

Muskie Stocking and Length Increase by MNDNR

As property owners we are all very aware of the value of our resource, and our need to share with the public. While only about 1/3 of our resident population fish, the resource of fishing and the value of a good fishing lake is very important to all of us. There is an effort by a small group of fisherman, along with the MNDNR, to continue to stock muskie in our lake. The muskie fisherman are reported to purchase about 14% of the fishing licenses in Minnesota, and are trophy fisherman only, they do not fish to put food on the table, their goal is the thrill of catching a "trophy class" fish. While we have no objection to the muskie fishermen's sport, we do object when we believe it is having a negative effect on the majority of sport fishing on Pelican Group of Lakes.

Muskie are native to some places in Minnesota, but are not native to our area or our county. The muskie group has gotten the state legislature to pass a law that increases the legal size limit of muskie to 54" long (up from 48" and before that 40 & 36").

The muskie is a very aggressive predator and most aggressive fish in our lake. While most game fish will eat smaller fish, the new size limit of muskie insures that it is the dominant fish in our lake. Our lake sport fisherman (non-muskie) are now noticing a significant negative impact on fishing success in our lake, and they blame the muskie.

Here is what we know at this point.

- Mississippi strain of muskie stocking started in 1989 (native strain was stocked starting in 1978), these fish live up to 30 years old, so we have not seen the full size or density of muskie on our lake.
- MNDNR catch data on Pelican and other lakes does not support the DNR theory of muskie having little effect on other fish.
- Catch data on Pelican Lake for muskie has only been done 4 times, the last time being over ten years ago. The MNDNR has no idea how many muskie are in our lake.
- Data from other states show a significant increase in muskie size and population density when muskie size limits are increased from 30 to 34 and again to 38 inches. These scientific studies also warn that attention needs to be paid to other fish communities, if high muskie densities occur. There is no data available on 48 and 54 inch size affect.
- Muskie stocking was partly justified because theoretically, muskie natural reproduction is poor, giving the impression that if stocking stopped, muskie population could be controlled. However, Ontario data shows that muskie reproduction gets much better with fish over 40 inches. With the new limit being 54 inches, no one knows where natural reproduction will take our muskie population.
- The MNDNR is looking to stock muskie in more Otter Tail County lakes, and they like to choose lakes on river chains, as the fish move both ways. The biggest known Minnesota muskie was 58.5 inches, and caught down river on a lake 40 miles from a stocked lake.
- The effect of zebra mussels on sport fishing is not known, and is not being tested by the MNDNR. We are very concerned that the combination of unknown zebra mussel

impacts and unknown muskie size and population impacts could have a big impact on our fishery

- With only 14% of the fisherman fishing for muskie, how does that overcome the interests of the 86% who fish other sport fish.
- Tourism and license sales are reported to be the main reason the MNDNR supports muskie stocking, but we argue that if our kids and grandkids can't catch fish as in the past, they will never become fisherman and more license sales will be lost.

We are asking members to support PLPOA efforts to reverse the direction the legislator by contacting legislative members and/or the DNR commissioner to get the size limit changed back to 36 inches.

Also we are asking the MNDNR to suspend stocking on Pelican Lake immediately and restart only if the technical and scientific facts are favorable and a majority vote of the effected fishermen and property owners.

A note to non-fishermen: It may appear that these issues don't affect you. Please remember less than 5% of the people on or visiting our lake are telling the other 95 % of the population how to stock our lakes. You may have a child or grandchild who takes up fishing one day or maybe retirement will give you the extra time to fish.

As groups, PLPOA and OTCOLA are working on this, but letters from individuals have an impact as well. Please take the time to contact the people who can help us get this changed. If you cc plpoa@pelcanlakemn.org, we'll be able to track how many letters have been sent. Our area representatives are [Representative Bud Nornes](#) and [Senator Bill Ingebrigtson](#). [Representative Paul Marquart](#) has property on our lake. [Tom Landwehr](#) is the Commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources.

[All MN State Senators](#)

[All MN State Representatives](#)

If you have more questions or would like to share comments, the best PLPOA contacts are [Dave Majkrzak](#), or [Fred Manuel](#)