
More Fish

Posted by Ron Seals - 2008/04/30 14:29

What is enough? Can more be less? These are questions you may want to ask about new rules in the works for Great Lakes salmon anglers.

The DNR is proposing to raise salmon catch limits to five fish from three. It is also proposing to allow anglers to use three lines rather than two for any kind of fishing, anywhere.

Anglers are being asked to share their thoughts and concerns about the proposals, which, if adopted, would go into effect in 2009. Neither is expected to have a negative biological impact on the fishery.

A DNR analysis of the new catch limit shows that perhaps 20,000 more salmon would be caught, out of a total catch of 800,000 to 900,000 fish.

"The difference is a pittance," said Jim Dexter, the Lake Michigan basin fishery chief. "What this really is, is a social issue. What is enough fish for people?"

Dexter has a unique perspective on the topic, born of years working closely with Great Lakes anglers and charter captains. He knows anglers love to catch their "limit." When the limit is three they more often go home satisfied.

When it is five, that isn't always so. Those focused on "limit" catches can go home unfulfilled with four. Legal limits, he said, have a way of establishing angler expectations.

"We know a lot of anglers can't get three fish," Dexter said. "There are going to be a lot more that can't get five."

Great Lakes anglers can currently catch five fish total, but no more than three of any one species (other than pink salmon). That means three coho or Chinook salmon or steelhead or a mixture of five.

That policy started in 1989 after the Lake Michigan salmon fishery collapsed due to Bacterial Kidney Disease. Limiting the take to three conserved what was left.

That limit has grown on some in the fishing trade. I've heard charter captains say they like the rule. Three salmon sometimes means they can go home quicker. With rising gas prices, that means less out-of-pocket costs for the captain and the customers.

Other captains have expressed concerns about what they perceive as waste; clients who hold out for a limit of five (50-100 pounds), but start whining at the cleaning station about what they will do with "all that fish."

You don't have to be Einstein to recognize that fish matter changes shape only to the extent that there is freezer space. The rest goes to friends or into the trash.

Gas prices also impact recreational anglers, those who fish from the piers or troll offshore in their own boats. Anglers who drive to Lake Michigan from Pontiac, Ann Arbor, Flint or Jackson fish less frequently these days because of gas prices and economic conditions. If they do go, some want the option of taking a five salmon.

"Three is plenty for some while five is not enough for others," Dexter said. "There is no right or wrong here."

The decision to return to a five salmon limit is something that anglers have been asking for, according to Dexter. It was also recommended in a 1990 DNR report on trout and salmon management in Lake Michigan.

Dexter maintains that there is no biological reason not to do it. Natural mortality for coho and Chinook is much greater than fishing mortality.

"There are, say 10 million Chinook swimming out in Lake Michigan," Dexter said. "We harvest just under one million of them, 10 percent. We get 20 to 30 percent dying naturally.

"Taking fewer might give us a small percentage savings in forage fish not eaten, but what that means is unknown and no matter how many we take, it may not help."

Part two of the proposal, to allow anglers to use three rods anywhere, in part, comes from anglers, who have said, "We can use two lines, why not three?"

It is a long lament, according to Dexter, backed up by the argument that legal limits still prevail. Anglers argue it should not matter whether they use two or four rods. Either way they are only allowed 35 perch, for example. The only difference

is they may catch them quicker.

Michigan anglers have been restricted to two rods for almost 100 years," said Dexter. That changed in 2001 for anglers fishing the Great Lakes.

Those who troll for salmon were allowed three rods per licensed angler. Everyone else is still required to use two. The proposed change to three is expected to simplify otherwise complicated regulations.

Anglers on Lake Huron also troll for walleye. But they are allowed only to use two lines per angler. Law enforcement becomes a challenge under those circumstances.

"The only issue we see may be space issues at the piers," Dexter said. "People may take up more space with more rods. Hopefully, etiquette will drive the day."

More space, more rods, less time spent fishing. It is an axiom only Albert Einstein could love.

What do you think?
Will anglers be more or less satisfied with a five-salmon limit?

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Re:More Fish

Posted by Tim Wierenga - 2008/04/30 18:15

Ron, you have a heard enough time with one line. This will just about put you over the edge...

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Re:More Fish

Posted by Ron Seals - 2008/05/03 00:19

:laugh:

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