

Special Meeting
Wisconsin Conservation Congress
Great Lakes Committee
5/13/2011

Committee members in attendance: Dale Mass, David Tupa, Ronald Vanderloop, Pete Petrouske, Donald Anderson, Norman Blohm, Richard Alvin, Bruce Prentice, and Eugene Altwies. Also in attendance: Ed Harvey, and George Meyer.

4:31pm - Call to order

Background:

On September 25th, 2010, the WCC Great Lakes Committee met in Stevens Point. In response to the conflicts between sport fishermen and commercial fishing gear, The WCC Great Lakes Committee had made the following Recommendations:

“It is the recommendation of this committee that the DNR ask the Coast Guard to conduct a risk analysis with input from the DNR, commercial fishermen, and sport fishermen to establish safe navigation regulations including boater safety certification, signs, and publications to educate sport-fishers about the location, identification, and risk of navigating and fishing in areas open to commercial fishing. Until such a time that this risk analysis is completed, it is further recommended that both of the summer fishing areas in zone 3 be closed to commercial trap nets. Motion and second to make the above recommendations to the DNR. *Unanimously approved.*”

<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/nrboard/congress/minutes/2010/Great%20Lakes%20minutes.pdf>

As of 5/13/2011, the above recommendations have not been implemented. The WCC Great Lakes Committee continues to be concerned about the safety of recreational fishermen, due to the placement of commercial trap nets in the above areas.

The NWF proposed two petitions to the DNR that would address this conflict:

1. No trap nets set in these areas during the June-August period.
2. Relocate the commercial fishing trap net box area away from the harbor.

The DNR Board met recently and did not accept the WCC Great Lakes recommendations nor did they concur with the two petitions submitted by the NWF. Instead, the DNR Board proposed an emergency rule to extend the commercial trap net box area to include the leads for these nets, expanding the commercial fishing box area to shallower water (60 feet). In addition, the DNR Board recommended that recreational fishermen be excluded from the commercial fishing area, suggesting the establishment of a no fishing zone in and around the commercial trap nets by establishing GPS coordinates around these areas. They also suggested that reflective tape on buoy markers would make these areas more visible. In addition, the DNR Board suggested that recreational fishermen should carry wire cutters on their vessels to cut downrigger cables, lines, and sever fishing gear that may become entangled in the commercial nets.

A motion was made and seconded to have the Great Lakes Committee go on record in opposition to the DNR Board recommendation to establish an exclusionary recreational fishing zone or buffer zone closed to sport fishermen in the trap net area. However, the Great Lakes Committee is in agreement with the petitions submitted by the NWF and the common sense suggestion for fishermen to have wire cutters onboard their fishing vessels. Members of the WCC Great Lakes Committee were unanimously in agreement to this motion.

In addition, the WCC Great Lakes Committee discussed the petition by commercial fishermen to decrease the mesh size of their whitefish nets. Committee members are not in favor of a mesh size reduction, but we are in favor of maintaining the current mesh size that was established through good scientific and biological research. The current mesh size was established to help protect yellow perch, smaller whitefish, and smaller lake chubs. Any mesh size reduction will likely increase the catch of smaller whitefish, chubs, and yellow perch. Currently, due to low numbers of yellow perch, commercial fishing for yellow perch is closed in an attempt to help the recovery of yellow perch populations.

Motion and second to adjourn – all agreed.

5:22pm