

Smallmouth Bass Public Meeting
10-13-2020

Agenda

- Introductions – WDNR Staff/Zoom Protocol – Brad Eggold
- Background/Ice Breaker Polling Questions – Dave Boyarski
- Tournament Rules Refresher – Joe Bevington
- Primer on Setting New Regulations – Tom Meronek
- Update on the Status of SMB Juvenile Abundance and Catch Statistics – Scott Hansen
- Whiteboard Session – Facilitations – Tom/Brad/Dave
- Open Discussion

WDNR Participants

Joe Bevington
David Boyarski
Tom Meronek
Scott Hansen
Mike Donofrio
Brad Eggold
Jordan Resop
Chip Long
Cheryl Masterson

Jimmy
John
John's iPad
JP
Chris
Keith
Kids's iPhone
Kramer
Lucas
Marjorie
Mark
Max

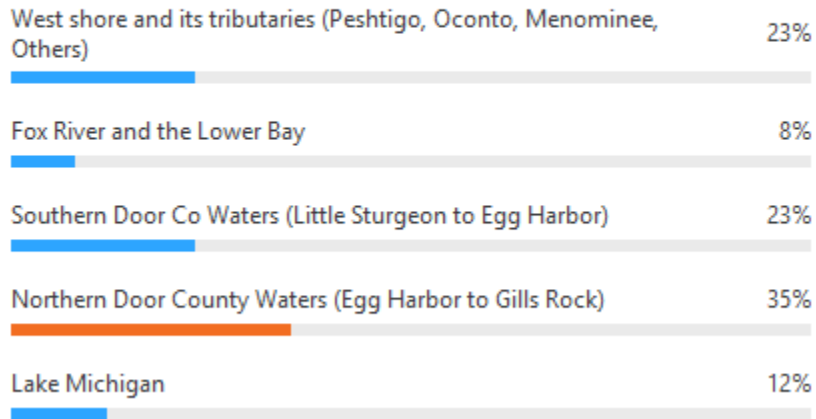
Participants

Samuel
Apos
B A
Bill
Cheryl
Clark
David
Dan
Doug
Frank
Gary
Gerald
Heather
iPhone
Dan
Jack
Jerome

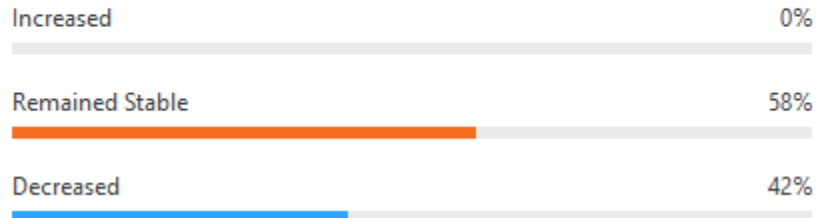
Mike
Mike
Peter
P's iPhone
Rich
Richard
Stranz
Stu
Tim
Troy
Zak
Gene
405-***-***88
414-***-***09
920-***-***80

Ice Breaker Polling Questions

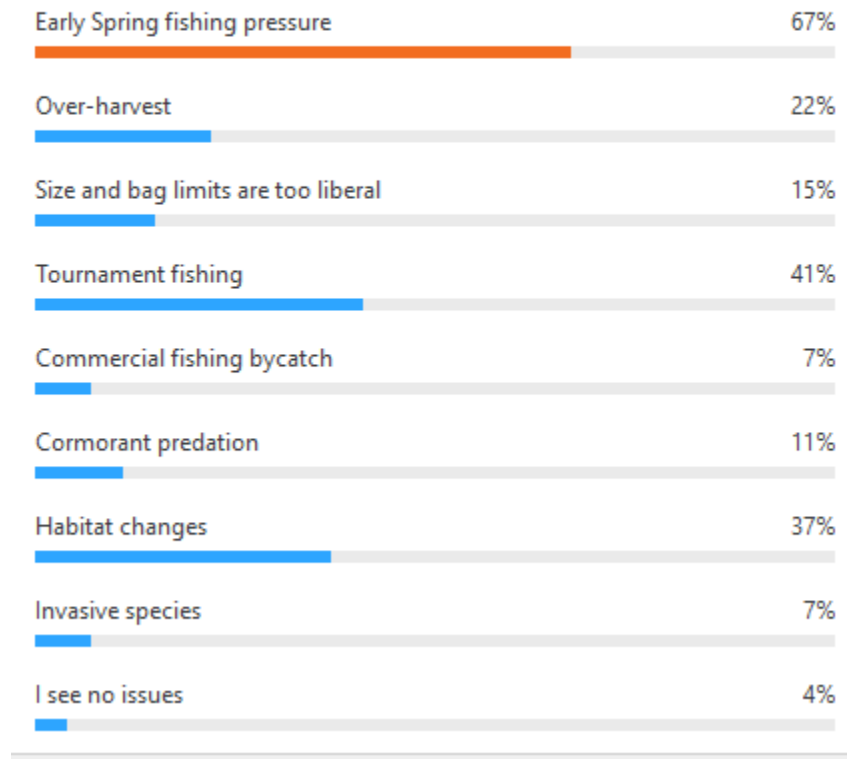
1. What area of Lake Michigan or Green Bay do you predominantly fish?



