

# **Ontario Waters of Lake of the Woods Fisheries Management Plan**

## Part 1 – Recreational walleye plan

March 19, 2024

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## Résumé en français (French Language Summary)

Le lac des Bois est le deuxième plan d'eau intérieur en importance en Ontario (385 000 ha). Il occupe également une partie de la province du Manitoba et de l'État du Minnesota (figure 1). Les plans d'eau de l'Ontario représentent 245 000 ha (64 %) de la superficie totale de la province. Le lac des Bois soutient la pêche récréative intérieure la plus importante sur le plan économique en Ontario, les dépenses annuelles étant estimées à 111,4 millions de dollars. Bien que cette valeur inclue la pêche récréative pour toutes les espèces, des études montrent que le doré jaune est l'espèce la plus recherchée par les pêcheurs à la ligne sur le lac des Bois.

La partie du lac des Bois qui est en Ontario compte plus de 6 000 chalets et autres propriétés saisonnières, ainsi que plus de soixante entreprises touristiques dont des pourvoiries, des camps de pêche, des terrains de camping et des entreprises d'accompagnement. L'industrie du tourisme emploie environ 38 % de la main-d'œuvre dans la Ville de Kenora. De plus, la pêche commerciale et la pêche de subsistance jouent un rôle important dans la vie des peuples autochtones sur le lac des Bois et à proximité de celui-ci, contribuant aux besoins alimentaires, sociaux, culturels et économiques de nombreuses communautés de Premières Nations et de Métis.

Les données de surveillance sur le lac des Bois recueillies par le MRNF indiquent que la population de doré jaune est vulnérable à des niveaux de récolte élevés continus, au point où la récolte actuelle présente un risque pour la qualité de la pêche au doré jaune. Plus précisément, il y a trois enjeux écologiques préoccupants :

- les taux de récolte sont élevés et nuisent à la capacité de la population à se protéger contre les pressions comme les espèces envahissantes, l'augmentation des prises et le changement climatique.
- la biomasse observée du doré jaune est en deçà de la biomasse de référence.
- les taux de mortalité sont élevés et la population compte peu de dorés jaunes âgés.

Ensemble, ces problèmes laissent sous-entendre que la pêche au doré jaune est menacée à long terme. La capacité de la population de doré jaune à se protéger contre les pressions imprévues à l'avenir, soit années de reproduction médiocre, pressions accrues exercées par la pêche ou événements importants attribuables au changement climatique, est faible. Ceci dit, le MRNF est conscient de l'importance que revêt la pêche au doré jaune pour le mieux-être social et économique des collectivités de la région du lac des Bois et s'engage à trouver un équilibre entre la protection de la nature et les considérations socio-économiques.

Le MRNF s'est allié à plusieurs communautés autochtones locales, exploitants d'entreprise touristique, administrations municipales et utilisateurs à des fins récréatives de la région pour former le Conseil consultatif des pêches du lac des Bois. Depuis janvier 2021, le groupe s'est réuni pour élaborer ce plan de gestion de la pêche récréative au doré jaune afin d'améliorer la situation de la population de doré jaune tout en tenant

compte de l'importance de la pêche sur le plan socio-économique, conformément aux orientations de la Stratégie provinciale de gestion des pêches de l'Ontario (MRNF, 2015).

Les objectifs écologiques et socio-économiques du plan de gestion sont les suivants :

1. réduire le taux de mortalité du doré jaune associé à la pêche récréative;
2. accroître la biomasse de doré jaune plus gros ou plus âgé;
3. \*traiter de manière égale tous les pêcheurs à la ligne de doré jaune pêchant à des fins récréatives;
4. reconnaître l'incidence des modifications réglementaires sur l'industrie touristique locale;
5. \*offrir des occasions supplémentaires de pêche à la ligne pour d'autres espèces, conformément aux objectifs de la Stratégie provinciale de gestion des pêches.

*\*Cet objectif n'a pas été pris en considération au moment de choisir la série finale de mesures de gestion.*

*\*Les mesures associées au cinquième objectif seront reportées aux exercices de planification futurs.*

Les anciens règlements sur la pêche récréative au doré jaune sur le lac des Bois étaient les suivants :

**Saison** : du 1<sup>er</sup> janvier au 14 avril et du troisième samedi de mai au 31 décembre

**Limites (résidents de l'Ontario et du Canada)** : Limite de 4 pour les titulaires de permis de pêche sportive. Limite de 2 pour les titulaires de permis de pêche écologique. Pas plus de 1 poisson de plus de 46 cm.

**Limites (non-résidents)** :

*Limite quotidienne de pêche avec conservation des prises* : Limite de 2 pour les titulaires de permis de pêche sportive. Limite de 2 pour les titulaires de permis de pêche écologique. Pas plus de 1 poisson de plus de 46 cm.

*Limite de possession* : Limite de 4 pour les titulaires de permis de pêche sportive. Limite de 2 pour les titulaires de permis de pêche écologique. Pas plus de 1 poisson de plus de 46 cm.

Pour atteindre les objectifs du plan de gestion de la pêche récréative au doré jaune dans le lac des Bois, le MRNF a approuvé (à compter du 1<sup>er</sup> janvier 2024) les modifications suivantes au règlement sur la pêche récréative au doré jaune :

**Résidents du Canada et de l'Ontario** :

Limite de 4 pour les titulaires de permis de pêche sportive. Moins de 43 cm ou plus de 70 cm. Pas plus de 1 poisson de plus de 70 cm.

Limite de 2 pour les titulaires de permis de pêche écologique. Moins de 43 cm.

**Non-résidents :**

*Limite quotidienne de pêche avec conservation des prises :* Limite de 2 pour les titulaires de permis de pêche sportive. Moins de 43 cm ou plus de 70 cm. Pas plus de 1 poisson de plus de 70 cm. Limite de 2 pour les titulaires de permis de pêche écologique. Moins de 43 cm.

*Limite de possession :* Limite de 4 pour les titulaires de permis de pêche sportive. Moins de 43 cm ou plus de 70 cm. Pas plus de 1 poisson de plus de 70 cm. Limite de 2 pour les titulaires de permis de pêche écologique. Pas plus de 43 cm.

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## Introduction

In the spirit of reconciliation, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry acknowledges that Lake of the Woods is located on the Traditional Territory of the Anishnaabe and Métis of Treaty #3 and is the home of numerous First Nation communities, and the Northwestern Ontario Métis Community.

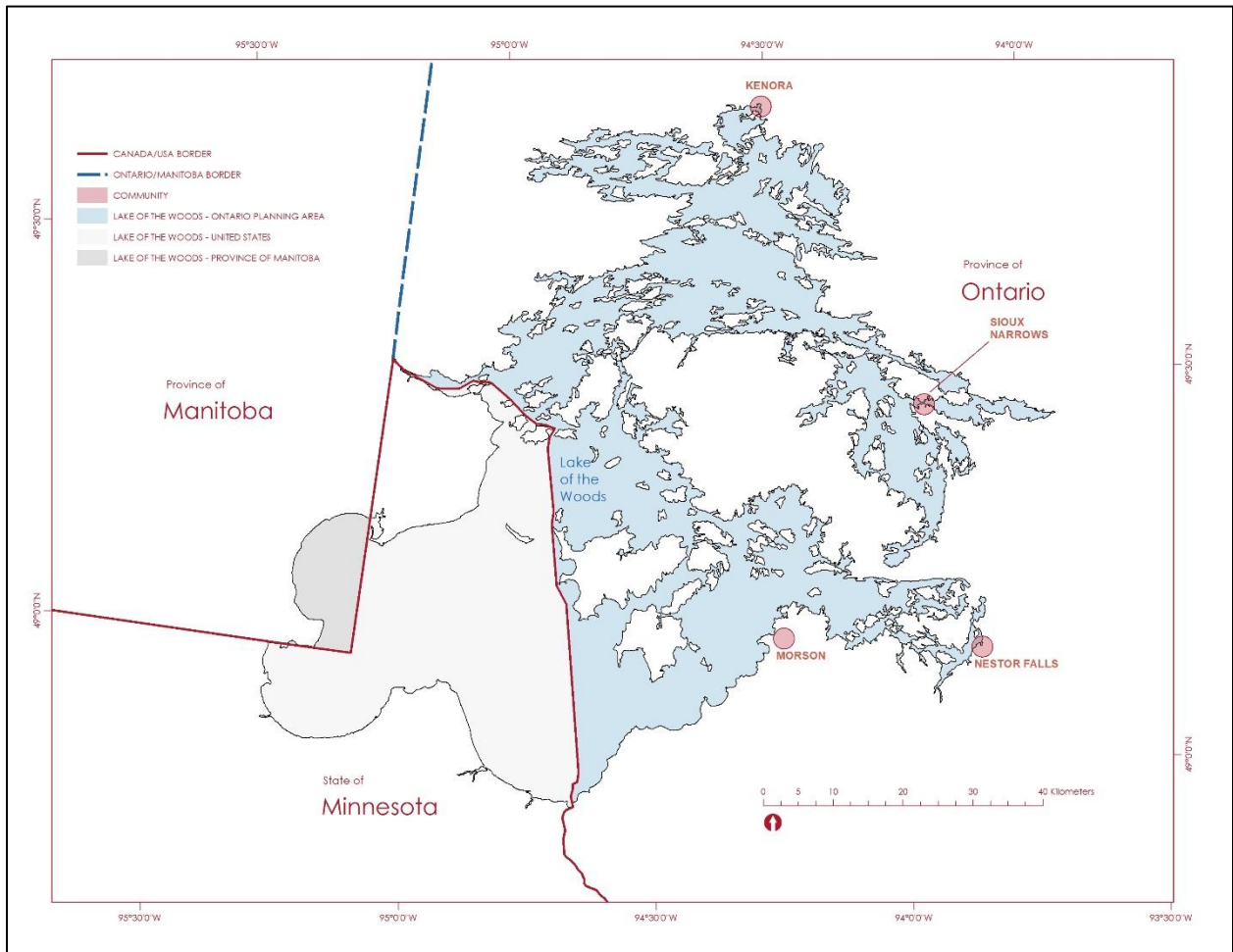
In 2015, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) adopted the Provincial Fish Strategy (PFS; MNRF 2015), which is intended to improve the conservation and management of fisheries, and the ecosystems upon which communities depend, while at the same time to promote, facilitate, and encourage fishing as an activity that contributes to the nutritional needs, social, cultural, and economic well-being of individuals and communities in Ontario. All fisheries management activities in Ontario are now expected to be consistent with the direction of the Provincial Fish Strategy.

