

TALKING POINTS FROM AARON COLE, DNR FISHERIES BIOLOGIST

People expressed interest in 2019 about changing the northern pike regulation because few fish were of legal size. I was not able to propose a different regulation until we did a netting survey, which was completed in spring 2021.

In spring 2021, the Barron DNR fisheries crew conducted a northern pike fyke netting survey. They clipped fins on all northern pike captured in their nets were able to determine a population estimate based on the proportion of northern pike with and without fin clips throughout the survey.

They handled 721 individual northern pike from Largon Lake and estimated the population size to 1,402 adult northern pike, which resulted in a density of 10.9 adults/ac, which was greater than the 2003 estimate (7.8 adults/ac) and less than the 1998 estimate (14.2 adults/ac).

The northern pike population is characterized as having a higher density and lower size structure population. This was likely influenced by the 2013-2014 winterkill. Northern pike survive winterkills better than other species like bass and bluegills.

Northern pike are the dominant predator in Largon Lake. Low numbers of largemouth bass were collected during the 2019 spring electrofishing survey. Largemouth bass took it hard after the winterkill, which is typical.

The current 32" minimum length limit (MLL) is overly protective with the current pike population, as only 0.7% of the pike population is of legal size.

Largon Lake is one of only eight lakes in the entire state of Wisconsin currently with a 32" MLL northern pike regulation. In general, this regulation was found to be ineffective in most places. Many of those water bodies have since gone from the 32" MLL/1 bag to the 26" MLL/2 fish bag limit.

Allowing more harvest of pike could decrease their density and increase size structure.

The best available fishing regulations are the 26" MLL/2 fish daily bag limit, or the base regulation, which is no MLL/5 fish daily bag limit.

The 26" MLL/2 fish bag limit would allow some harvest (16% of current population legal size) and should be as effective as the 32" MLL at preserving size structure.

This regulation would not harvest small pike, but should preserve size structure.

Since this is not the default regulation, it would have to go through the Wisconsin Conservation Commission Spring Hearings in 2023 and could be implemented at the 2024 fishing opener at the earliest.

The No MLL/5 fish bag limit would allow for significantly more harvest opportunities and would likely do a better job at decreasing density and increasing size structure.

This regulation could go through a more streamlined process, which would consist of a public notice and public hearing (only if requested). This regulation could be implemented at the 2022 fishing opener.

I would be comfortable with either the 26" MLL/2 fish daily bag limit or the No MLL/5 fish bag limit.