

HISTORY OF BIG SAND LAKE'S WALLEYE SLOT LIMIT REGULATION

Newsletter article by Ellis Jones, October 2014

I'm awed seeing very old, turn of the century pictures with a day's catch of 30, 40, or 50 big fish. Through the years, this excess had a toll on fish populations. During the 1980's there was public concern expressed that Big Sand's walleye population was being overexploited. Working with the DNR, a new regulation for Big Sand Lake of 6 walleye per day with one over 20 inches was established in the spring of 1990. This varied from the state wide regulations of 6 per day with one over 24 inches.

For the next few years, from 1990 to 1992, the DNR measured the effectiveness of the regulation by doing concurrent studies that included annual mark and recapture population estimates, mortality estimates, age and growth estimates and creel surveys along with monitoring walleye spawning runs between Lake Emma and Big Sand. The DNR concluded that the "one-over" regulations alone were ineffective at limiting walleye harvest. The public indicated they wanted to continue trying to reduce the walleye population decrease. As a result, the DNR recommended an experimental slot limit. It would limit keeping walleye between 18 and 26 inches and allow one over 26 inches. This was proposed and accepted by the public and implemented in the spring of 1995.

In the fall of 1999, at a public meeting, the DNR explained their study findings which showed some improvements in the proportion of 18 to 26 inch fish in the population but little improvement in walleye larger than 26 inches that they had hoped for. The DNR speculated that the regulation had not had enough time to increase the larger fish and recommended continuing it for another 5 years.

More studies by the DNR were done in 2001 and 2002 along with a population assessment conducted in 2004. Those evaluations suggested that a decrease in growth and condition of the small and medium sized walleye had occurred. As a result, the DNR recommended modifying the regulation increasing the protected length range to 20 to 28 inches instead of 18 to 26 inches, which the public supported. In 2011/2012, the DNR changed the regulations from experimental to special classification which allowed the new regulation to continue without time limits.

A lot has changed since those turn of the century pictures were taken. We can't go back in time but we can take what resources and knowledge we have at the current time to care for our lake and its future.

I'd like to thank Doug Kingsley and other DNR Fisheries personnel for helping with this article.