Lake of the Woods (LOTW) is the next largest waterbody in Ontario after the Great Lakes and Lake Nipigon. It is shared with the Province of Manitoba and the State of Minnesota (Figure 1). Ontario waters comprise 218,042 hectares (ha) of the total surface area (approximately 57%), situated within the bounds of Fisheries Management Zone 5 (Figure 2). Lake of the Woods is part of the Lake of the Woods Provincially Significant Inland Fishery (PSIF) complex which includes the Ontario waters of Shoal Lake (Shoal Lake is shared with Manitoba) and the Rainy River (shared with Minnesota), downstream of the Fort Frances dam. The Lake of the Woods Recreational Walleye Plan deals with the Ontario waters of Lake of the Woods proper; fisheries in the Rainy River and Shoal Lake will be addressed in future management planning.

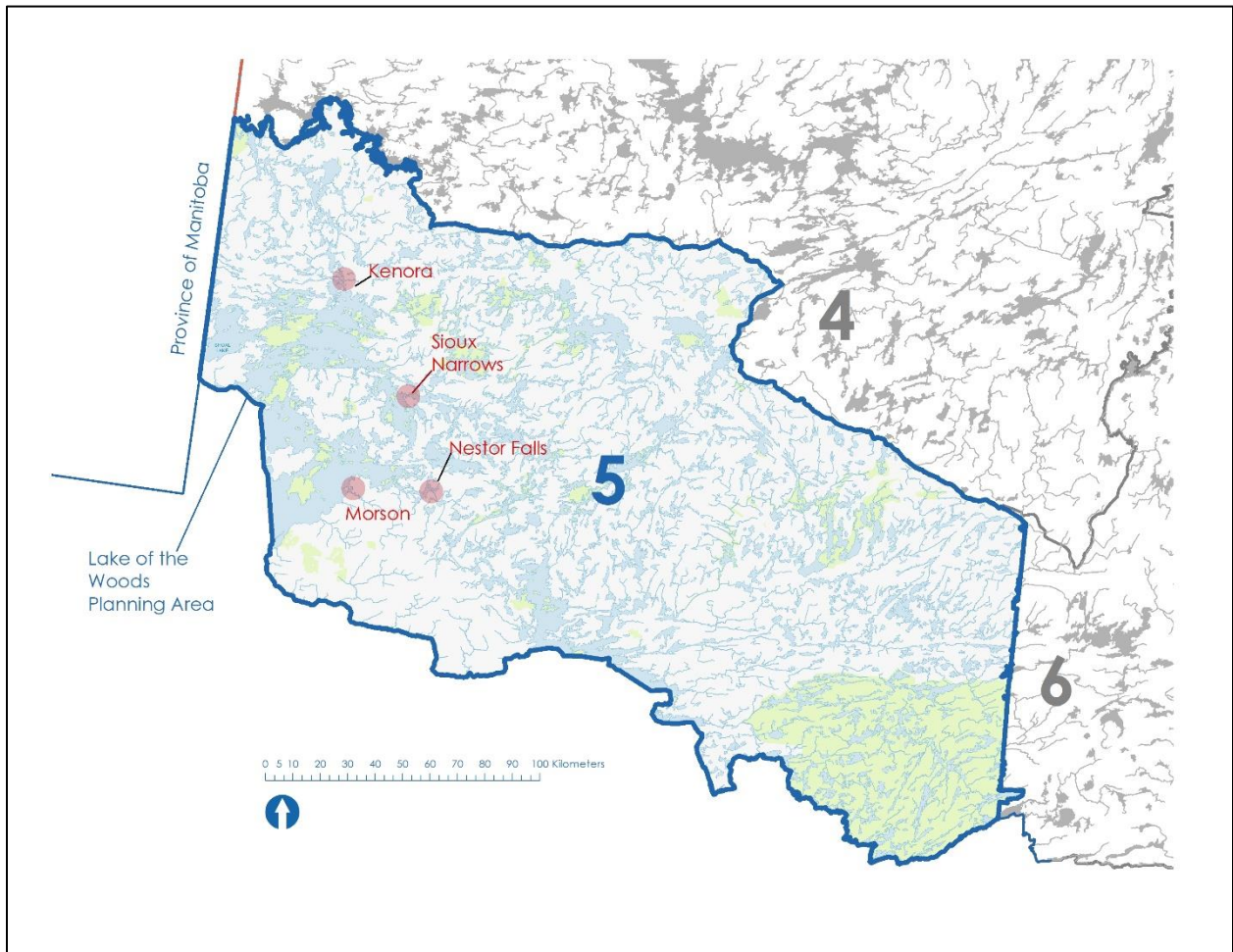
MNRF has established the Lake of the Woods Fisheries Advisory Council (hereinafter referred to as the 'Advisory Council'), comprised of members representing Indigenous communities, recreational anglers, the tourism industry, and other interested parties. This group advises MNRF with respect to developing objectives and management actions within the fisheries management planning process (MNRF 2015).

The intent of the LOTW fisheries management planning process is to develop a plan addressing the management of each species targeted by fisheries (i.e., recreational, and commercial) in the lake. Due to the ecological status of walleye (*Stizostedion vitreus*) and the economic importance of that species (Sections 1.1 and 1.2), initial management planning efforts in LOTW were directed towards the recreational fishery for walleye. The other fisheries of Lake of the Woods will be addressed in future planning exercises; this recreational walleye plan is intended to become a chapter in a lake-wide fisheries management plan resulting from these future planning exercises.





