

2019 Public hearing for Clark Lake proposed panfish bag limit change

The DNR will be accepting comments concerning the proposed reduction of the daily panfish bag limit from 25 down to 10 on Clark Lake at the spring fish and wildlife public hearings. This proposal was included on the CLAA survey and received support among the 188 respondents with 79% indicating strong support and another 16% indicating moderate support.

A walleye bag limit reduction was initially suggested too, but this wasn't viewed favorably by DNR's internal review, and isn't going forward to the spring hearing.

These hearings are set for Monday April 8, with one in-person public hearing in each county across the state starting at 7:00 PM.

In addition to the in person public hearings, and for the first time ever, there will be opportunity for people to respond online too. This online option will be provided through a link that will be posted on this website (<https://dnr.wi.gov/About/WCC/springhearing.html>) and will go live at 7:00 PM on April 8. The online response option will remain open for three days (72 hours). Please visit the DNR website for many additional details on the entire spring hearing process.

Details about the specific proposal for Clark Lake and the DNR process are copied here.

2019 Spring Hearings questionnaire

(https://dnr.wi.gov/About/WCC/Documents/spring_hearing/2019/2019SpringQuestionnaire.pdf): QUESTION 39 (pages 32-33): Panfish – Sherwood Lake (Clark County), Lake Emily (Dodge County), Clark Lake (Door County), Paya Lake (Oconto County), Virginia Lake (Sauk County), Iola Millpond (Waupaca County), Long Lake (Waushara County)

- The proposed regulation is an aggregate daily bag limit of 10 panfish for lakes in Clark, Dodge, Door, Oconto, Sauk, Waupaca and Waushara counties. The goal of this regulation is to reduce harvest pressure on panfish to increase the abundance of certain panfish species, especially larger bluegill, and provide a memorable fishing opportunity. The current regulation is the statewide panfish regulation of a 25-aggregate daily bag limit. These regulations apply to: Sherwood Lake (Clark County), Lake Emily (Dodge County), Clark Lake (Door County), Paya Lake (Oconto County), Virginia Lake (Sauk County), Iola Millpond (Waupaca County), and Long Lake (Waushara County).
- Clark Lake: Constituents have expressed interest in improving panfish populations in Clark Lake. A bag limit reduction is proposed to improve population abundance and panfish size, especially for bluegill and yellow perch. Abundance of yellow perch has generally decreased during recent years, and a reduced bag limit is intended to reduce harvest and allow population growth. For bluegill, catch rates have increased during several most recent department surveys and growth or size-at-age is good, so a bag limit reduction is intended to further increase and improve abundance. Opportunity for inland panfish angling is limited in Door County with few inland lakes, so this regulation proposal also seeks to protect and improve a somewhat unique angling opportunity.

Overview of the Process to Develop Regulations:

1. Regulation proposals go through a public feedback process including annual spring hearings held every April.
2. Although hearings are held every April, the process alternates every other year as being just advisory questions vs. actual regulation proposals (e.g., 2018 was advisory; 2019 is for actual proposals).
3. To prepare for the 2019 spring hearing, regulation proposals were written & submitted to statewide DNR species teams sometime around March 2018.
4. DNR species teams then provided feedback & recommendations (e.g., a panfish team reviewed the Clark Lake proposal), and favorable proposals were submitted to DNR's fish policy team.
5. If approved by DNR species and policy teams, any feedback is considered with opportunity for changes & further development of the proposal.
6. The next step is to receive public feedback at the April 2019 spring hearings.
7. Depending on how a rule is received at the 2019 spring hearings, the earliest a rule change could be implemented is 2020.
8. Also, on a few occasions via both emails and meetings, I discussed this regulation process and proposal with the Clark Lake Advancement Association.
9. A member feedback survey on fish populations was also conducted by the association, which was a good way to get initial feedback.
10. Next year/2020, the spring hearing will be just advisory.

If the local DNR hadn't gotten the current regulation proposal submitted, then the next opportunity for a rule change would involve a proposal at the 2021 spring hearing, for possible implementation in 2022.

The earliest a regulation change could go into effect would be 2020, so before then, the DNR will at least have preliminary results from the upcoming 2019 survey, and this could factor into a final decision especially if there is compelling new data.

Background on Panfish Regulations:

Reduced panfish regulations are currently being evaluated in Wisconsin, with several experimental regulations and lakes established for studies throughout the state. Additional information on this study is online at <https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/fishing/outreach/panfishplan.html>, under the "*experimental panfish regulations*" tab. In addition to these experimental regulations, the state has two somewhat standard panfish regulation options, which include the statewide 25 per day limit and an alternative 10 per day limit. The 25 is more common, but several lakes do have a 10 fish limit. Results from the experimental lakes will help guide future panfish management and regulation structure. The experimental regulations include: 1) a total of 25 panfish but no more than 10 of any one species, 2) a total of 15 panfish but no more than 5 of any one species during May and June, with 25 panfish in total the rest of the year, and 3) a total of 15 panfish but no more than 5 of any one species.

Reasons for Writing the Clark Lake Proposal:

Recent DNR surveys generally show an increasing trend in bluegill catch (from surveys) with good condition/growth, and a generally decreasing trend for yellow perch. General advice is that

a 10 fish limit can be good to reduce harvest and improve panfish populations, and this was a consideration. It's tough to say whether harvest is limiting panfish populations in Clark Lake, but if it is, then a reduced panfish bag limit could reduce harvest and improve population abundance. Fish populations can be cyclic or up/down, so it's also possible that present Clark Lake conditions just favor bass/bluegill vs. perch/walleye (thus fewer perch?). From recent survey data, it's encouraging that bluegills are growing well in Clark Lake (with good condition and growth), indicating that lake conditions might support a larger bluegill population (vs. an overabundance of small bluegill, with not enough food). There is some uncertainty here, that the upcoming 2019 survey will provide additional information to inform management.