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Golden Rules

Actually, we might call them “Golden Regulations.” In the 2007–2008 fishing season, over one million people spent 21 million days casting their lines into Wisconsin waters. That’s a lot of time and a lot of anglers. Imagine if all these anglers were able to keep as many fish as they wanted, regardless of species. Overfishing, especially on smaller lakes and with popular fish, could eliminate certain fish populations. Historically, many species of fish suffered because of overharvest. To sustain our diverse fishery and aquatic ecosystems, anglers observe regulations. An important one you’ll learn about in these pages is the requirement for anglers to have a fishing license.



Largemouth bass

General Regulations

To help keep fisheries healthy, the DNR has an overlying set of regulations that all Wisconsin anglers must follow. DNR conservation wardens enforce these regulations. It is the responsibility of every angler to know them before going fishing. Each of the restrictions has a sensible explanation and reason behind it. See if you can figure out why the DNR has the following five regulations:

- 1) It is illegal to fish in any waters of the state without a Wisconsin fishing license.
- 2) It is illegal to possess a fish that is within a protected size range (“slot” limit) or below the minimum length limit for the waterbody being fished.
- 3) It is illegal to release unused bait into Wisconsin lakes, ponds, rivers, or streams.
- 4) It is illegal to fish for a species during a closed season for that species even if you release the fish you catch.
- 5) It is illegal to leave any fish line unattended. When fishing in open water, anglers must remain within 100 yards of their lines.

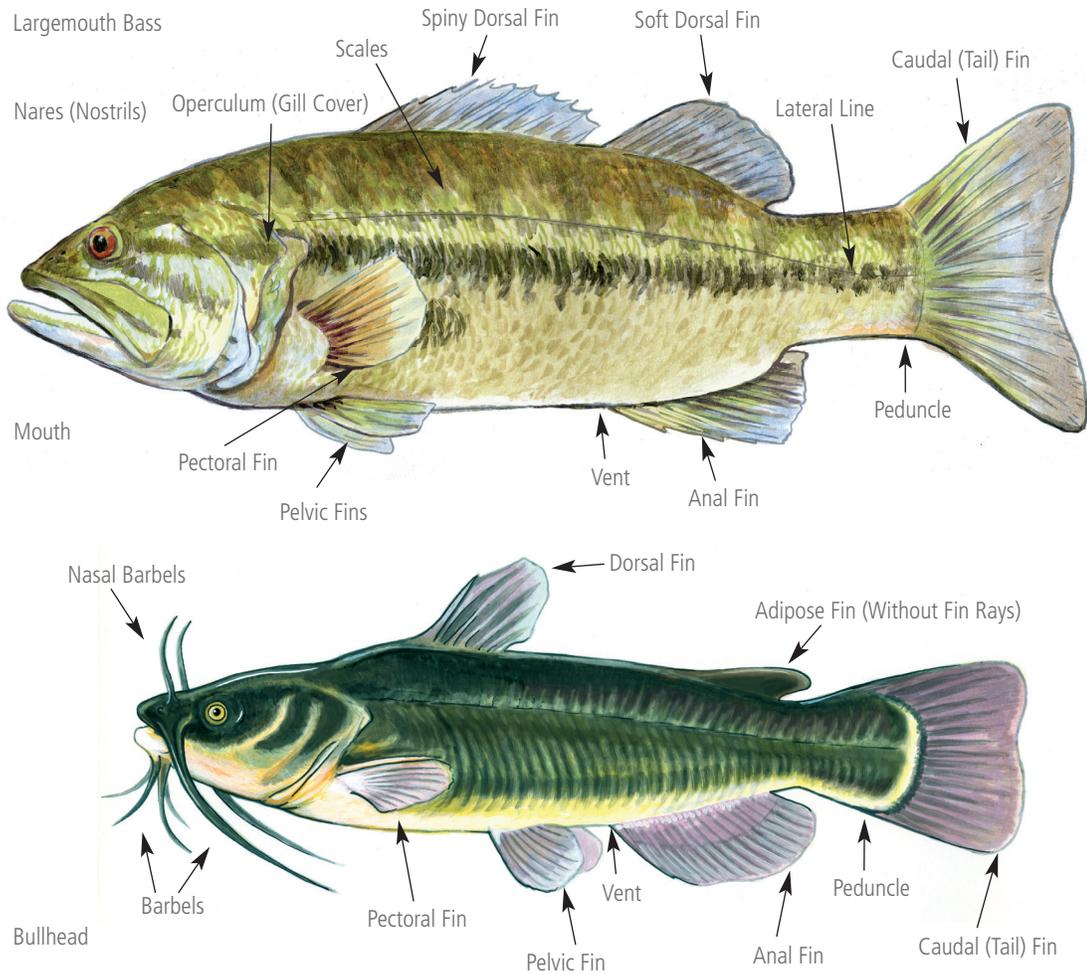
Species Specifics

Beyond the general rules that all anglers must follow, specific rules apply to each species of game fish and body of water in Wisconsin. These rules can change from year to year based on fish populations and the health of different bodies of water. It is important to always have a copy of the current DNR fishing regulations with you so that you can refer back to them when you catch a fish. Many fish are regulated by **total daily bag limits** (the number you can keep in a day from all Wisconsin waters). For this reason, you need to be able to identify each species of fish you catch. Knowing that you can only keep one northern pike on your local lake isn’t helpful if you don’t know when you’ve caught a northern pike!

