



Much of Wisconsin is experiencing a drought that has many lakes and streams at very low water levels. Fisheries biologists have received calls from the public asking if the fisheries program was going to close the trout fishing season as we had done in the late 1980's.

Indeed, conditions in June and July in southern Wisconsin have been serious, as evidenced by historically low rainfall levels and stream flows (as documented by USGS real time water flow ranking - see <http://waterdata.usgs.gov/wi/nwis/rt>). A visit to this site will give anglers a state-wide picture of streamflow characteristics.

What we've learned from earlier droughts

Changes to the fishing season or fishing hours should only be considered as a last resort with very severe conditions. Fisheries biologists discovered during the last severe drought (1989 – 1990) that conditions can change by the time rule changes are implemented, and closing the season significantly changes angler fishing patterns for many years. During the drought of the 1980's, two year classes of fish were lost in streams in some parts of Wisconsin. Some anglers expressed displeasure with a catch-and-release season although we found that brook trout did well, and benefited from the closed season, in some streams when conditions improved. We found that streams with good natural reproduction recovered on their own as most good streams with natural reproduction have sufficient groundwater flow and thermal refugia to maintain adequate spawning stocks.

What we can do in the future

Long term, we can take several actions in response to potential impacts to trout resources from global climate change including continuing to do habitat work that impacts stream temperatures by narrowing, deepening and increasing flow rates; managing stream side vegetation if stream temperatures are marginal, protecting groundwater infiltration and springs, modifying stocking practices, and continuing monitoring, during times of the year when fish are not stressed (e.g., spring and fall).

What YOU can do to help

With current drought conditions Fisheries Management is asking anglers to:

1. use restraint in stressing trout and other fish,
2. fish only in better (colder) trout streams, and
3. fish during cooler periods of the day (early and late).