**Figure 1:** Map of Lake of the Woods showing jurisdictional boundaries.



**Figure 2:** Map of Fisheries Management Zone 5 boundaries and general location of the Lake of the Woods Planning Area.

## 1. Background

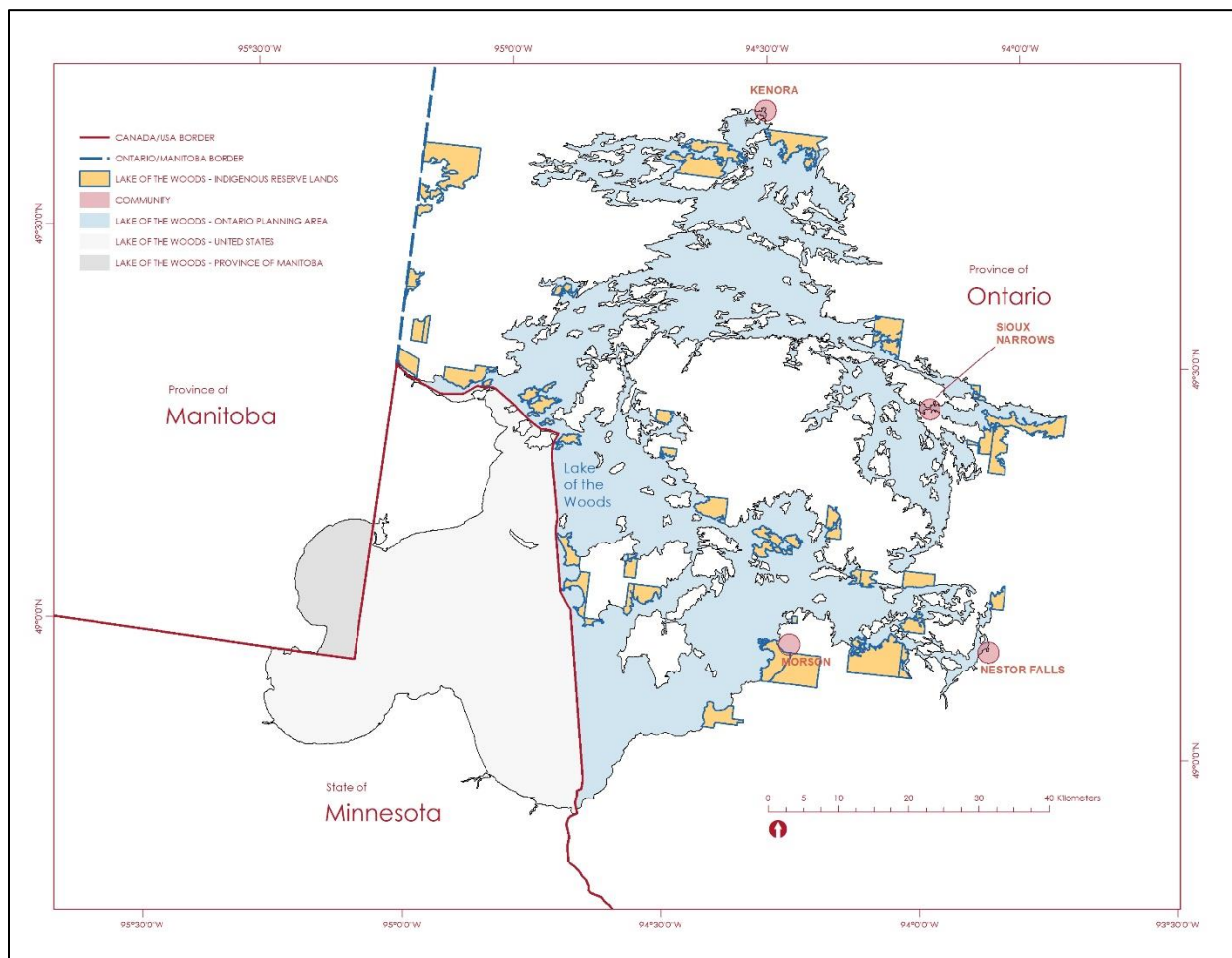
### 1.1 Socio-Economic Information

The largest municipality located on the shores of Lake of the Woods is the City of Kenora (population ~15,000; StatsCan 2021). The other organized municipalities on the Ontario waters of Lake of the Woods are the Township of Sioux Narrows-Nestor Falls (population ~550; StatsCan 2021a) and Lake of the Woods Township (population ~230; StatsCan 2021o). Reserve lands of eleven First Nations are located on the Ontario waters of Lake of the Woods (Figure 3), and one First Nation is located on the Manitoba waters. An additional two First Nations share Agency 30 reserve lands with the eleven located directly on the lake (Table 1). Lake of the Woods is also within the Lake of the Woods/Lac Seul/Rainy Lake/Rainy River asserted harvesting territory area of the Northwestern Ontario Métis Community (Métis Nation of Ontario Region One; MNO).

**Table 1:** First Nations located on Lake of the Woods (Source: StatsCan 2021 b-p)

<b>First Nation</b>	<b>Population</b>
Animakee Wa Zhing 37 First Nation (Northwest Angle 37)	185
Anishinaabeg of Naongashiing (Big Island First Nation)	110
Buffalo Point First Nation*	481
Iskatewizaagegan 39 Independent First Nation (Shoal Lake 39)	540
Mishkosimiziibing First Nation (Big Grassy)	235
Naotkamegwanning First Nation (Whitefish Bay)	575
Northwest Angle 33 First Nation	190
Obashkaandagaang Bay First Nation (Washagamis Bay)	140
Ojibways of Onigaming First Nation	375
Rainy River First Nations	740
Shoal Lake 40 First Nation	220
Wauzushk Onigum Nation (Rat Portage)	415
<b>First Nations with shared Agency 30 reserve lands only</b>	
Niisaachewan Anishinaabe Nation (Dalles)	195
Wabaseemoong Independent Nation	830

\*Located on Manitoba waters of Lake of the Woods



**Figure 3:** Map of Lake of the Woods illustrating First Nations reserve lands.

*NB: Buffalo Point First Nation (Manitoba) is not illustrated on this map.*

### 1.1.1 Tourism industry

Tourism is one of the most valuable economic industries in the Lake of the Woods catchment. Approximately 38% of the work force in the City of Kenora is employed in the tourism industry (Lake of the Woods Development Commission 2013). Total visitor spending in the region is reported as \$543 million (2011; City of Kenora 2014). The 2015 Survey of Recreational Fishing in Canada (DFO 2019; MNRF 2020) estimated that direct expenditures by recreational anglers on Lake of the Woods was \$111.4 million.

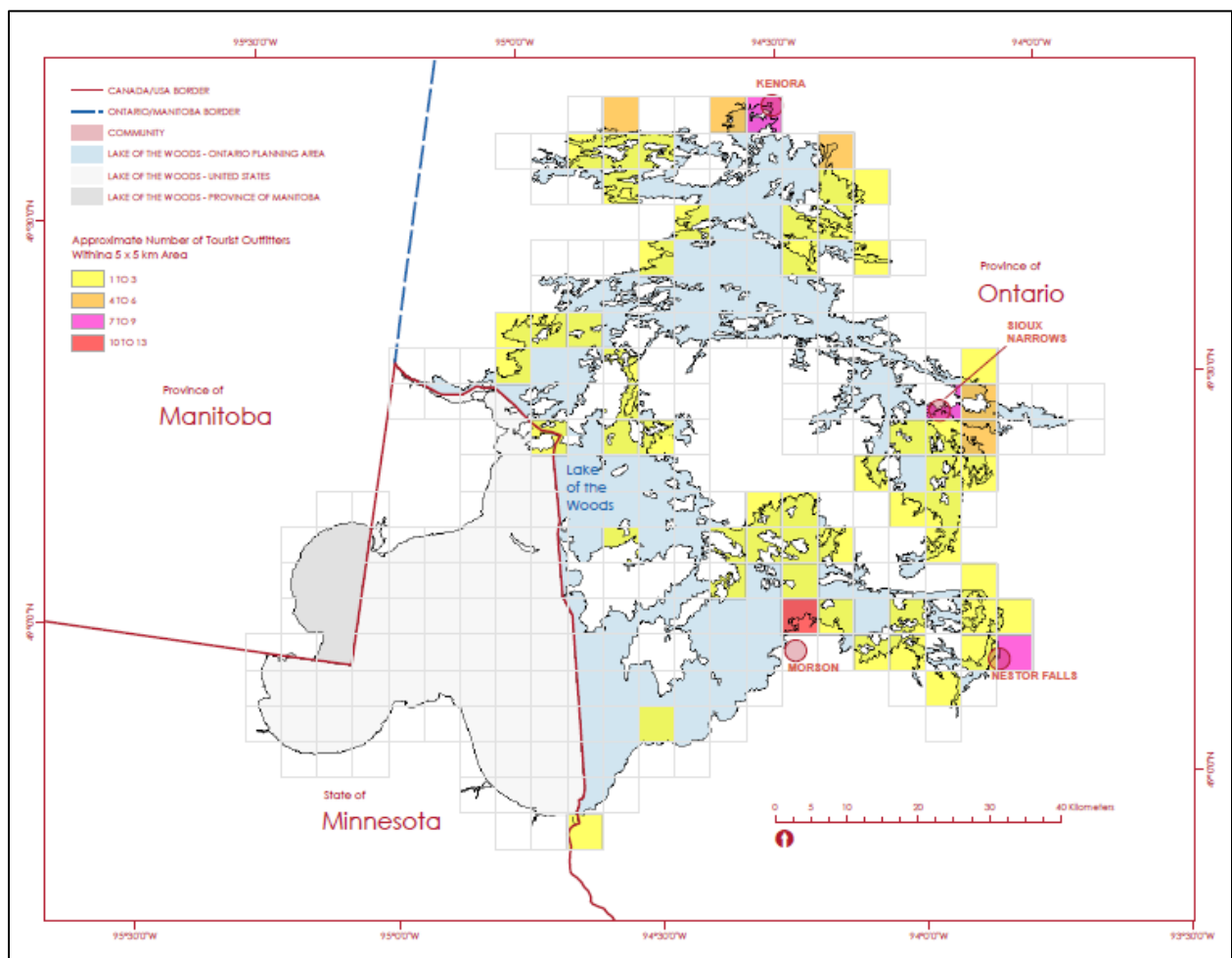
Approximately 62 tourist establishments are located on the Ontario portion of Lake of the Woods (Figure 4). Three operating provincial parks are located along Highway 71, adjacent to Lake of the Woods; two non-operating provincial parks are located on the lake proper. The majority of the islands on Lake of the woods are regulated provincial conservation reserves.

