

DATE: April 28, 2014

TO: All Members of the Natural Resources Board

FROM: Cathy Stepp, Secretary

SUBJECT: Fisheries Management Bureau's 2014 Fish and Wildlife Spring Hearings Advisory Question Results

At the April 14, 2014, Fish and Wildlife Spring Hearings, the Fisheries Management Bureau gathered input from 7,053 hearing attendees on its 26 advisory questions. The results from these questions will be considered by the Fisheries Bureau when developing fishing regulation changes. If there is public support and biological data to support a change, related proposals may be presented as changes to administrative code in 2015.

No decisions on advancing the regulation proposals in the advisory questions have yet been made by the Department. The Fisheries Bureau will discuss results and future plans within the Fisheries Management Board and its species teams, groups assembled at the direction of the Board to advise it on technical and policy subjects. The species teams include internal staff and external partners, including Conservation Congress volunteers.

The Bass Team recently began a statewide review of bass regulations that will continue over the next couple years, with plans to make regulation change proposals, as needed, at the 2017 spring hearings. Advisory questions 6 through 10 will be considered by the Bass Team during its review.

The Panfish Team is in the process of developing a statewide panfish management plan. It is a comprehensive effort including analysis of all available data on panfish populations and angler harvest as well as a thorough literature search to include research and evaluations of panfish management actions across the country. The draft plan will include consideration of a variety of angling regulations for inland waters including reduced bag limits and bag limits by species. Public input has been sought throughout the process, including questions 11 through 21 at the 2014 spring hearings. If the Team determines that regulation changes are necessary to meet the management goals in the plan, proposals will be developed for consideration at the 2015 spring hearings. However, based on extensive public input received to date, there is support for maintaining current statewide panfish regulations. Based on the results of questions 18 through 21, the Panfish Team would like to apply regulations on a subset of lakes (150-200) in a structured manner to determine the most effective regulation. Over time the department will evaluate these regulations and continually move toward using the most effective ones.

The Trout Team is in the process of reviewing trout regulations and seasons based on feedback and suggestions from a task force made up of stakeholder and partner representatives from around the state. The Team will consider results from questions 22 through 27 to analyze statewide and regional preferences for season structure and uniformity of regulations. If the Team determines that regulation changes are necessary to meet management goals, proposals will be developed for consideration at the 2015 spring hearings.

Any proposals that stem from the advisory questions will be peer-reviewed for justification and enforceability by the bureaus of Fisheries Management, Law Enforcement, and Legal Services. In addition, input is solicited from Conservation Congress members, the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission, and the WI Fisheries Advisory Council. Final approval rests with the District Supervisors, the Bureau Director, and other members of the Fisheries Management Board. Proposals will

then be recommended to the Water Division, Department administrators, and the Natural Resources Board for advancement to the 2015 spring hearings. Additional public input will be sought at that time.

2014 Fisheries Spring Hearing Question Results – Statewide Votes

2. Would you support creating catch and release seasons for game fish that would replace closed fishing seasons if there are no significant biological impacts?

Votes Yes	Votes No	Majority	Counties Approving	Counties Rejecting	Counties Tie vote
2449	3323	No	15	55	2

Additional votes sent directly to the Fisheries Bureau: 2 No

3. If the Department created catch and release seasons for game fish that replaced most closed fishing seasons, would you support requiring only the use of artificial lures during catch and release seasons?

Votes Yes	Votes No	Majority	Counties Approving	Counties Rejecting	Counties Tie vote
3658	2032	Yes	66	4	2

The Department received one comment on question 3, requesting that if an artificial lure requirement is implemented that the Department develop strict regulations on the preventing the use of harmful, synthetic artificial lure materials and encourage the removal of all lures from a fishing site.

Additional votes sent directly to the Fisheries Bureau: 2 No

4. Would you support a regulation making it legal to catch and release lake sturgeon with hook and line on Wisconsin-Minnesota boundary waters year round, with closed seasons during spawning periods and keeping existing harvest seasons?

