

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
Natural Resources Board Agenda Item

SUBJECT: Results of voting on the Bureau of Fisheries Management's 2018 spring fish & wildlife meeting agenda of advisory questions.

FOR: May 2018 Board meeting

TO BE PRESENTED BY: Scott Loomans, filling in for the Fisheries Program and Policy Analyst

SUMMARY:

The following advisory questions were the subject of voting at 2018 spring fish & wildlife meetings held jointly with the Conservation Congress on the second Monday in April. Support was generally strong for all proposals. Fisheries bureau staff will continue to develop the concepts and they could become rule proposals that would be subjects of voting at the 2019 spring hearings.

Question 1. Establish a statewide, continuous open season for bass fishing but allow harvest only during the current traditional season.

Question 2. Establish alternate size and bag limits for permitted, catch-and-release, bass fishing tournaments.

Question 3. Establish a 60" minimum size for lake sturgeon on Lake Superior.

Question 4. Review panfish regulations on the Mississippi River.

Question 5. Review gamefish size and bag limit regulations on the Mississippi River.

Questions 6. and 7: Walleye regulations on Koshkonong Lake in Jefferson/Rock Counties.


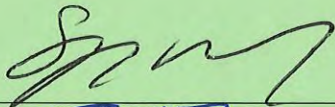

Question 8. For walleyes on Lake Winnebago, reduce the walleye bag limit from 5 to 3.

Question 9. Reduce mortality of flathead catfish by expanding the prohibition on use of whole/live fish for bait, on setlines or bankpoles, to include the upper Fox and the Wolf rivers.

RECOMMENDATION: Information only

LIST OF ATTACHED MATERIALS (check all that are applicable):

Background memo

Approved by	Signature	Date
Justine Hasz, Fisheries Management Bureau Director		4-30-18
Sanjay Olson, Fish, Wildlife & Parks Division Administrator		4-30-18
Daniel L. Meyer, Secretary		5-11-18

by Ed Eberle

DATE: April 19, 2018

TO: Natural Resources Board

FROM: Secretary Daniel L. Meyer

SUBJECT: Results of voting on the Bureau of Fisheries Management's 2018 spring fish & wildlife meeting agenda of advisory questions.

This memo will summarize the results of voting on nine fisheries management related advisory questions.

Background:

In 2018, all fisheries questions were advisory-only and not rule change proposals. The department will hold hearings on a spring hearing rules package again in 2019 and subsequent odd-numbered years. This timeline for rule promulgation is compatible with requirements of Ch. 227 Stats. as modified by 2011 ACT 21.

Annually the department submits proposals and advisory questions on a variety of subjects related to fisheries and fisheries management. The statewide April spring fish & wildlife hearings/meetings are the traditional vehicle for citizen input. The origins of these questions and proposals are most often: 1) department staff specialists from the bureaus of fisheries management, 2) publicly supported Conservation Congress advisory questions from prior years or; 3) advisory questions suggested by the natural resources board.

Summary of Agenda Items:

Spring hearing attendance in 2018 was 6,893 people. Table 1. below provides a description of each question and a summary of statewide voting results. Written comments are summarized in Table 2. The full questions are attached as Appendix 1.

Table 1. Voting results.

	Question Description	Yes Votes	No Votes	Statewide Support	County Vote (Yes/No/Tie)	Local Vote (Yes / No)
Statewide department questions						
1	Continuous open bass season with traditional harvest season	2995	2554	54.0%	49 / 21 / 2	
2	Alternate size and bag limits for permitted C&R bass tournaments	3033	2412	55.7%	50 / 20 / 2	

