

BUCK LAKE WALLEYE MANAGEMENT

Fisheries Management Update - Prairies Area

November 2011

Update on Proposed Changes to the Buck Lake Walleye Regulations

In July 2011, Fisheries Management Branch, Prairies Area, produced an information leaflet called "Buck Lake Walleye Management" that discussed the status of past, present and future Walleye populations in Buck Lake. The document was part of a process intended to inform the public about important trends affecting this sport fish population; notably, that the abundance of the Walleye population in Buck Lake and their size has been declining steadily since 2004. Research has shown that the current Walleye regulation (and resultant increased Walleye yield), combined with the increase in angler pressure has caused much of the decline in abundance and size of Walleye in the lake.

To help fix the situation, fisheries biologists responsible for managing the Buck Lake fishery have suggested the use of a Special Walleye Licence (tag) system as part of future fisheries management efforts. The tag system is a proven fisheries management tool which would effectively restore a healthy, balanced fishery over time, by establishing a better balance of size classes, growth rates and maturity. Ongoing research and data collected over the last six years clearly show that the annual Walleye yield (harvest) resulting from the current regulation of one Walleye over 43 cm is not sustainable. Fisheries biologists are concerned about the future of the Walleye population in Buck Lake.

Letters and emails were sent out to anglers and stakeholders in August 2011 as part of the public consultation process regarding proposed changes to the Walleye regulations for Buck Lake. In addition, two public meetings were held (Wetaskiwin, September 6 and Red Deer, September 7) that included presentations about the proposed regulation changes. A survey questionnaire also enabled members of the public and anglers who were contacted or attended the meetings to comment, ask questions and provide feedback on the Walleye tag proposal for Buck Lake.

A summary of the survey responses suggests there is limited public support for the use of a Special Walleye Licence for Buck Lake. The majority of survey respondents (56 per cent) *agreed or strongly agreed* that the current regulation for Walleye on Buck Lake of one Walleye over 43 cm should be changed. An overwhelming number of respondents (75 per cent) *disagreed or strongly disagreed* that using a Special Walleye Licence (tag) system for Walleye less than 43 cm would be a socially acceptable solution. Respondents who did not agree with the recommended proposal, i.e., a Special Walleye Licence, were also asked to provide alternative solutions. The majority of recommendations focused on either returning to the previous Walleye regulation of one Walleye over 50 cm, or on implementing a "slot" regulation (a number of different size ranges were suggested).

After careful review of the management strategies proposed and consideration of the feedback received, Sustainable Resource Development is supportive of a return to the previous regulation of one Walleye over 50 cm as an interim solution. This regulation change would be implemented for the 2012-2013 angling season. As a short-term goal, this regulation provides some harvest protection for Walleye up to 50 cm. This regulation will not result in a healthy, balanced Walleye population over the longer term because it does not address the preponderance of Walleye with “hockey-stick” growth types in Buck Lake.

This interim solution provides additional time to further evaluate management options and discuss desired outcomes with stakeholders through additional public consultation. We hope this strategy will increase awareness and understanding amongst the public and stakeholders about the long-term benefits that can be achieved through use of the Special Walleye Licence (tag) System and the complex issues surrounding management of the sport fish populations in Buck Lake. As part of the public consultation process, Sustainable Resource Development is also considering the development of a Buck Lake Fisheries Advisory Committee. This advisory committee, which would consist of representatives of major stakeholder groups, would work with Sustainable Resource Development staff to prepare a Buck Lake Fisheries Management Plan. This plan would identify issues and potential solutions and would be used to guide management of the Buck Lake fishery over the long term.

For more information, please contact Sustainable Resource Development’s Senior Fisheries Biologist in Red Deer at 403-340-5142.

Additional information, including the complete *Buck Lake Walleye Management Fisheries Management Update (July, 2011)*, may be found at:

Websites:

www.srd.alberta.ca/FishWildlife/FisheriesManagement/PrairiesAreaFisheriesManagement.aspx

The results of the research project on Walleye growth characteristics and Alberta’s Walleye regulations are available at: http://repository.library.ualberta.ca/dspace/bitstream/10048/960/1/Spencer_SStephen_Spring+2010.pdf

Creel survey and index netting reports prepared by the Alberta Conservation Association are available by searching under Buck Lake at: www.ab-conservation.com/go/default/index.cfm/publications/conservation-reports/report-series/search/

What is a slot size regulation?

A slot size regulation allows anglers to either harvest a fish within a specified size range (called a harvest slot), or a regulation which protects a fish from harvest within a specified size range (called a protected slot). This regulation differs from the more commonly used minimum size limit regulation, where all fish under the specified size are protected.

A harvest slot limit allows an angler to **retain** a fish between a specified lower and upper size, i.e., a “slot”, and typically indicates how many fish can be retained within that size range. For example, the Walleye regulation at a particular lake has a harvest slot limit of one fish 43 cm - 50 cm. This regulation would allow an angler to retain one Walleye that measures between 43 and 50 cm. Any Walleye caught which are smaller than 43 cm or larger than 50 cm must be released.

A protected slot limit requires an angler to **release** any fish between a specified lower and upper size, i.e., the listed slot limit, and typically indicates how many fish can be retained on either side of the slot. For example, the Northern Pike regulation at a particular lake has a protected slot limit of 63 cm – 100 cm, of which one fish may be under and one fish may be over. This regulation would allow an angler to retain one Northern Pike that measures less than 63 cm and/or one Northern Pike that measures greater than 100 cm. Any Northern Pike caught that measures between 63 cm and 100 cm must be released.