Seasonal properties (i.e., cottages) comprise the largest component of domestic tourism. Over 6000 cottages are located on the Ontario portion of Lake of the Woods (MNRF unpublished data). Overnight stays at private cottages account for ~22% of domestic tourism in the Kenora census division (2017; MHSTCI unpublished data).

Open water creel surveys conducted in 2017-18 (Danco 2019) suggest the majority of recreational anglers are American non-residents (Table 2). NB: It is important to recognize that these values represent solely the proportions of individual anglers interviewed; it should not be inferred that these values represent the recreational fishing effort or harvest by each demographic group.

**Table 2:** Percentage residency of angler groups interviewed during the 2017 and 2018 open water creel surveys (adapted from Danco 2019)

Origin	2017	2018
Local	7.2	6.6
Resident of Ontario (not local)	2.4	1.5
Resident of Canada (not Ontario)	12.6	10.2
Resident of United States	77.7	81.0
Other country	0.1	0.5



**Figure 4:** Map showing commercial tourist camps that are within Ontario on Lake of the Woods

*NB: This map represents the best information available to MNR and may not be complete.*

Research Resolutions & Consulting Ltd. (2015) found that most American anglers visiting northern Ontario came from (in order) Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Illinois. This finding generally supports the results of the 2015 Recreational Fishing Survey of Canada, (DFO 2019; MNRF 2020; MNRF unpublished data) which found the highest number of respondents who reported fishing in Lake of the Woods coming from Minnesota (32%), Wisconsin (14%), Manitoba (14%), Illinois (8%) and Ontario (6%).

Appendix A summarizes the results of the 2015 Recreational Fishing Survey of Canada (DFO 2019; MNRF 2020; MNRF unpublished data) regarding the license type purchased by anglers who reported fishing the Ontario waters of Lake of the Woods. The most popular license purchased was the 8-day, non-resident conservation license (21.3%), followed closely by the 8-day, non-resident sport fishing license (20.7%). Amongst all license categories (including resident and non-resident), slightly more than half of anglers chose a sport fishing license over a conservation license (52%).

### **1.1.1.1 Competitive Fishing Events**

Competitive fishing events (i.e., tournaments and derbies) are not directly regulated by MNRF, though participants are required to adhere to the provincial fishing regulations. Consequently, an accurate count of these events is difficult, considering the number of small events organized by cottage associations, neighbourhood groups, service clubs, etc. However, several large-scale events directed at professional anglers are held annually on the Ontario waters of Lake of the Woods, three of which target walleye:

- Lake of the Woods Women’s Walleye Tournament (80+ boats) – June
- Kenora Walleye Open (120+ boats) – July
- Lake of the Woods Walleye Challenge (50+ boats) – October

These three events are all live-release tournaments; the Lake of the Woods Walleye Challenge currently operates under a weigh-in format, the Women’s Walleye Tournament has a catch-photo-release format, while the Kenora Walleye Open uses a hybrid format.

## **1.2 Fisheries Monitoring**

Fisheries independent (i.e., index netting) and fisheries dependant (i.e., creel surveys) information has been collected by MNRF for decades. Between 1999 and 2017, MNRF’s fisheries-independent data came from Fall Walleye Index Netting (FWIN; Morgan 2002), a common assessment tool for monitoring walleye populations. Since 2018, MNRF has carried out the PSIF – Lake of the Woods Monitoring Program; the fisheries-independent component of this program largely follows the methodologies of the provincially standardized Broad-scale Monitoring Program for Inland Lakes (BsM; Sandstrom et al. 2013). For more information regarding the BsM program, please visit <https://www.ontario.ca/page/broad-scale-monitoring-program>.

Fisheries dependent data is collected through roving creel surveys conducted during the open water and winter angling seasons. Creel surveys involve conducting recreational angler counts and interviews, to provide estimates of catch, effort (i.e., angler- or rod-hours), and harvest (Malvestuto et al. 1978; Lester and Korver 1996.). Creel results are supplemented with information from the Survey of Recreational Fishing in Canada (MNR 2020).

The LOTW monitoring program has recently completed a two-year index netting event, two open-water creel surveys, and multiple area specific winter creel programs over a five-year period. Future results of both the independent (index netting) and dependant (creel survey) monitoring of the PSIF – Lake of the Woods Monitoring Program will be used to measure success in achieving the walleye objectives.

### **1.2.1 Fisheries-Independent Monitoring Assessment**

Walleye that are captured during index netting surveys or sampled from angler catches during creel surveys are measured for a variety of biological attributes that provide information on population status including:

- Length
- Weight
- Sex
- Age

These measures are used to describe several important characteristics of the walleye population, including relative abundance (i.e., catch per unit effort), age structure, growth, biomass, and mortality. A minimum size is often used in the calculation and reporting of common fisheries metrics, often referred to as recruit- or harvestable-sized fish. The bulk of this management plan will report on walleye greater than or equal to 350 mm (13.75 inches) total length to represent the portion of the population that are fully recruited to the fishery (vulnerable to netting gear and other fishing, i.e., angling). Reporting on recruit- or harvestable-sized walleye (>350 mm total length) can be considered an acceptable threshold as this is the average size that recreational anglers begin to target and harvest walleye.

The status of walleye fisheries in Ontario is evaluated using two biological reference points (Lester et al. 2003) for sustainable fishing (biomass and mortality rate) which can be used to identify overfishing (Figure 5). Biological reference points are a way to compare what is observed from monitoring data (i.e., netting) to what is expected, given habitat and climate characteristics of a waterbody. Lester et al. (2004) developed the Thermal-Optical Habitat Area (TOHA) model to estimate walleye yield for Ontario lakes using physical and chemical parameters, including lake size, depth, nutrient levels, water clarity, and temperature. The TOHA model describes a method for calculating the carrying capacity ( $B_{MAX}$ ).



$B_{MAX}$  refers to the expected biomass density when a population is unexploited (e.g., no harvest), or simply, the maximum amount of biomass a lake can support. MSY describes the maximum harvest that can be sustained over time, without detrimental effects to the population as evidenced by reduced biomass and increased mortality. Observed biomass ( $B_{OBS}$ ) is measured from the PSIF - LOTW Monitoring Program (index netting), whereas biomass at MSY ( $B_{MSY}$ ) is estimated from predictive models (Lester et al. 2004) and defined as 50% of  $B_{MAX}$ .  $B_{MSY}$  is the benchmark against which to  $B_{OBS}$  can be compared ( $B_{OBS}:B_{MSY}$ ).

Instantaneous total mortality ( $Z$ ) is the rate at which fish in a population die on annual basis and accounts for both natural ( $M$ ) and fishing ( $F$ ) mortality. Fishing mortality results from sources including recreational, commercial, or subsistence fisheries. Observed instantaneous total mortality ( $Z_{OBS}$ ) is measured from the PSIF – LOTW Monitoring Program (index netting), whereas  $M$  is estimated from predictive models (Lester et al. 2014). Instantaneous total mortality rate at MSY ( $Z_{MSY}$ ) is the benchmark against which to  $Z_{OBS}$  can be compared ( $Z_{OBS}:Z_{MSY}$ ).  $Z_{MSY}$  is defined as:  $M + F_{MSY}$  (where  $F_{MSY} = M$ ), or simply  $2M$  (Figure 5). Where  $Z_{OBS}$  exceeds  $Z_{MSY}$ , both yield and abundance (i.e., biomass) decline, decreasing the benefits to all users and increasing the risk to the walleye fishery (MNRF 2015).