	Question Description	Yes Votes	No Votes	Statewide Support	County Vote (Yes/No/Tie)	Local Vote (Yes / No)
Local Department Questions						
3	Review panfish regulations on the Mississippi River	4395	883	83.3%	72 / 0 / 0	
4	Review gamefish regulations on the Mississippi River	4456	743	85.7%	72 / 0 / 0	
5	Increase the size limit for Sturgeon on Lake Superior	3889	1247	75.7%	70 / 2 / 0	Ashland: 41 / 3 Bayfield: 32 / 5 Douglas: 12 / 14 Local total: 85 / 22
6	Walleye size limit, Lake Koshkonong & Rock River	2887	1659	63.5%	61 / 10 / 1	Dane: 320 / 77 Jefferson: 87 / 43 Rock: 96 / 49 Local total: 503 / 169
7	Establish standard game fish season for walleyes, Koshkonong & Rock River	2318	424	84.5%	71 / 1 / 0	Dane: 265 / 114 Jefferson: 48 / 82 Rock: 42 / 103 Local total: 355 / 299
8	Reduce walleye bag limit from 5 to 3 on the Winnebago system	3366	1816	65.0%	63 / 9 / 0	Calumet: 39 / 31 Fon du Lac: 47 / 71 Green Lake: 39 / 40 Outagamie: 104 / 64 Shawano: 42 / 49 Waupaca: 66 / 62 Winnebago: 79 / 59 Local total: 416 / 376
9	Expand prohibition on use of whole/live fish on set/bank poles	1941	739	72.4%	69 / 2 / 1	Calumet: 33 / 22 Fon du Lac: 69 / 28 Green Lake: 50 / 26 Outagamie: 60 / 83 Shawano: 46 / 44 Waupaca: 41 / 75 Winnebago: 74 / 50 Local total: 373 / 328

Table 2. Written comments.

		Ayes	Noes
Statewide Fisheries Management Advisory Questions			
1	Continuous open bass season with traditional harvest season	6	2
2	Alternate size and bag limits for permitted C&R bass tournaments	5	3

		Ayes	Noes
Local Fisheries Advisory Questions			
3	Review panfish regulations on the Mississippi River	5	3
4	Review gamefish regulations on the Mississippi River	7	1
5	Increase the size limit for Sturgeon on Lake Superior	3	3
6	Walleye size limit, Lake Koshkonong & Rock River	3	3
7	Establish standard game fish season for walleyes, Koshkonong & Rock River	6	1
8	Reduce walleye bag limit from 5 to 3 on the Winnebago system	4	4
9	Expand prohibition on use of whole/live fish on set/bank poles	2	3

Future Action on 2018 Spring Hearing Advisory Questions

The results of voting on all of these questions will be used by the department in the development of future policies and regulations.

STATEWIDE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT ADVISORY QUESTIONS

QUESTION 1: Establish a statewide, continuous open season for bass fishing but allow harvest only during the current traditional season

Some people have expressed an interest in increasing fishing opportunity by allowing year-round fishing for largemouth and smallmouth bass. Under current rules, bass fishing is generally allowed during the traditional fishing season that begins on the first Saturday in May and continues through the first Sunday in March and is closed for two months in early spring. Many rivers, their impoundments, and Lake Winnebago currently have a continuous open season. There is already a catch-and-release season for smallmouth bass in the northern bass zone that begins on the first Saturday in May and continues through the Friday preceding the third Saturday in June. Our surrounding states do not have closed seasons for bass.

The current closed season does not protect bass from fishing pressure during their May to June spawning season and is not needed for that purpose. A catch-and-release bass season in March and April is not expected to result in an increase of bass mortality. A catch-and-release bass season could make it more difficult to enforce the closed season for other species such as walleyes and northern-pike during March and April. However, possession of bass, walleyes, or northern-pike would continue to be prohibited and would continue to be readily enforceable by conservation wardens.

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1. Do you favor establishing a statewide, continuous open season for bass fishing but allow harvest only during the current traditional season? YES ____ NO ____
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QUESTION 2: Establishing alternate size and bag limits for permitted, catch-and-release bass fishing tournaments

In response to angler interest and department survey data for particular waterbodies, largemouth and smallmouth bass are often managed with regulations that are different than the statewide five fish bag limit and 14" minimum size limit. Tailoring management to the unique conditions on certain waters can result in higher quality fishing opportunities than would otherwise be available.

However, special regulations can be a disadvantage for organized fishing tournaments. For instance, a daily bag limit of one bass with an 18" size limit greatly reduces the number of fish that are available for tournament anglers to possess during an event.

To address this, the department could create an exception that allows participants in permitted fishing tournaments to adhere to the standard statewide five fish bag limit and 14" minimum size limit - as long as all bass are released back to the same waterbody.

An exception for permitted tournaments could result in improved fishing for everyone by eliminating a source of conflict between non-tournament and tournament anglers that can make it challenging to

establish what some believe are the most appropriate regulations for a waterbody. Tournament regulations are readily enforceable because the department issues permits in advance of the events. Under state statute, bass are the only species for which tournament regulations can be less restrictive than the regulations for non-tournament anglers.