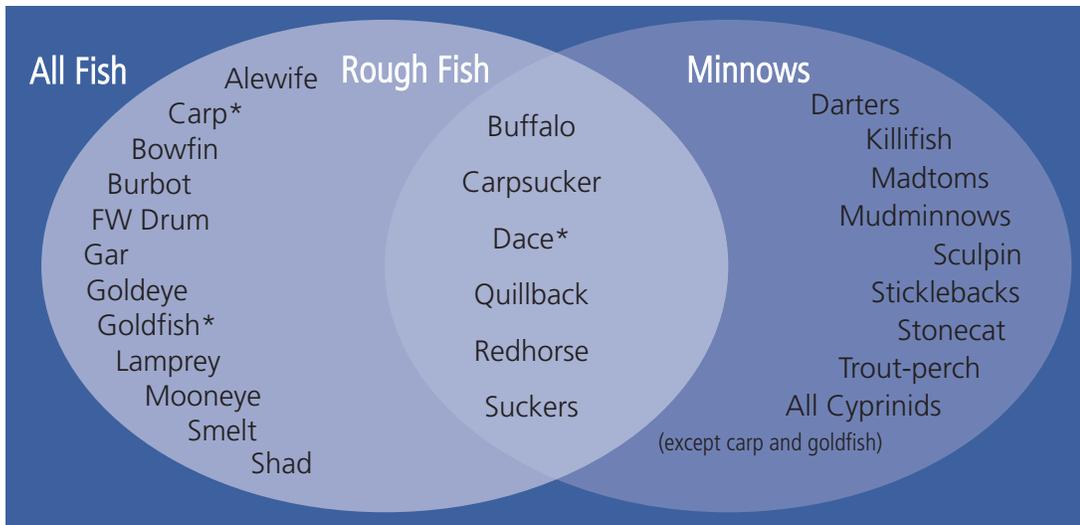
There are three important things to consider when identifying your fish:

- The overall size and shape of the fish:
Is it round like a bluegill? Long like a musky?
- The size, shape, and position of the fins:
Is the dorsal fin ray-shaped, like on a pumpkinseed? Is it pointed like a whitefish?
- The pattern of markings: Is it spotted like a brown trout? Striped like a perch?

Practice identifying the fish you are most likely to catch on your fishing trip and quiz yourself regularly.



Game Fish, Rough Fish, Minnows



By state law all fish are "game" fish if not "rough" fish or "minnows." Game fish may not be harvested unless an open season is specified in Administrative Code.

* Taxonomically, carp and goldfish are in the minnow family. Legally, however, they are classified as "rough"

fish, but not as "minnows" in Wisconsin. Although dace are also members of the minnow family, legally, they are classified as both a minnow and a rough fish. All members of the sucker family are considered rough fish for legal purposes; they are in the same *order* as minnows. Other fish legally referred to as "minnows," are in several different taxonomic families.



Catch and Keep?

Use this chart as the basis for a fishing journal. Record your paper “catch” and whether or not you could keep your fish:

SPECIES	LENGTH	DATE	LOCATION	BAG LIMIT	LEGAL?	WILL KEEP?
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						

Bag Limit Scavenger Hunt!

Use the regulation book or go online to find out:

1) What is the total daily bag limit on largemouth and smallmouth bass during summer months?

2) What is the total daily bag limit on muskellunge?

3) What is the daily bag limit for panfish on Sawdust Lake in Bayfield County?

4) What’s the difference between “daily bag limit” and “possession limit”? ?

5) Why can’t you keep a slender madtom?

6) Suppose that you go to a lake that has a bag limit of three for walleye and you catch three walleye. Later that day you want to go to another lake that also has a three-fish bag limit on walleye. What do you do?

7) If you have questions about the fishing regulations, who do you call in your area?

What about Trout and Salmon?

Regulations for trout and salmon that inhabit the Great Lakes and their tributaries are listed separately in the back of the general hook and line fishing regulations booklet. More detailed regulations for inland trout are outlined in a

separate booklet. Specific size and bag limits for trout are color-coded to a stream map of Wisconsin and vary from one stream to the next. It's important to be able to read a map and figure out where you are when you go trout fishing! You also need a trout or salmon stamp if you intend to fish for those species, in addition to a fishing license.

License Loop



You don't need special training or certification to fish, but you do need a license to wet a line when you reach driving age. Anglers age 16 and 17 pay less for a license, while fishing is free for those age 15 and under. Your license fees come back to you in the

form of more fish to catch through habitat restoration or improvement, stocking, and hatchery operations. License fees fund education programs and places to fish along waterways.

The funding also enables fisheries biologists to conduct fish population surveys, and creel clerks to interview anglers, record their success rates and estimate fishing pressure. These assessments help set bag limits. In 1977, Wisconsin introduced an inland trout stamp followed by a Great Lakes trout and salmon stamp in 1982. Stamp sales fund salmon production and projects to restore or improve trout and salmon habitat.