The primary tool for visualizing the ratios of observed versus expected biomass ( $B_{OBS}:B_{MSY}$ ) and total instantaneous mortality ( $Z_{OBS}:Z_{MSY}$ ) is the 'Quad Plot', often referred to as the 'Diagnostic Plot' or 'Kobe Plot' (Figure 5). This graphical tool allows us to classify a fishery into four stages:

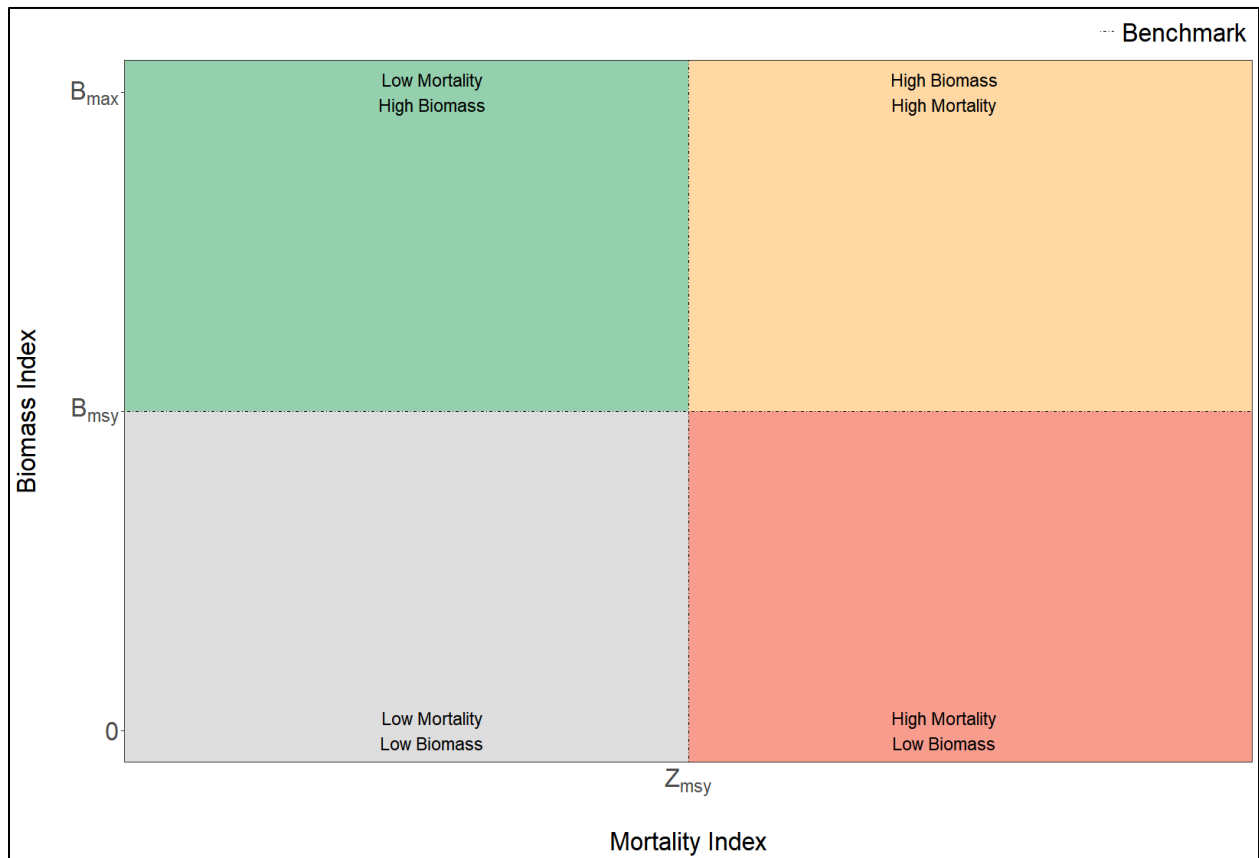
- Top Left: high biomass and low mortality
- Top Right: high biomass and high mortality
- Bottom Left: low biomass and low mortality
- Bottom Right: low biomass and high mortality

The PSIF – LOTW monitoring program conducted index netting surveys in 2018 and 2019. Estimated measures for the walleye population were calculated by combining all nets (efforts) from historical sectors (Figure 6) and years and randomly drawing a sample of 98 efforts that accurately represent the contribution of each sector's area and depth to the whole lake. The mean value was then calculated from the pooled catch and this process repeated 100 times to understand the variability (level of uncertainty) associated with the resampled mean (Figure 7). This was done to provide a single estimate for the Ontario waters of Lake of the Woods. Results indicate that the walleye population status exists in the lower right quadrant of the Quad Plot (Figure 7), demonstrating low biomass and high mortality rates compared to benchmark/ biological reference points.

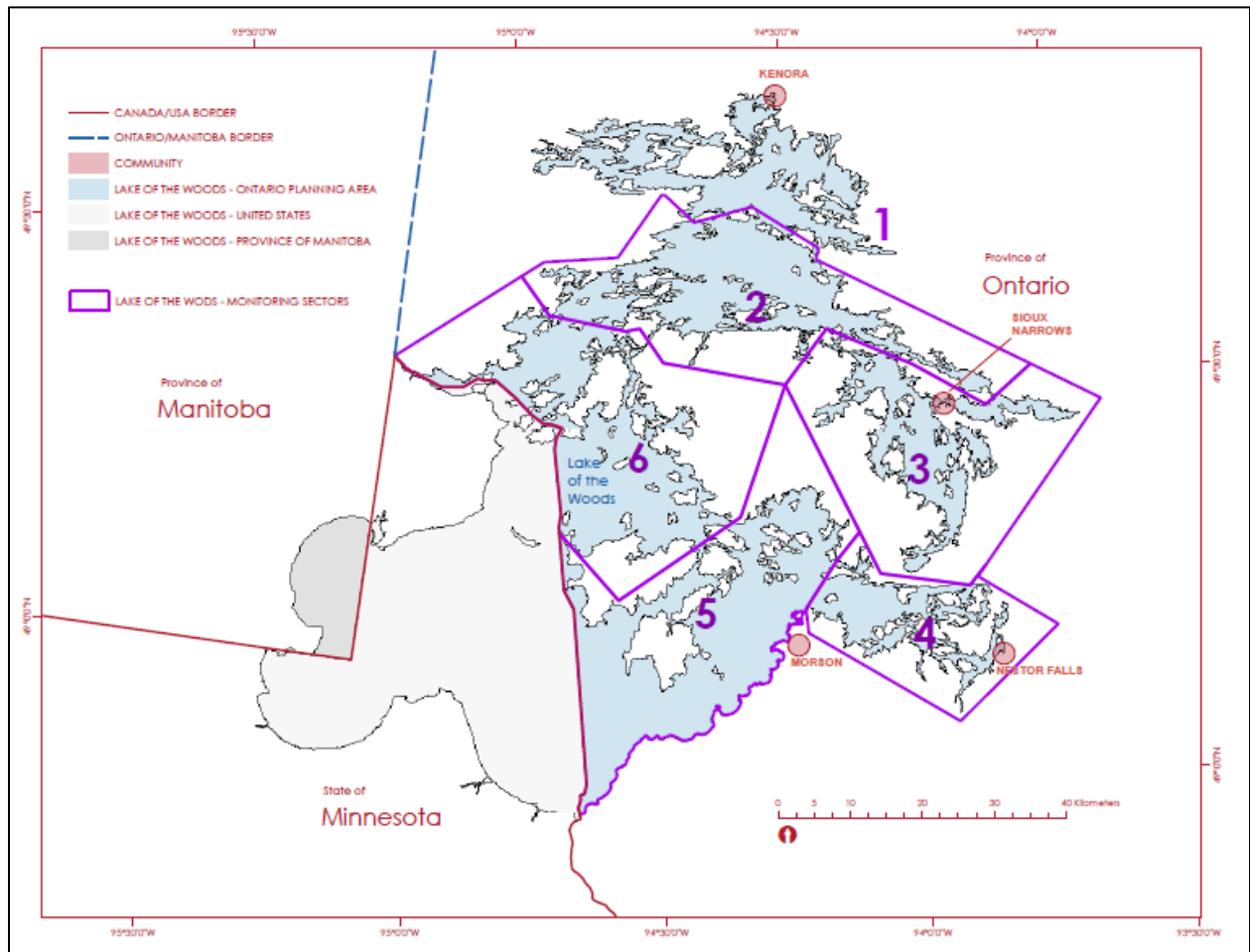
MNRF netting data from 2018 and 2019 demonstrates that the walleye population in Lake of the Woods is skewed towards younger age classes, with fish older than age eight years making up less than 12 percent of the population (Figure 8). Fisheries researchers have identified extended age structures as essential to the sustainability of many exploited fish stocks (Venturelli et al. 2009). Significant representation (numbers of fish) of numerous

older age classes within a population serves to ensure that periodic disruptions to spawning that negatively impact a year class do not disproportionately affect the entire population. Missing or limited numbers of older spawning individuals may lead to reductions in the numbers of new individuals to replace those harvested, and low recruitment of individuals to the population, a phenomenon known as recruitment overfishing (Ricker 1975).

