

## Lower walleye limits, license fees among changes being considered in MN

By [Sam Cook](#) January 15, 2017 at 2:58 p.m.

A Minnesota angler holds a walleye before releasing it. Minnesota Department of Natural Resources officials are considering reducing the state's walleye limit from six to four. News Tribune file



GRAND RAPIDS, Minn. — A statewide fisheries advisory group again has brought up the idea of reducing Minnesota's statewide walleye limit from six fish to four, said Chris Kavanaugh, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources regional fisheries supervisor at Grand Rapids.

The topic was one of several fisheries issues discussed at the DNR's annual Roundtable meeting Jan. 6 in a Minneapolis suburb. Other topics included the possibility of a fishing license fee increase and establishing new limits for northern pike, Kavanaugh said.

The idea of reducing walleye limits to protect fish populations came up as long ago as 2000, when the DNR re-evaluated limits for several fish species. The agency considered several options at the time, including reducing the walleye limit to four or even three. But no action was taken to change the statewide walleye limit at that time, although several important walleye lakes have special regulations that include a four-fish possession limit on walleyes.

"The walleye working group (an advisory committee to the DNR) has been talking about this for some time," Kavanaugh said. "They're wondering, is it time to take another look at statewide walleye limits?"

On the surface, it seems that reducing the walleye limit from six to four might reduce the harvest by one-third, Kavanaugh said, but that isn't true in practice because so few anglers catch a limit of six walleyes. During discussions in 2000, DNR officials said reducing the walleye limit from six to four would result in only a 5 percent reduction in harvest.

Such a change might be more symbolic, Kavanaugh said.

"It sends a message that this is a finite resource," he said. "This is more conservative. It might spread out the resource among more people. But it wouldn't reduce the harvest that much."

Concern about the state's fisheries resource is directly related to the growth in technology that allows anglers to be more effective, Kavanaugh said.

"Thirty years ago, you'd hear about a hot bite last week on Fish Lake," Kavanaugh said. "Now you hear about it right now. The number of angler-hours is probably a little lower than in the '90s or even in the '80s, but the effective fishing pressure is higher. Boats are bigger and faster. The technology of GPS and getting to the spot-on-the-spot is better... We're throwing a lot of technology at them."

Tom Neustrom, a fishing guide from Grand Rapids, is a member of the walleye advisory group. He said he believes anglers would be open to reducing the walleye limit.

"What is enough?" he asked. "Is four enough? Is six enough? Most people don't catch their limit. If we can lower the limit and save a percentage of the fish for the future, I think that's fine."

He emphasized that the discussion is just beginning.

"This isn't going to get done overnight," Neustrom said. "It's a work in progress for at least another year or two."

### Northern pike limit changes

Minnesota anglers probably will see new northern pike regulations in place by this spring's fishing opener, Kavanaugh said. A new slate of pike regulations has been in the works, including public hearings, for months. Only a few DNR administrative hurdles remain to make the new rules official, Kavanaugh said.

"We're expecting the new rule to come in May this year," he said.

Current limits for northern pike statewide (except for waters with special regulations) are three in possession, of which only one may be longer than 30 inches. Under the new limit structure, limits would vary in three regions statewide:

#### Northeast Zone (North and east of U.S. Highway 53)

Angling bag limit: Two, with none from 30 to 40 inches and only one over 40 inches

Spearing bag limit: One over 26 inches, one under 26 inches

#### North-central Zone (U.S. Highway 53 south to a line roughly from Ortonville to Hutchinson to the Twin Cities)

Angling bag limit: 10, and all pike from 22 to 26 inches must be released, with only two longer than 26 inches

Spearing bag limit: 10, including one from 22 to 26 inches and one over 26 inches; or, bag limit of 10, with two over 26 inches.

#### Southern Zone (South of a line roughly from Ortonville to Twin Cities)

Angling and spearing bag limit: Two fish, 24-inch minimum size

### License fee increase

DNR fisheries officials are beginning to consider the possibility of raising the fee for fishing licenses, which were last increased in 2013, Kavanaugh said. At that time, the fee for a resident fishing license went from \$17 to \$22.

Historically, a license fee increase has generally carried DNR fisheries programs for about six years. Typically, the agency takes in more than it spends on programs for the first two of those years, breaks even for the middle two years and spends more than it takes in during the last two years, Kavanaugh said.

But the last fee increase came after 10 years rather than six, so budgets were stretched.

"The game and fish fund is projected to go into deficit by about 2019 or 2020," Kavanaugh said. "That's what we projected in 2012. We're right on track with that."

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