

2013 DNR RULE CHANGE PROPOSAL FORM

Name: Jeremy Price

Position: North Region Fisheries Supervisor

1) Proposed rule change (cite the rule and describe the change, but proposed rule language is not necessary):

312 IAC 9-7-14 Fish with no bag limit, possession limit, or size limit

Impose a statewide 25 fish bag limit on harvest of sunfish from public waters. Sunfish should be defined as all species in the genus *Lepomis* and their hybrids and would include the species Bluegill, Redear, Pumpkinseed, Warmouth, Longear Sunfish, and Green Sunfish among others.

2) Explain the need for the change. What problem/opportunity does it address? Include any technical/scientific/survey information and the history/background (if any).

The Bluegill is Indiana's foremost sport fish and draws the interest of anglers from widely varying demographics. From first time anglers to seasoned and highly-skilled veterans, quality Bluegills are held in high regard as a sport fish. Panfish, a category that primarily implies Bluegill but also includes other *Lepomis* species and Yellow Perch, accounts for 63% of Indiana anglers and 47% of angler days annually within the state (US-DOI 2013). Despite its importance, Indiana regulations place little conservation value on this species. With the exception of a special aggregate bag limit (grouped with Redear and Crappie) at J.C. Murphey Lake, there are currently no restrictions on harvest of Bluegill in Indiana.

In recent years, improvements in technology (fish finders, flashers, underwater cameras, and GPS) have greatly increased the efficiency with which anglers can harvest fish. Furthermore, rapid exchange of information through social media, message boards, etc. can result in intense levels of harvest, especially during the ice fishing season or when fish are bedding. Having a bag limit in place at times when fish are highly vulnerable can moderate the long term impacts on the population.

While much of the focus of this proposal centers on Bluegill, the proposal seeks an aggregate bag limit for numerous species. Anglers may not always be able to conclusively identify the sunfish they catch, especially when they hybridize. An aggregate bag limit will lessen confusion associated with separate bag limits and the enforcement challenges such a situation might present.