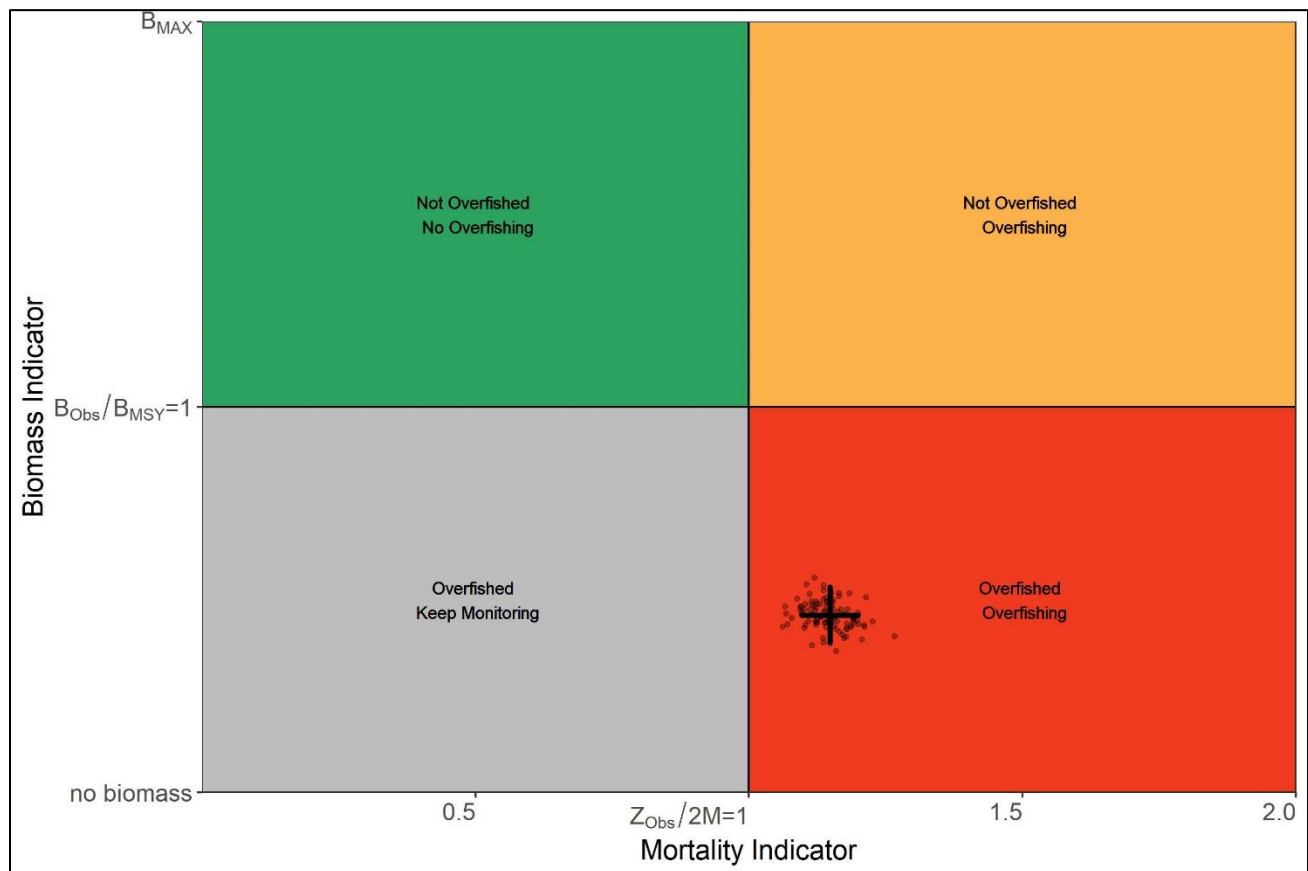
While the Lake of the Woods walleye population currently appears to have no issues with recruitment, the population's limited capacity to buffer against unforeseen pressures in the future/long term, such as poor reproductive years, increased fishing pressure, invasive species, or severe climate events is likely to be further compromised unless management action is taken to improve the health of the fishery.



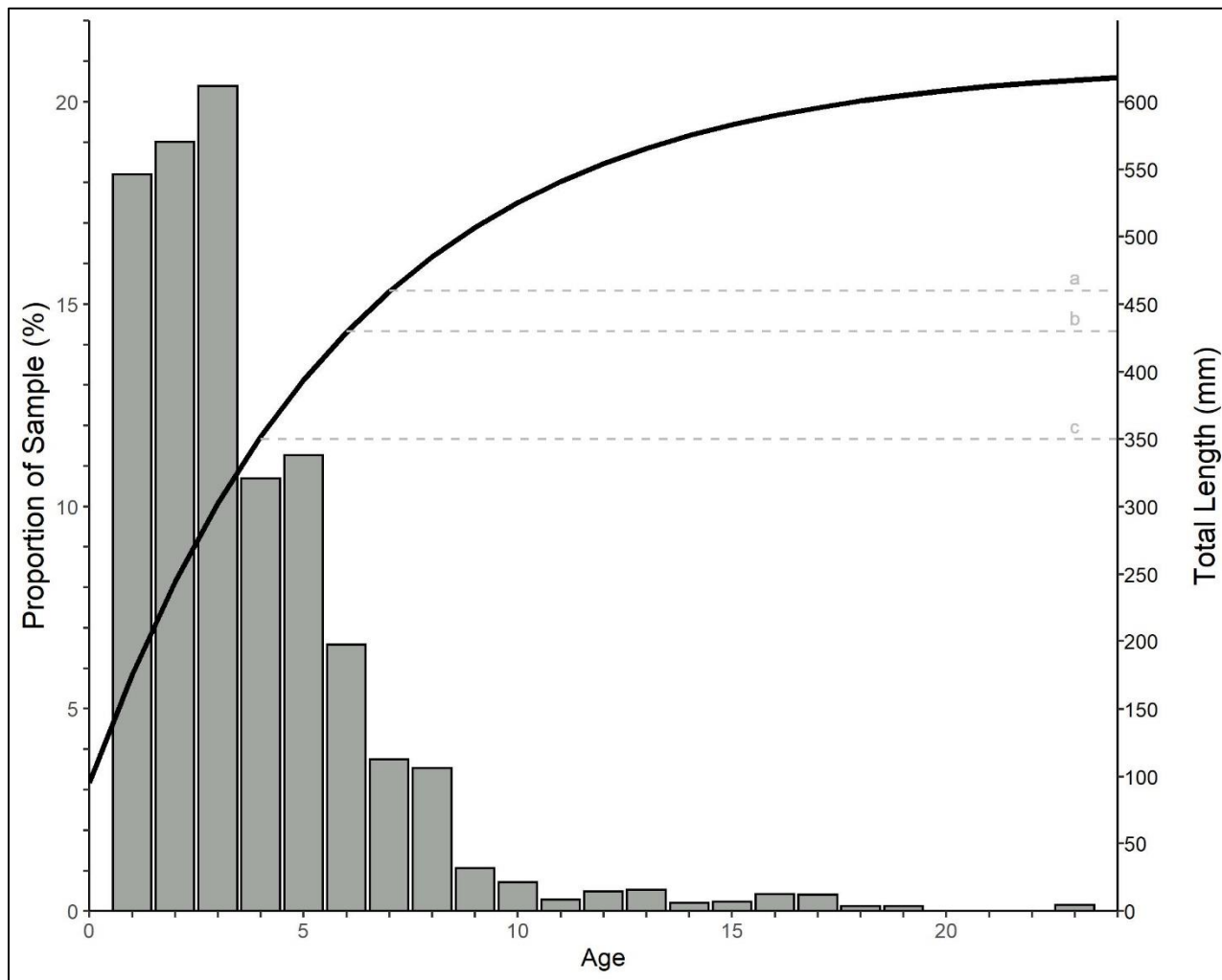
**Figure 5:** The diagnostic ‘quad’ plot is the primary indicator of status for fisheries management in Ontario. The horizontal and vertical dashed lines represent the biomass ( $B_{MSY}$ ) and mortality ( $Z_{MSY} = 2M$ , where  $M$  is natural mortality) benchmark/biological reference points at maximum sustainable yield. Adapted from Lester et al. 2003; MNRF 2015; Lester et al. 2021.



**Figure 6:** Historical monitoring sectors for Lake of the Woods.



**Figure 7:** Quad plot illustrating results of 2018-19 BsM survey. Data was resampled without replacement. The estimate of mortality was calculated from the truncated (age 4-11) Robson and Chapman method. Centroid of points is shown with “+” symbol.  $B_{MAX}$  = maximum biomass (carrying capacity of an unfished population),  $B_{OBS}$  = observed (estimated) biomass,  $B_{MSY}$  = biomass at maximum sustainable yield,  $Z_{OBS}$  = observed (estimated) mortality rate,  $M$  = estimated natural mortality.

