

Background:

Even though muskellunge harvest has steadily declined over the past 2 decades and the number of muskellunge harvested is relatively low, (despite the sport growing exponentially) it has become increasingly important to provide higher-quality muskellunge fishing than is available today to help attract today's muskie anglers, who are primarily interested in fishing for larger specimens.

Yesterday's way of estimating muskellunge anglers and harvest is outdated for today's management purposes. One method used to estimate harvest is a creel survey, these creel surveys generally involve personal interviews of anglers conducted at boat landings. Because creel surveys are labor intensive, only about 20 lakes per year are surveyed, this is a very low number when compared to 711 lakes the state has with muskellunge known to be present.

Adding to the problem, the harvest of muskellunge today is a relatively infrequent occurrence, which has resulted in a wide range of estimates obtained through these creel surveys. Estimates of muskellunge capture/harvest are also available through mail surveys. However, this appears to be equally unreliable and biased for management purposes. The two current methods in use result in a wide range of estimates, which clearly demonstrates the unreliability of these data. Recent estimates of harvest range from about 5,000 per year (based on creel surveys) to nearly 30,000 per year (based on mail surveys).

Past Legislation: None, the proposed muskellunge stamp will be a combination of two separate programs that have proven to be both reliable and beneficial. These are the trout stamp, and 48-hour Canada goose registration.

Fiscal Estimate: A stamp and 48-hour mandatory registration program should generate approximately \$2,500,000 annually. These designated funds will greatly benefit Wisconsin muskellunge research/management/protection and help to improvement of habitat.

LEGISLATIVE PROPOSAL

Problem/Solution:

Problem:

1. The current methods of estimating muskellunge harvest are not precise
2. Available funding for the muskellunge is not adequately keeping up with demand.

Today's muskellunge anglers are primarily interested in catching larger, trophy-caliber fish while the longevity of the species (a trophy is approximately 15 years old) mandates a better way to estimate angler interest and harvest. Compounding the problem is not having enough appropriate funding available to help with the revitalization of Wisconsin muskie tourism.

Solution:

1. Registration of harvested muskellunge would be beneficial for management purposes.
2. A muskellunge stamp would create a designated revenue base to enhance the fishery.

A registration program similar to that of the Canada goose would provide the accuracy and precision required for better management of the species. The creation of a muskellunge stamp similar to the trout stamp would increase revenue to help develop and maintain larger, more beneficial long-term programs.

Solution Description

A Muskellunge stamp and 48-hour mandatory registration program:

Issuance: The Department of Natural Resources shall make available muskellunge stamps and the reporting guidelines to any person holding or applying for a fishing license if the person intends to fish for or possess a muskellunge in the state.

Stamp requirement: No person may fish for muskellunge in any state waters unless he or she has a valid fishing license and muskellunge stamp.

Registration requirement: No person may possess a muskellunge taken by hook and line from the state waters unless he or she registers the fish in the manner required by the department.

Use of moneys from fees: The department shall deposit the receipts from the sale of all muskellunge stamps issued under this subsection into the muskellunge conservation fund.

Muskellunge stocking, protection & habitat fund. Moneys generated from the stamp will be used to help manage Wisconsin muskellunge fisheries, protect/improve/maintain muskellunge habitat, and for administration of the muskellunge stamp program.

Cost: Muskellunge Stamp \$10