

2013 DNR RULE CHANGE PROPOSAL FORM

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

312 IAC 9-7-12 Walleye; sauger; saugeye

- A.) Implement a 16 inch minimum size limit for walleye on all public waters (lakes, impoundments, rivers and Lake Michigan) north of SR 26. Exceptions include:
- Lake George (Steuben County) - as a border lake, it is recommend that the MSL be increased to 15 inches to be consistent with Michigan regulations
 - Bass Lake (Starke County) - the current 14-inch MSL will remain in place due to historically slow growth
 - Simonton Lake (Elkhart County) - the current 14-inch MSL will remain in place due to historically slow growth
 - Wolf Lake (Lake County) - as a border lake, the current 14-inch MSL will remain in place to be consistent with Illinois regulations
 - Wall Lake (LaGrange County) – Special regulations (16 inch minimum size and 2 fish bag limit) was recently adopted by the NRC and will be implemented on March 1, 2014. The special regulation was designed to increase density of adult walleye and improve bluegill fishing through additional predation pressure.
- B.) Remove the minimum size limit for Walleye-Sauger hybrids (Saugeye) on all waters statewide and place a special minimum size on the two waters where they are specifically managed for (Huntingburg and Sullivan Lakes).
- C.) Add Sauger to the aggregate bag limit for Walleye and Saugeye. The new bag limit would be 6 Walleye, Saugeye, or Sauger singly or in aggregate per day.

A fishing guide-style summary of the rules following this change would look like this:

Statewide Size and Bag Limits

Species	Daily Bag Limit	Minimum Size
Walleye	North of State Road 26 6 singly	16 inches (exceptions: see below)
	South of State Road 26 or in	14 inches
Walleye-Sauger Hybrid, Sauger	aggregate	none (exceptions: see below)

Walleye Size and Bag limit Exceptions

14-inch minimum size limit, 6 fish bag limit

- Bass Lake (Starke Co.)
- Simonton Lake (Elkhart Co.)
- Wolf Lake (Lake Co.)

15-inch minimum size limit, 6 fish bag limit

- Lake George (Steuben Co.)

16-inch minimum size limit, 2 fish bag limit

- Wall Lake (LaGrange Co.)

Saugeye Size Limit Exceptions

14-inch Minimum Size limit, 6 fish bag limit

- Huntingburg Lake (Dubois Co.)

- Sullivan Lake (Sullivan Co.)

Ohio River Regulations for Walleye, Saugeye, and Sauger

- 10 fish daily bag limit singly or in aggregate; no minimum size

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).

Walleye Proposal

Presently, the Indiana Division of Fish & Wildlife (DFW) stocks walleyes, walleye-sauger hybrids or sauger into 11 reservoirs (32,000 acres) and 10 natural lakes (8,200 acres). Two northern Indiana rivers encompassing approximately 25 miles are also stocked with walleye or sauger.

Indiana's walleye stocking strategy was developed to minimize hatchery costs while still providing anglers with quality walleye fisheries. In this strategy, DFW stocks progressively larger walleyes as necessary based on a three-year evaluation of survival. If survival is deemed adequate to sustain a fishery, a creel survey is then conducted at the lake to measure angler interest and harvest statistics to determine if the benefits of the fishery outweigh the hatchery costs.

Historically, initial stockings consisted of 4 day old fry. If these stockings failed to meet the minimum success criteria for year class strength (7 age-0 fish per hour of fall electrofishing; Andrews 1994) two out of three years, the stocking would shift to 1 – 2 inch June fingerlings. If June fingerlings failed to meet the minimum success criteria, the lake was eliminated from the program. After a minimum of three successful stockings, a creel survey should be conducted. The criteria for success for creels is the harvest of one fish or pound per acre, or a minimum walleye fishing preference of 5% with a minimum catch rate of 0.10 fish per hour for anglers targeting walleyes (Andrews 1994).

Since 2001, the fisheries section has been able to incorporate the stocking of larger fall fingerlings (6 – 8 inches) into the program as a third option for creating a walleye fishery. While more costly, this option has proven successful at many northern Indiana lakes, including several that were historically successful with June fingerling stockings but shifted to marginal success over time. Some states and the province of Ontario believe increasing water clarity as a result of zebra mussels and improved land management practices, along with the significant increase in largemouth bass populations are contributing factors in the decline of some of their walleye fisheries (OMNR 2009; WDNR 2010). Perhaps this is what northern Indiana waters are experiencing as well.

In northern Indiana, 10 lakes, one impoundment and two rivers are stocked by the DFW with walleye or sauger (Table 1). One river and 13 additional natural lakes are stocked by various

associations (Table 2). Based on the number of privately funded stockings, the demand for walleye fishing opportunities in northern Indiana has grown beyond the fisheries section's means.

The goal of Indiana's early walleye management effort was to establish walleye populations and encourage harvest, regardless of size, to gauge and promote support. By the mid 1990's, the majority of Indiana's fisheries biologists favored the use of minimum size limits as a tool in managing walleye and hybrid walleye populations (Andrews 1994). While size limits can have negative impacts on walleye growth and harvest, the section agreed that the potential to improve fishing quality along with strong public support justified the risk. On August 1, 1996 a 14-inch minimum size limit was implemented. "Our walleye fisheries are based entirely on stockings," said Gary Hudson, supervisor with the IDNR's Division of Fish and Wildlife. "To get the most out of the stockings, we want them to grow larger before anglers take them home". (Pearson 1996).