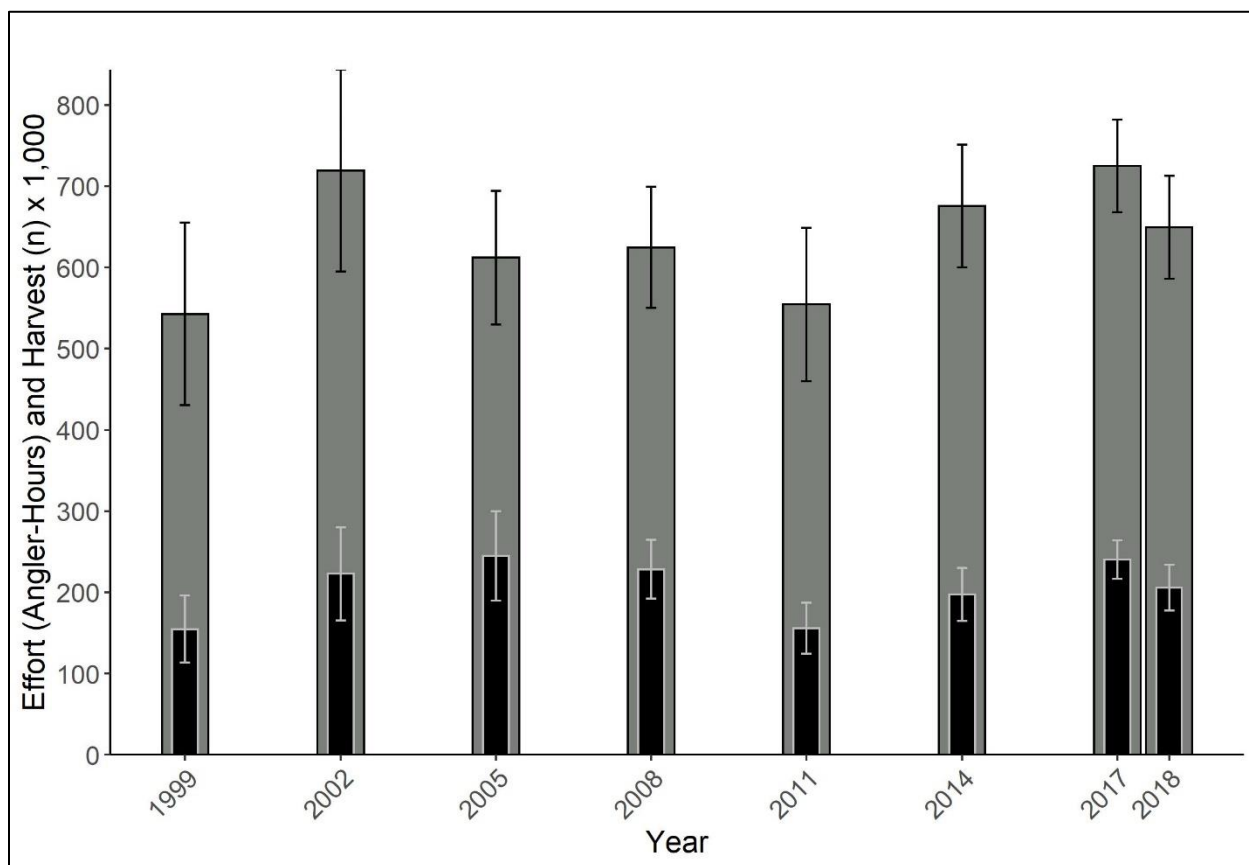


**Figure 8.** Walleye age distribution (grey bars) estimated through analytical resampling and the generalized growth curve for the population using 2018-2019 data (sexes combined). Horizontal dashed lines indicate the estimated age at key total length criteria used in this management plan (a) 460 mm; minimum size of current one-over regulation, (b) 430 mm; maximum size limit (Advisory Council preferred option, Section 3.3.2) and (c) 350 mm minimum size for harvestable biomass estimate.

## 1.2.2 Fisheries-Dependent Monitoring

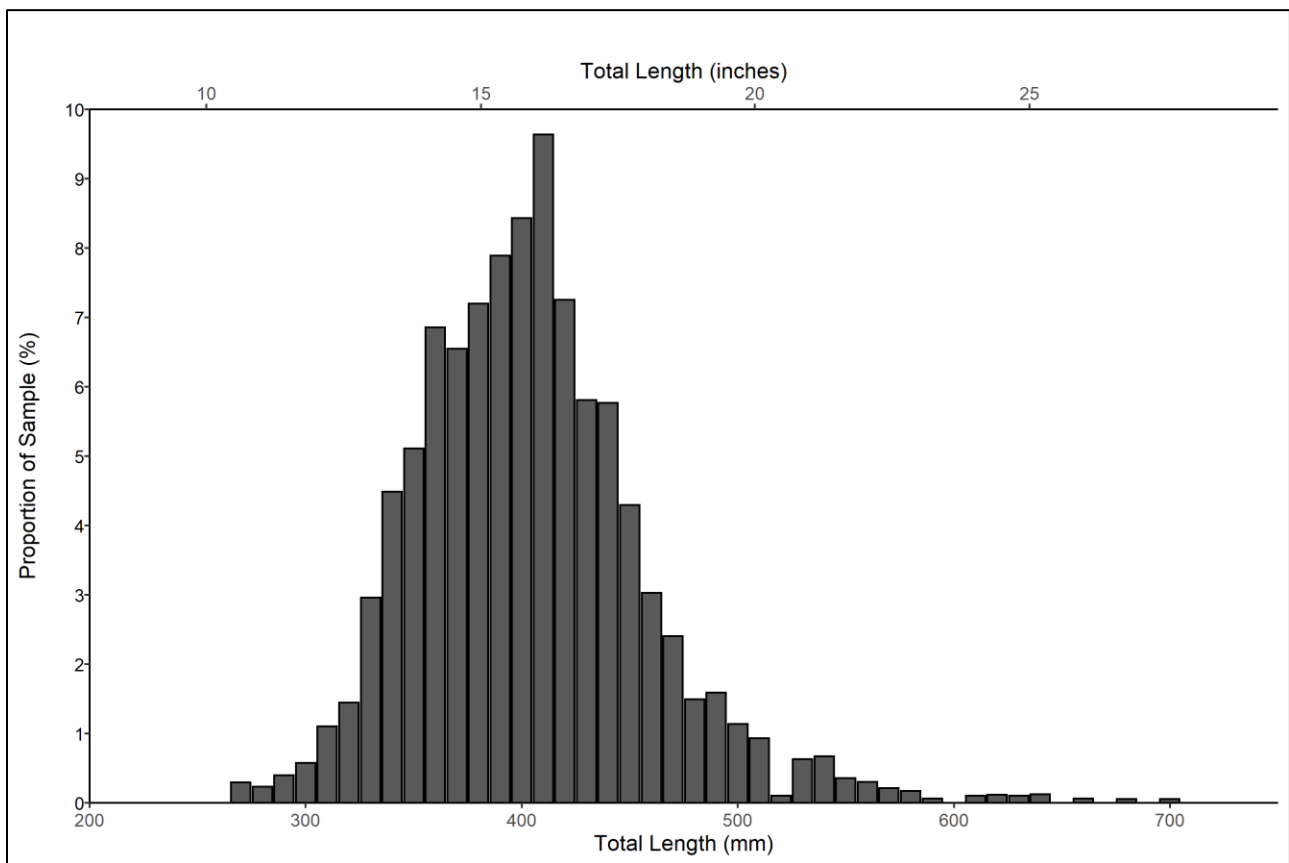
Fisheries dependant data is primarily collected using creel surveys to collect information on recreational fishing catch, effort, and harvest, as well as socio-economic information such as angler origin and licence type.

The most recent creel survey results indicate that walleye are the most targeted species in terms of angling effort (angler hours) and harvest (Figure 9). Danco (2019) reports that the proportion (percent) of recreational effort targeted at walleye was 75% and 76% in 2017 and 2018, respectively. Estimated open-water walleye effort has ranged from 2.49 angler-hours per ha (542,713 angler-hours in total) in 1999 (Mosindy 2002; Spendlow 2007) to a high of 3.32 angler-hours per ha (724,821 angler-hours) in 2017. The open-water harvest of walleye was estimated at 0.65 kg/ha in 2017 (240,414 ± 23,561 walleye totalling 140,662 kg) and 0.54 kg/ha in 2018 (205,967 ± 28,259 walleye totalling 118,359 kg) (Danco 2019). Walleye was most frequently harvested at ~400 mm (Figure 10). Current estimates of biomass suggest that the standing stock is approximately half of  $B_{MSY}$ , with a mean value of 2.65 kg/ha (range of uncertainty from 2.11 kg/ha to 3.28 kg/ha) (Figure 11).



**Figure 9:** Estimated recreational angling effort (gray vertical bars) and harvest of walleye (black vertical bars) from 1999-2018 whole lake open water creel surveys. The 95% confidence interval is indicated by the vertical lines.





**Figure 10:** Size distribution of walleye harvested by the recreational open water fishery from the most recent (2017-18) open-water creel surveys.

## 1.3 Recreational Walleye - Issues Identification

The Lake of the Woods Fisheries Management Advisory Council was established in December 2019. The Advisory Council began meeting remotely in January 2021 to develop a management plan for the recreational walleye fishery. The second planning meeting of the Advisory Council (January 19, 2021) was dedicated to the identification of ecological and socio-economic issues that would be addressed in the management plan.