Votes Yes	Votes No	Majority	Counties Approving	Counties Rejecting	Counties Tie vote
2824	2586	Yes	42	27	3

Additional votes sent directly to the Fisheries Bureau: 1 No

5. To avoid the general fishing season opening day from occurring on Mother’s Day weekend, would you favor changing the opening day of the general fishing season from the first Saturday in May to the Saturday closest to May 1?

Votes Yes	Votes No	Majority	Counties Approving	Counties Rejecting	Counties Tie vote
4116	1701	Yes	72	0	0

Additional votes sent directly to the Fisheries Bureau: 1 Yes 1 No

6. To enable fisheries biologists to more broadly use protected slot limit regulations for bass, would you favor allowing permitted catch-and-release bass tournament participants temporary exemptions from protected slot length limit regulations if the tournament does not harvest any fish and donates any incidental dead fish to a local food pantry?

Votes Yes	Votes No	Majority	Counties Approving	Counties Rejecting	Counties Tie vote
2509	3013	No	20	48	4

Additional votes sent directly to the Fisheries Bureau: 1 No

7. Would you favor increasing the minimum length limit associated with the Department's trophy bass regulation option from 18 inches to 20 inches?

Votes Yes	Votes No	Majority	Counties Approving	Counties Rejecting	Counties Tie vote
2598	2998	No	21	47	4

Additional votes sent directly to the Fisheries Bureau: 1 Yes

The Department is interested in learning the type of regulation you prefer. If the goal for a particular lake is to increase the average size of fish by allowing the harvest of small fish, please indicate whether you would be in favor of each of the following regulations:

8. Maximum size limit: No fish over the length of X inches are allowed to be harvested.

Votes Yes	Votes No	Majority	Counties Approving	Counties Rejecting	Counties Tie vote
2014	3306	No	7	65	0

Additional votes sent directly to the Fisheries Bureau: 1 Yes 1 No

9. Protected slot size limits: There is no minimum length limit but fish from the size range of X inches to Y inches may not be harvested and only one over Y inches is allowed to be harvested.

Votes Yes	Votes No	Majority	Counties Approving	Counties Rejecting	Counties Tie vote
3243	2062	Yes	66	6	0

Additional votes sent directly to the Fisheries Bureau: 2 Yes

10. 1 over: There is no minimum length limit but only 1 fish over the length of X inches is allowed to be harvested.

Votes Yes	Votes No	Majority	Counties Approving	Counties Rejecting	Counties Tie vote
2864	2413	Yes	47	24	1

Additional votes sent directly to the Fisheries Bureau: 2 Yes

11. Do you think there is a general statewide need to increase the average size of panfish in Wisconsin inland waters?

Votes Yes	Votes No	Majority	Counties Approving	Counties Rejecting	Counties Tie vote
2792	2837	No	31	39	2

Additional votes sent directly to the Fisheries Bureau: 2 Yes

12. Do you think there is a general statewide need to spread out panfish harvest each year in Wisconsin inland waters?

Votes Yes	Votes No	Majority	Counties Approving	Counties Rejecting	Counties Tie vote
2237	3216	No	11	57	4

Additional votes sent directly to the Fisheries Bureau: 2 Yes

13. Do you support keeping the statewide general inland waters panfish combined daily bag limit of 25 fish?

Votes Yes	Votes No	Majority	Counties Approving	Counties Rejecting	Counties Tie vote
3680	1945	Yes	68	2	2

Additional votes sent directly to the Fisheries Bureau: 2 No

14. Would you be in favor of reducing the statewide general inland waters panfish daily bag limit of 25 fish to 15 fish?

Votes Yes	Votes No	Majority	Counties Approving	Counties Rejecting	Counties Tie vote
2274	3374	No	8	64	0

Additional votes sent directly to the Fisheries Bureau: 2 Yes

15. Would you be in favor of reducing the statewide general inland waters panfish daily bag limit of 25 fish to 10 fish?

Votes Yes	Votes No	Majority	Counties Approving	Counties Rejecting	Counties Tie vote
1024	4573	No	0	72	0

Additional votes sent directly to the Fisheries Bureau: 2 Yes

16. Would you be in favor of reducing the statewide general inland waters panfish daily bag limit of 25 fish to 5 fish?

Votes Yes	Votes No	Majority	Counties Approving	Counties Rejecting	Counties Tie vote
443	5154	No	0	72	0

Additional votes sent directly to the Fisheries Bureau: 1 Yes 1 No

17. Would you be supportive of having separate angling bag limits for bluegill, crappie and perch if it can be shown to improve management?