1. In your opinion have smallmouth bass populations over the last 5 years.



1. If you had to choose one issue you believe is impacting the quality of smallmouth bass fishing, would it be? (Please Select Your Top 2 Answers) (Multiple choice)



Questions re: Tournaments

Gary – In the past, the number of bass and their size increased each year despite a number of large tournaments in the 1990s-2000s, when the tournaments had 250-260 boats. In recent years, I’ve seen people taking fish in mesh bags out of the water to the release boat. Tournaments need to be monitored by DNR, especially with the smaller tournaments. Public perception has changed dramatically. Water level changes, mussels, gobies, other invasive species also play a role in changes to the fishery – you can’t pinpoint it on one thing.

[Joe B. – Recently there has been an emphasis on catch, photograph, immediate release tournaments.]

Keith – How many in tournaments have there been in the Bay in recent years?

[Joe B. – 12-15 permitted tournaments annually. We don’t know how many additional small non-permitted tournaments there are.]

Chris – Large tournaments are in the spring, in addition to enormous fishing pressure. In the 1st week in May through 2nd week in June – 40 boats in 3 feet of water or less.

Bill – Immediate release tournaments will help eliminate the negative feelings toward tournaments in general. Bigger tournaments are going in the right direction. The under 20 boats, non-permitted tournaments are more concerning where fish are held, transported in livewells, held up for photos, and released improperly are probably having a bigger impact.

Bret – The timing of little club tournaments is terrible; they happen during the spawn when fish are on beds. In the spring during the large tournaments, fish are pre-spawn and not on their beds. Some tournaments haul fish a long distance from their beds – some are moved up to 50 miles. Maybe there could be smaller boundaries for large and small tournaments. Too many fish are being pulled off of their beds.

Bill – At 6AM in June, bass boats are running to the north on Lake Michigan. Anglers were culling bass off of beds in North Bay. Small tournaments are running fish from North, Rowley, and Moonlight Bays to Sturgeon Bay, which is harmful. Bed fishing in general is harmful.

Gerald – Director for WI Smallmouth Alliance; our core value is catch and release. Bass should be weighed and released where they are caught.

Stu – Casual angler – haven't been able to catch fish in the last 5 years.

Chris via chat – There are fish on beds most every year between the first and second week of May entire southern bay

Doug via chat – Harvest of fish in the spring has been an issue. I have witnessed it this on both sides of the bay. Nothing survives the frying pan.

Questions re: Regulations/SMB Status Update

Chris – The data is scattered. We see declining catch and harvest rates. Is there a relationship with the high lake levels? The rule making process is long – it could span multiple administrations. How do we do something so that we can be more responsive to what is going on with the fishery?

[Tom M. – there is a three to four-year timeline to change regulations. We are doing positive things in the meantime – public meetings, data sharing, tournament changes, etc.]

Doug – DNR says harvest is not an issue, but we are relying on data coming from the public and the public being truthful. I don't think you know how many fish actually come home in the spring. Those people don't talk to you and don't go to your boat launches. The 18-19-inch fish are being harvested, and those are the producers.

[DNR – Our creel clerks many times verify the harvested fish that anglers are keeping, the issue is really with caught and released fish as that data come from the statement from the angler.]

Jimmy – Could we consider no tournaments from Memorial Day to July 1? Can Washington Island go back to the way it was before? It was shut down until July 1 for 40 years. This year it was included in the catch and release only regulation change. How can local guides help the DNR? Report catches, tag fish, etc. We are a resource you can use.

Bret – Mink River refuge is great. When will we “take the handcuffs off the wardens so they can enforce it?” Signs need to be posted as people were still fishing there. Can there be catch and release only to protect and enhance the world class fishery?

[Jordan R. – The Mink River is not in my area. Warden Mike Neal fielded many complaints about compliance in the Mink River refuge. Many people weren't aware of the change. Generally, we are fairly lenient when it comes to enforcing new regulations – often there are warnings instead of citations.]