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2. Do you favor an exception that allows participants in permitted fishing tournaments to adhere to the standard statewide five fish bag limit and 14" minimum size limit - as long as all bass are released back to the same waterbody? YES _____ NO _____
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LOCAL FISHERIES MANAGEMENT ADVISORY QUESTIONS

QUESTION 3: Review panfish regulations on the Mississippi River

Mississippi River panfish regulations have not been revised in many years and may not provide adequate protection or distribution of harvest among anglers. Currently, Wisconsin allows harvest of 75 panfish in total per day; 25 yellow perch, rock bass, and crappie; 25 bluegill and pumpkinseed; and 25 white and yellow bass per day. The possession limit is twice the daily bag limit for all species listed.

Minnesota allows harvest of up to 125 panfish in total per day; 25 crappie, 25 rock bass, 25 sunfish (bluegill, pumpkinseed and hybrids), 25 yellow perch, and 25 white or yellow bass per day. The possession limit is the same as the daily bag limit for each species.

Iowa allows harvest of 25 bluegill, crappie and pumpkinseed, 25 yellow bass, white bass, rock bass, and hybrid (wiper bass), 25 yellow perch with no closed season. Possession is twice the daily bag for all three categories of fishes (75 panfish total).

The Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Iowa natural resources departments are all interested in simplifying, unifying, and reducing the total daily bag limit for panfish species (bluegill, pumpkinseed, hybrid bluegill, yellow perch, rock bass, crappie); and white and yellow bass and hybrids on the Mississippi River and border waters. Specific recommendations from this project would be topics of spring hearing voting again prior to adoption by the department.

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3. Do you support an effort by the department to develop panfish regulations for the Mississippi River that are consistent between the states, more simple than current rules, and with a lower bag limit than under current rules? YES _____ NO _____
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QUESTION 4: Review gamefish regulations on the Mississippi River

In recent years, department personnel from Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin have heard from the public that regulations for gamefish in the Mississippi River need to be changed to reflect current trends in angler attitude, habitat, fish populations and environment. Mississippi river fishing regulations have not

been revised or reviewed comprehensively by all the surrounding states in more than 20 years. For example, the year-round fishing season was established in 1968 and minimum size limits for bass and walleye were established in 1990.

A joint review of regulations could result in recommendations that are more in line with angler expectations, consistent between the states, and proactive in protecting larger predators which are important in the native fish community as invasive carp ranges expand.

Specific recommendations from this project would be topics of spring hearing voting again prior to adoption by the department.

4. Do you support an effort by the department to develop gamefish regulations for the Mississippi River that are consistent between the states, reflect current angler interests, and which may protect larger predators? YES _____ NO _____

QUESTION 5: Increasing the size limit for sturgeon on Lake Superior

Interest in fishing for lake sturgeon in Lake Superior had historically been low but has increased in recent years with anglers successfully targeting and harvesting them. It is likely that the management goal to rehabilitate and maintain spawning, self-sustaining populations of lake sturgeon is not being met at the current level of harvest of these slow-growing, late-maturing fish.

Increasing the size limit for sturgeon on Lake Superior would reduce harvest without eliminating harvest opportunity and allow the lake sturgeon to reproduce at least once prior to being susceptible to harvest. This proposal would also make the Lake Superior size limit consistent with most other Wisconsin waters which already have a 60" size limit.

5. Do you favor increasing the minimum size limit for sturgeon on Lake Superior from 50 inches to 60 inches? YES _____ NO _____

QUESTIONS 6-7: Walleye regulations on Koshkonong Lake and the Rock River from the Indianford Dam to the Jefferson Dam in Jefferson/Rock Counties

This proposal seeks to gather public input on the regulation of walleye, sauger and their hybrid on Lake Koshkonong and the Rock River from the Indianford Dam to the Jefferson Dam. Currently, these waters are managed at the statewide minimum length limit of 15-inches with a daily bag limit of 5. There is a year-round open season. These regulations attract high angling pressure, especially in the spring when the majority of other waters are closed. During a 2008-2009 creel survey, walleye were the species most frequently targeted by anglers. That creel survey showed above average catch and harvest rates of 61,396 walleyes caught and 19% or 11,455 of those fish harvested. Data collected from 2002 to 2016 showed average exploitation rates of 42% which exceeds the widely accepted 35% maximum exploitation rate for sustainable walleye populations.

There has been recent, local interest in exploring regulation changes to offer greater protection for this popular fishery. A three-fish daily bag limit and 18" size limit would provide that increased protection. A traditional open season instead of the current continuous season, but keeping the 5-fish bag and 15" size limits would also provide protection for the walleye population.

