

FISHING IN NONTIDAL WATERS – Walleye in Deep Creek Lake

What is being considered?

The Department is considering the establishment of an 18 - 21-inch protected slot length limit for walleye in Deep Creek Lake.

Why is this change necessary?

The 2016 Maryland Angler Preference Survey identified Deep Creek Lake as a key destination and vacation fishery with more than 60 million dollars of economic value. More than half of the 87,700 trips listed fishing as the trip's primary purpose, with 35 percent specifically targeting walleye. Deep Creek Lake is a four-season fishery and is considered Maryland's premier ice fishing destination attracting both resident and nonresident anglers. Protecting and enhancing the walleye fishery will help to ensure that Deep Creek Lake remains a destination fishery attractive to resident and nonresident anglers.

Independent and dependent fishery surveys conducted on the Deep Creek Lake walleye fishery documented that harvest is an important component of the fishing experience for many anglers. A tagging study conducted in 2022 found that 72 percent of the legal size (15 inches) walleye caught by anglers are kept. Fishery data and tournament results indicate that the average size of the angled and harvested walleye is 17.5 inches, with very few fish exceeding 20 inches.

Several management options were evaluated to improve the walleye size distribution, including no change to the current regulations, increasing the minimum size, and establishing a protected slot length limit. Population modeling conducted by the Freshwater Fisheries and Hatcheries Division (FFHD) suggests that the current minimum size combined with a slot size limit approach with an 18-to-21-inch protected slot (no harvest within this range) would provide the greatest benefit for improving the walleye size distribution while maintaining the opportunity to harvest some of the catch. Under this harvest scheme, 83 percent of the walleye harvest would occur above the minimum size (15 inches) and below the protected slot (18 - 21 inches), with the average size of harvested walleye remaining similar to the current average. Although the total number of walleye harvested would decrease by 16 percent with a 14 percent decrease in yield, over time, the number of walleye reaching 22 inches and 24 inches is expected to increase more than twofold, significantly improving the angling experience. The creel limit would remain at five fish per day.

Who will this affect?

This action will affect nontidal recreational anglers fishing for walleye in Deep Creek Lake.

When will this be effective?

The Department projects that this change could be effective in the winter of 2023-2024. However, the exact date cannot be determined. The Department will follow our normal scoping and proposal procedures.

Has this change been discussed with stakeholders?

No.