Votes Yes	Votes No	Majority	Counties Approving	Counties Rejecting	Counties Tie vote
3484	2162	Yes	60	12	0

Additional votes sent directly to the Fisheries Bureau: 2 Yes

18. Would you support high minimum length limits on panfish in specific waters?

Votes Yes	Votes No	Majority	Counties Approving	Counties Rejecting	Counties Tie vote
2639	2893	No	24	47	1

Additional votes sent directly to the Fisheries Bureau: 2 Yes

19. Would you support greatly reduced bag limits for panfish, in specific waters, in order to determine the effects on panfish populations?

Votes Yes	Votes No	Majority	Counties Approving	Counties Rejecting	Counties Tie vote
3169	2396	Yes	54	18	0

Additional votes sent directly to the Fisheries Bureau: 2 Yes

20. Would you support restricting harvest of game fish in specific waters, to increase populations to levels that would control panfish abundance through predation and maximize panfish growth?

Votes Yes	Votes No	Majority	Counties Approving	Counties Rejecting	Counties Tie vote
3430	2085	Yes	66	6	0

Additional votes sent directly to the Fisheries Bureau: 2 Yes

21. Would you support habitat improvements or habitat protection, in specific waters, in order to determine the effects on panfish populations?

Votes Yes	Votes No	Majority	Counties Approving	Counties Rejecting	Counties Tie vote
4937	631	Yes	72	0	0

Additional votes sent directly to the Fisheries Bureau: 2 Yes

22. Would you favor changing the early catch and release season dates (the first Saturday in March through the Sunday preceding the first Saturday in May), on waters where it currently applies, to January 1 through the Sunday preceding the first Saturday in May if this change will not have any significant impact on trout populations?

Votes Yes	Votes No	Majority	Counties Approving	Counties Rejecting	Counties Tie vote
2199	2651	No	24	45	3

Additional votes sent directly to the Fisheries Bureau: 2 No

23. Would you favor applying an early catch and release season to all inland trout streams from January 1 through the Sunday preceding the first Saturday in May if this change will not have any significant impact on trout populations?

Votes Yes	Votes No	Majority	Counties Approving	Counties Rejecting	Counties Tie vote
2034	2799	No	15	53	4

Additional votes sent directly to the Fisheries Bureau: 2 No

24. Would you favor eliminating the five-day closure that occurs between the early catch and release season and the open trout season (from the Sunday preceding the first Saturday in May to the first Saturday in May) and continuing the catch and release season during that time if this change will not have any significant impact on trout populations?

Votes Yes	Votes No	Majority	Counties Approving	Counties Rejecting	Counties Tie vote
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2266	2510	No	27	42	3
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Additional votes sent directly to the Fisheries Bureau: 2 No

25. The open trout fishing season currently ends on September 30. To provide more opportunities to fish and harvest trout in the fall, would you favor extending the open trout fishing season to October 15 if this change will not have any significant impact on trout populations?

Votes Yes	Votes No	Majority	Counties Approving	Counties Rejecting	Counties Tie vote
3112	1746	Yes	64	7	1

Additional votes sent directly to the Fisheries Bureau: 1 Yes 1 No

26. The open trout fishing season currently ends on September 30. To provide more opportunities to fish for trout in the fall but not increase harvest, would you favor adding a trout fishing catch and release season from October 1 to October 15 if this change will not have any significant impact on trout populations?

Votes Yes	Votes No	Majority	Counties Approving	Counties Rejecting	Counties Tie vote
1965	2884	No	9	62	1

The Department received one comment on question 26 in favor of extending the trout season in October with catch & release, no kill, in order to first see how it works and to later make a decision about catch and kill options.