Chris via chat – Yes to Bret's comment on Mink

Doug via chat – Yes on catch and release

Bill – Agree with Jimmy and Bret. If we had a 22-inch trophy regulation it would give someone an opportunity to keep a fish, would keep non-residents interested, would keep guides clients happy.

Chris Johnson via chat – Can't single out club tournaments and allow large tournaments.

Doug via chat – The days of catch and weigh tournaments are gone.

Jimmy via chat – Scott and Tom, I was curious if the Washington Island Issue is something I should continue with the Spring Hearing? Are you guys in favor of protecting that area?

Doug – Why we can't go to 1 over 22 inches?

[Tom M. – We started having these public meetings in 2017. We are still trying to make headway and come up with a list of our options.]

[Dave B. – Tournaments would be limited by a catch and release fishery or a high size limit. There are a group of anglers who like to catch and eat fish, and they shouldn't be forgotten.]

Bill via chat – The two big spring tournaments could be exempted!

Gary – Promoted fishing in Door County since the 1980s. Many are dwelling on the negatives; we are forgetting how high quality the fishery is. Catch and release may not be ideal – the fish will still get caught. Bag limit changes would also do the same thing – fish would have 10 holes in their mouths. Fishing was started as a way to get food. We can't leave out the people who like to eat fish. It isn't all about the money the guides bring in. We need to quit the negative comments, as that can chase people away. We need to do more surveys – netting, bed counts, etc. Bass in Door County have survived well on their own, and it will come back again.

Jerome – President of WI Smallmouth Alliance, but I've never fished Door County. We work with the Fish Biologists up north regularly. We educate and promote catch and release. Check out wisconsin-smallmouth.com – we can provide signs that show the slow growth rates of smallmouth.

Frank via chat – What about a size limit on engines on boats coming into the Mink? I have seen a lot of bad behavior of big boats blowing through there and creating large wakes for kayakers and small fishing boats.

Bill via chat – Many of those families who keep fish, have not been educated to the CPR effort. Only the top small percent of the MLF and FLW anglers did well!
Let's get those Free the Fighter signs all over Door County!

We've seen it often.

Bill – Thank you for this and previous meetings. Waiting for three years to have another meeting is not a good idea. Great points have been brought up tonight. Maybe have another meeting next October, or sooner if the need arises.

Conservation Warden Jordan – Compliance in the Mink River refuge wasn't great, but it wasn't terrible. Many user groups helped spread the word. Law enforcement presence at fishing tournaments is something I can work toward next spring and summer. In the past three years I have not seen a lot of smallmouth harvest taking place; some, but not a lot. Tournament anglers aren't keeping smallmouth.

JP via chat – i agree that we need meetings more often. Waiting until 2023 would not be the best thing.

Stranz – I fish tribs on the west shore. Water quality is a concern. The water clarity is markedly worse. Large rain events fill the river with mud, perhaps from large agricultural operations above Oconto Falls. Dredging in Oconto 10 years ago changed the fishery also.

[Mike D. – We've seen high flows and high water levels in the west shore tributaries.]

Chris – I would like to see some problem solving to level out the ups and downs in the fishery and a more concerted effort to maintain our status as a trophy fishing destination.

Frank via chat – How do you get the Free the Fighter signs for all of us to put in appropriate places?

Keith via chat – would like to see educational placards at popular landings and shore fishing sites emphasizing SM Bass maturity and need to catch and release for sustainable fishery!

JP via chat – Warden Jordan, can you please keep stats on how many people you see with too many fish, size problem, and those who are keeping?

Yes that's kind of the point...you only see a few and how many is that?

Keith via chat – Need more shore fishing access for seniors and persons with disabilities along Bay and Lake Michigan! This would further License sales and outdoor experiences! Especially for visiting tourists

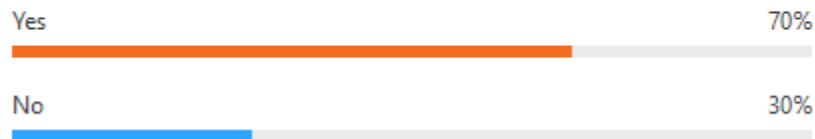
Jordan Resop via chat – jordan.resop@wi.gov / 920-493-0546

Stu via chat – a PDF of the Free the Fighter sign can be downloaded here and printed out:

https://wisconsinsmallmouth.com/wordpress/?page_id=15

Closing Polling Questions

1. Have you heard about the smallmouth bass with sores caught in Green Bay and Lake Michigan?



1. Have you caught a smallmouth bass with a sore in Green Bay or Lake Michigan?



**1. WDNR will post the meeting notes on our Lake Michigan Web Page as well as follow-up items such as rule proposals WCC resolutions.
Please select your preference for long-term Stakeholder Engagement on the SMB fishery.**