It has been 17 years since the 14-inch minimum walleye size limit was implemented. Twelve years have also passed since Indiana began experimenting with stocking larger fall fingerlings. Although walleye numbers have increased, overall growth remains good (Table 3) and comparable to Michigan (Table 4). While most walleye fisheries in northern Indiana are successful based on the percentage of anglers fishing for walleye that is not the case for the criteria of harvesting one walleye or one pound of walleye per acre. Since 2000, 17 angler creel surveys have been conducted on 11 different northern Indiana walleye lakes. The criteria for success of harvesting one walleye per acre was met 41 % of the time while the criteria of harvesting one pound of walleye per acre was met 53% of the time. Larger, older walleyes are relatively scarce in our fisheries which tend to be dominated by age-2 fish that are less than 16 inches long. For example, at Crooked Lake in 2003, 2007 and 2013, 70%, 47% and 65% of the harvested walleye were less than 16 inches respectively. At Maxinkuckee, Pretty and Wall lakes, approximately 40% of the harvested walleyes were less than 16 inches, however, the age two year classes were either weak or absent at the time of the creels.

Requests from walleye anglers and associations who are purchasing walleyes to consider increasing the minimum size limit have increased in recent years. Lake associations, like some of the DFW northern fisheries biologists, question whether we are getting the most from these expensive hatchery fish by allowing the harvest of young fish. To provide a walleye program update, presentations were made to six associations in 2013 who are purchasing walleyes. Verbally, these groups indicated that they support increasing the minimum size limit. At Clear Lake, over 61% of the walleye anglers who were interviewed during the 2012 creel survey would support a 16 inch minimum size limit. At Lake Maxinkuckee during the same year, only 37% supported such a change. In 2013, Crooked Lake walleye anglers are nearly split, with 49% supportive, 44% opposed and 7% having no opinion. Fifty-six percent of the walleye anglers at Bass Lake in 2013 support changing the minimum size limit.

According to Michigan, which appears to be the most comparable to northern Indiana, walleye natural mortality is approximately 35% annually. However, once they reach adult size (15 inches) annual mortality drops to 21%, much lower than previously assumed (MDNR).

Risks associated with increasing the minimum walleye size limit, which will delay harvest an additional year, are reasonable. If walleye growth rates become an issue, managers can reduce stocking rates or consider alternate year stockings which could free up fish for other waters.

Walleye recruitment in naturally reproducing populations can be very erratic, influenced by predation (including cannibalism from adult walleyes), weather, forage size and abundance, water

quality and harvest. These factors are also capable of influencing the survival of stocked fish. Although expensive (\$1.60 per fish), stocking fall fingerlings reduces early life history barriers and provides management options for Indiana's natural lakes where fry and June fingerlings have failed. While factors like the weather, forage production or predation are uncontrollable, we can influence harvest. As we continue our shift to stocking larger fall fingerlings to increase the percentage of successful lakes, fisheries biologists in the north region believe it is time to take the next step and protect these expensive hatchery fish for an additional year and move the focus for our walleye fisheries from quantity to a higher quality.

Saugeye Minimum Size and Aggregate Bag Limit Proposal

In recent years, anglers and Indiana Conservation Officers have expressed some concern over challenges in field identification of Sauger and Saugeye where their distributions overlap. Saugeye are currently only stocked in two lakes in southern Indiana. However, Walleye and Sauger can hybridize naturally creating blended fisheries that can be difficult to regulate. Saugeye and Sauger are very similar in appearance and can be difficult to differentiate in the field. This becomes increasingly important where both are present as the current minimum legal size differs between Sauger (no minimum size) and Saugeye (statewide 14-inch minimum size limit). Furthermore, they are currently regulated by separate bag limits (Sauger – 6 per day; Saugeye – 6 per day in aggregate with walleye).

Given the challenges anglers may face in staying within the regulations and the ICOs face in citing anglers for bag or size limit violations, we propose to simplify the regulations governing these by removing the minimum size limit for Saugeye except for where they are stocked and specifically managed for (Huntingburg and Sullivan Lakes) to match Sauger regulations. We also propose incorporating Sauger into the aggregate bag limit of 6 fish per day that currently covers Walleye and Saugeye harvest. These changes will alleviate enforcement concerns as well as prevent inadvertent violations by anglers due to misidentification.

Table 1. Northern Indiana waters stocked with walleyes by the Indiana Division of Fish and Wildlife, 2013.

Water Body	County	Acres
Bass Lake	Starke	1,440
Clear Lake	Steuben	800
Crooked Lake	Steuben	802
Lake of the Woods	Marshall	416
Lake Maxinkuckee	Marshall	1,854
Lake Shafer	White	1,281
Pike Lake	Kosciusko	1,345
Pretty Lake	LaGrange	184
St. Joseph River	Elkhart/St. Joseph	
Sylvan Lake	Noble	669
Tippecanoe River	Carroll	
Wall Lake	LaGrange	141
Winona Lake	Kosciusko	562

Table 2. Northern Indiana waters stocked with walleyes by Lake Associations and Conservation Groups, 2013.

Water Body	County	Acres
Big Turkey	Steuben/LaGrange	450
Golden Lake	Steuben	119
Elkhart River	Elkhart	
Fish Lake	LaGrange	100
Fish Lake (periodic stockings)	LaPorte	273
Flint Lake	Porter	89
Lake George	Steuben	488
Lake of the Woods	LaGrange	136
Little Turkey	LaGrange	135
Loomis Lake	Porter	62
Riddles Lake	St. Joseph	77
Simonton Lake	Elkhart	303
St. Joseph River, stocked in conjunction with DFW	Elkhart/St. Joseph	
Tamarack Lake	Noble	84
Wolf Lake	Lake	385