Additional votes sent directly to the Fisheries Bureau: 2 No

27. Would you favor development of a uniform trout season (first Saturday in May through first Sunday in March) and regulations that would apply to all “put-and-take” trout lakes and ponds statewide?

Votes Yes	Votes No	Majority	Counties Approving	Counties Rejecting	Counties Tie vote
3306	1459	Yes	71	1	0

Additional votes sent directly to the Fisheries Bureau: 1 Yes 1 No

The following pages were distributed to hearing attendees and are included here for additional information on the panfish and trout questions.



Panfish (bluegill, yellow perch, crappies, other sunfishes) are the most common fishes caught and harvested in Wisconsin. In a 2006-2007 survey, Wisconsin anglers reported catching nearly 58 million panfish, bluegills led the way with 38 million caught, 41% of which were harvested.

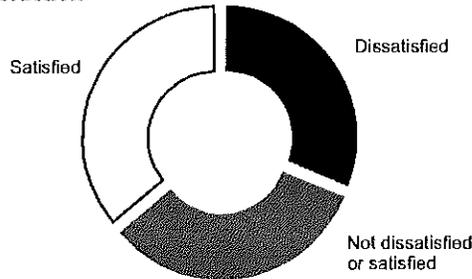
Anglers and biologists throughout Wisconsin have been increasingly interested in improving our panfish fisheries. Over the last few years, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has taken steps to better manage panfish in Wisconsin through research, stakeholder input, and data analysis – all of which will ultimately result in a Panfish Management Plan.

Results of 2013 public input survey

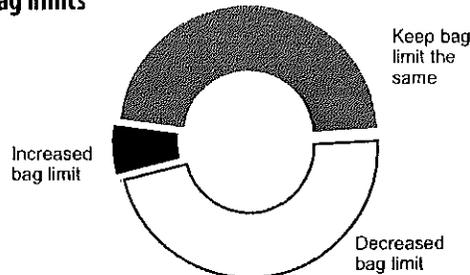
We conducted a survey of anglers to better understand views and opinions on panfish angling in Wisconsin. We received nearly 3,500 responses to questions about satisfaction, preferred experiences, and interest in more restrictive regulations.

- How satisfied are you with the size of your favorite panfish? Dissatisfied (31%) Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied (33%) Satisfied (36%)
- Would you like to see the daily bag limit of 25 panfish increased, decreased or kept at 25? Increased (6%) Kept at 25 (47%) Decreased (47%)
- Would you prefer to catch and keep fewer panfish but larger in size or more panfish of average or smaller size? Catch fewer but larger panfish (61%) No change in number or size of panfish (33%) Catch more but panfish size is average or smaller (6%)

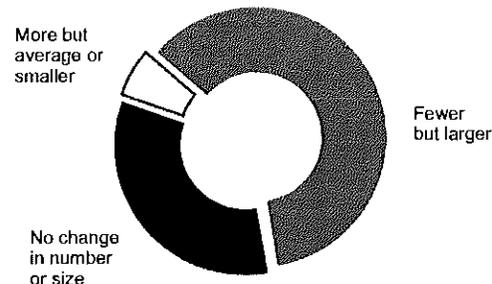
Satisfaction



Bag limits



Fish numbers



Plan Timeline

1 Panfish Team (review & analysis)

2 Identify public issues and concerns

- Public meetings (Winter/Spring 2013)
- Conservation Congress participation
- Online questionnaire

3 Draft management plan and form stakeholder group

- Refine issues with Conservation Congress advisory questions (April 2014) ← **HERE**
- Management objectives
- Recommendations

4 Public review of draft plan

- Public meetings
- Online surveys
- Mail surveys

5 Finalize management plan at Natural Resources Board Meeting (June 2014)

- If regulation changes are needed (spring hearing April 2015)
- Potential rule adoption 2016