6. Do you favor increasing the minimum length limit for walleye, sauger and their hybrids from 15- inches to 18-inches and reducing the daily bag limit from 5 to 3 and maintaining the year round open season on Lake Koshkonong and the Rock River from the Indianford Dam to the Jefferson Dam? YES _____ NO _____

7. Do you favor a season closure during the standard gamefish closure for all gamefish on Lake Koshkonong and the Rock River from the Indianford Dam to the Jefferson Dam, but maintaining the 5 fish bag and 15" size limits? YES _____ NO _____

QUESTION 8: For walleyes on the Lake Winnebago system, reduce the walleye bag limit from 5 to 3

Although the Winnebago System has continued to maintain a strong self-sustaining walleye population, recent results from a reward tag study have indicated that there are years where the exploitation rate, particularly of immature and adult females, is very high. Reducing the bag limit to 3 should help to reduce exploitation levels and would help ensure that the system can continue to sustain a good walleye population despite the very heavy fishing pressure it receives on an annual basis.

Walleye exploitation has been tracked annually on the Winnebago System since 1993 and relies heavily on anglers returning tags from tagged fish that they catch. Recent study results indicate that the estimated angler tag reporting rate was 29% in 2016 and 42% in 2017 which is lower than previously estimated. This means that exploitation rates were higher than previously estimated. For adult female walleyes, annual exploitation surpassed 40% in 6 years since 1993, which is above the 35% threshold that is often suggested for maintaining sustainable walleye populations. In addition, the department has begun tagging immature female walleye and estimated annual exploitation at 59% in 2015 which was focused mainly on 15 to 18-inch fish from the 2011 walleye year class.

Winnebago System Waters include Poygan, Winneconne, Butte des Morts, and Winnebago and all their tributaries from their mouths upstream to the first dam including the Fox river from Lake Winnebago upstream to the dam above Princeton and all its tributaries from their mouths upstream to the first dam; the Wolf river from its mouth upstream to the dam in the city of Shawano and all its tributaries from their mouths upstream to the first dam including Cincoe lake, Partridge Crop lake and Partridge lake in Calumet, Fond du Lac, Green Lake, Marquette, Outagamie, Shawano, Waupaca, Waushara and Winnebago counties.

8. Do you favor reducing the walleye bag limit from 5 to 3 on the Lake Winnebago system? YES _____ NO _____

QUESTION 9: Reduce mortality of flathead catfish by expanding the prohibition on use of whole/live fish for bait, when using setlines or bank poles, to include the upper Fox River in Winnebago, Green Lake, Marquette and Waushara counties and the Wolf River in Outagamie, Shawano, Waupaca, and Winnebago counties

For flathead catfish on the Lake Winnebago system there is currently a one fish bag limit, 30" minimum size limit, and 36" to 42" protected slot size limit. This means that it is necessary to release a number of fish that are caught because they are not the correct size or because a flathead catfish is already in possession. When whole or live fish are used for bait on setlines and bank poles, fish are often on the line for up to 24 hours or more and may have suffered deep hooking wounds, torn flesh in the mouth area, and may suffer mortality immediately or later because of secondary infection from those wounds. Additionally, it is very difficult to obtain whole or live fish for use as bait on setlines and bank poles because of restrictions on the movement of live fish and on possession of angling gear while setting, lifting, or attending setlines or bank poles.

Expanding the prohibition on use of whole or live fish for bait on the upper Fox and the Wolf rivers would reduce or eliminate waste of flathead catfish caught on set lines or bank poles that currently die after release. Flathead catfish are unlikely to be attracted to other baits that are effective at catching channel catfish. For channel catfish there is a 25-fish bag limit and no size limit and they would still be available for harvest on bank poles and set lines.

Use of whole or live fish is already prohibited on lakes Butte des Morts, Little Butte des Morts, Winnebago and Winneconne, Winnebago County, Poygan in Waushara and Winnebago counties, and the Black River in Jackson, La Crosse, and Trempealeau counties.

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9. Do you favor expanding the prohibition on use of whole/live fish for bait on set lines and bank poles in order to reduce mortality of flathead catfish in the upper Fox River in Winnebago, Green Lake, Marquette and Waushara counties and the Wolf River in Outagamie, Shawano, Waupaca, and Winnebago counties? YES _____ NO _____
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