

Message from Inland Fisheries Division – Delay of Regulation Changes for Northern Pike in DCL

A number of you shared comments and feedback on the idea of changing fishing regulations (e.g., creel and minimum size) for Northern pike in Deep Creek Lake in order to develop the potential for a trophy fishery. Although we heard a lot of support for a regulation change, we also learned some new information that lead us to conclude that more work is needed to assure the proposal (1) achieves the management objectives; and (2) is based on a thorough understanding of angler preference, and a full suite of fisheries dependent and independent data.

The Northern pike angler preference survey and feedback you shared during the public comment period (a key part of the Department's standard scoping process for potential regulation changes) has provided valuable new information about angler preferences. We want to thank all of the anglers who took the time to participate in the angler preference survey and the public scoping process. This is a great example of the value of angler involvement in the management of our fisheries resources. We also want to thank the Cumberland Times News for publishing multiple articles on the subject and helping us to get the word out.

The next step is for our biologists to expand the collection of some key fisheries dependent and independent data which will give us the best possible foundation for improving the original proposal.

Our plan is to complete the following tasks by December 2016: (1) collect information on how other jurisdictions manage trophy Northern pike fisheries in lakes similar to Deep Creek Lake. This may identify other potential management options that we have not considered; (2) implement a sampling survey designed to provide new information and fill some key data gaps on the Northern pike population in Deep Creek Lake; and (3) evaluate the need for a short seasonal closure to protect the spawning population by eliminating harvest during the spawning period.

Based on sampling schedules, we hope to have new information on the Northern pike population size structure, spawning success, growth rates, movement, and harvest patterns by the end of 2016. So we expect it will be 2017 at the earliest before a new and improved proposal can be drafted.

We will continue to keep you informed on progress. In the meantime, anglers can help by keeping an eye out for tagged Northern pike in Deep Creek Lake and reporting tagged fish using the information on the tag - whether they are kept or released.