The state of panfish science

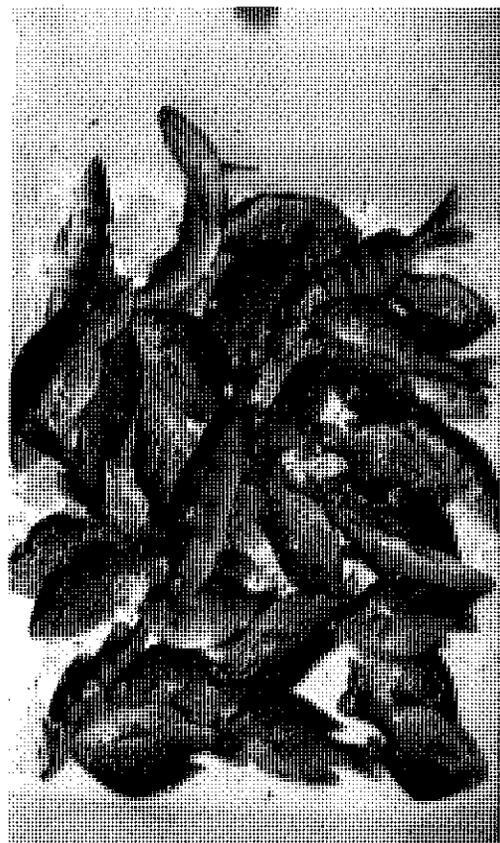
Why do certain lakes have bigger panfish than others?

- “Stunting” is common in panfish (especially bluegills) and can be due to a variety of factors such as excessive reproduction and lack of predation.
- Just because all the panfish in a lake are small doesn't mean it's stunted—if there is good growth and overall size is low, anglers are probably just harvesting all the large fish.
- Larger lakes (>400 acres) tend to have bigger bluegills than small lakes.
- Especially in smaller lakes, predation on bluegills by species such as largemouth bass can improve growth and average size by thinning out the number of smaller fish.

How effective are panfish regulations?

Based on studies of Wisconsin lakes:

- To see any meaningful reduction of harvest (which could lead to better average size) bag limits would need to be less than or equal to 10.



Typical collection of Wisconsin 'panfish' - bluegill, pumpkinseed sunfish, yellow perch, and black crappie

- On average, we have observed increases in the average size of bluegill of almost one inch in lakes where the bag limit was reduced to 10.
- Minimum length limits may improve the size of panfish but the right conditions (i.e. average growth) might be necessary and tradeoffs between harvest and natural mortality exist.
- Maximum length limits or modified slot limits (a limited number of fish over a certain size are allowed) focus harvest on small fish. These novel regulations could offer a balance that both improves size structure while minimizing the loss of harvest for anglers.

For more detailed information and to keep up-to-date on panfish management in Wisconsin, go to the DNR website, dnr.wi.gov and search for “panfish plan”.



2014

TROUT SEASON ADVISORY

Should we consider extending the trout season? Please consider:

- Fisheries biologists across the state tell us there are more opportunities to fish for trout
- The DNR is trying to tailor extended seasons to your desires
- Other states have year-round trout seasons with no harm to trout populations
- Trout that are caught and released have low mortality when caught by artificial lures or flies
- Extended seasons should not negatively affect spawning
- The DNR will continue to monitor populations to ensure no negative effects to populations
- According to surveys, many anglers want the opportunity to fish for trout for more days each year
- For most streams, trout populations are at the best densities we have seen in many years
- There are no plans to extend the season beyond October 15th to avoid deer rut and bow hunting

A few questions to think about...

- 🐟 Should the opening day of the early trout season be earlier? Should this be in effect in parts of the state or everywhere?
- 🐟 Should the five-day closure immediately before the May general fishing opener be eliminated?
- 🐟 Should the regular season be extended to Oct. 15? Would you prefer a catch and release or a harvest season?
- 🐟 Are you in favor of a uniform gamefish season for put-and-take trout lakes and ponds?

Trout Regulation Review Timeline

1. Identify Public Issues and Concerns – Public Meetings – 2011, Online Angler Survey, Lapsed Angler Mail Survey, Current Angler Mail Survey, Task Force Meetings
2. Develop Draft Regulation Proposal – **2014 Spring Hearing Advisory Questions**, Regulation Proposal Revisions
3. Review of Draft Plan – Public Meetings 2014
4. Vote on Proposal – Spring Hearings 2015

To stay informed, go to dnr.wi.gov
and search "trout review"