### 1.3.1 Summary - Ecological Issues

#### 1. *Harvest is too high*

Walleye is the most targeted species by recreational anglers. The open-water harvest of walleye was estimated at 0.65 kg/ha in 2017 (240,414 ± 23,561 walleye totalling 140,662 kg) and 0.54 kg/ha in 2018 (205,967 ± 28,259 walleye totalling 118,359 kg). Exploitation rates for the combined open water (2017 and 2018) and winter harvests (multiple years) were calculated at 22% (18% - 27%) and 19% (16% - 24%). Based on the estimated natural mortality rate (M) of 0.21 for Lake of the Woods, a safe exploitation rate (0.75M) would be roughly 15%, as recommended in Lester et al. (2014).

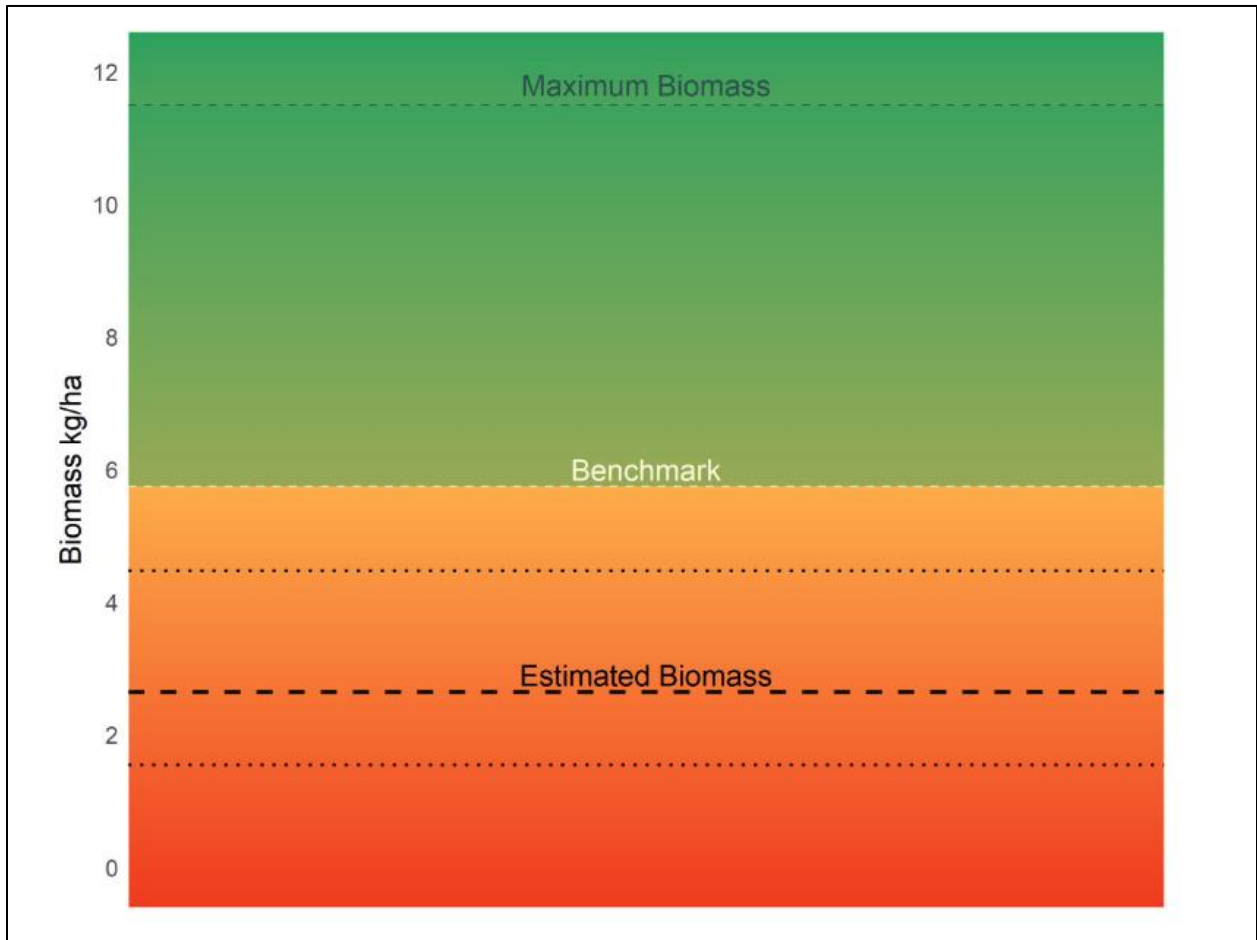
#### 2. *Biomass is too low*

Current estimates of observed biomass ( $B_{OBS}$ ) based on large mesh netting from the BsM survey suggest that the standing stock is approximately half of the expected benchmark ( $B_{MSY}$ ) value (Figure 11).

#### 3. *Age distribution is skewed to younger fish*

The age distribution of walleye in Lake of the Woods (Figure 8) is skewed to younger fish, with proportionally few fish above age 8, suggesting a population showing signs of exploitation resulting in the observed mortality rates ( $Z_{OBS}$ ) that exceed the benchmark value ( $Z_{OBS}/2M$ ).

Collectively, these issues suggest the walleye fishery is at risk due to the walleye population currently having a limited capacity to buffer itself against unforeseen pressures in the future, such as poor reproductive years, consistently high levels of fishing pressure, invasive species, or severe climate events over the long term.



**Figure 11:** Lake of the Woods walleye biomass and benchmarks/biological reference points. The two horizontal reference lines represent the carrying capacity (maximum biomass), and benchmark/fully fished biomass ( $B_{MSY}$ ). The larger black dashed line represents the mean 2018-2019 walleye (estimated) biomass status ( $B_{OBS}$ ), and the dotted black line shows the associated uncertainty of the measure (95% confidence limit; Giacomini et al. 2020).



### 1.3.2 Socio-economic Issues

#### 1. *Tourism is a critical part of the regional economy*

Recreational fishing attracts tourists, particularly non-resident tourists. Walleye is the most-sought species by anglers in FMZ 5 (MNRF 2020). Consequently, recreational walleye regulations, especially those that focus on non-residents, have a direct effect on the regional economy.

The local tourism industry has been adversely affected by the closure of the United States land border in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with some Advisory Council members reporting 90% or greater reduction in guests at their facilities in 2020.

#### 2. *Concerns that solutions to the ecological issues should be borne by all segments of the recreational fishery (Ontario residents, Canada residents, non-residents).*

Since 1982, walleye regulations within FMZ 5 have been primarily focused on reducing the non-resident portion of the walleye harvest on Lake of the Woods and other border waters. The Advisory Council is concerned that continuing to place the onus for walleye rehabilitation on non-residents may significantly impact the ability of the tourism industry to market LOTW as a destination.

#### 3. *Day trippers harvest fish without contributing to the Ontario economy.*

The Advisory Council expressed concern that day trippers (non-resident anglers who fish Ontario waters but who are accommodated outside of Ontario) are harvesting a significant number of walleye, but are not contributing to the Ontario economy, notwithstanding the cost of their Ontario fishing licenses.

The 1999 NAFTA challenge (Appendix B) determined that Ontario's previous approach to regulate day trippers differently than non-residents accommodated in Ontario violated the trade principle of "national treatment", (i.e., that Ontario cannot discriminate against foreign service providers). Consequently, this issue has been determined to be out of the scope of the current planning exercise.

## 2. Goals and Objectives

The Provincial Fish Strategy (MNRF 2015) directs the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry to *develop and implement fisheries management plans with measurable objectives for Fisheries Management Zones and for intensively managed water bodies such as Provincially Significant Inland Fisheries*. In the context of fisheries management planning, objectives are specific, measurable, and verifiable statements of intermediate tasks which serve to focus the activities of fisheries managers on the desired "what" and

“how” of achieving the organization’s goals (Barber and Taylor 1990). PSIF fisheries management objectives must be consistent with the goals and objectives of the PFS and should have associated performance measures attached through which the plan can be evaluated for its progress and effectiveness.

## **2.1 LOTW Fisheries Management Goals**

For the purposes of establishing fisheries management objectives, the following PFS goal statements have been adopted for the Ontario waters of Lake of the Woods:

### **Goal #1: Healthy ecosystems that support self-sustaining native fish communities.**

Lake of the Woods supports an array of recreational, commercial, First Nations, and Métis fisheries that are dependent upon a healthy aquatic ecosystem, including high quality fish habitat. The focus of Goal #1 is to protect and rehabilitate or restore native fish communities and their supporting ecosystem and habitat, and to avoid introductions of new species. Certain species have previously been introduced (e.g., smallmouth bass) and are now naturalized, providing significant economic, social, and in many cases ecological benefits. Like native species, naturalized species and their supporting ecosystems and habitats should be afforded protection and rehabilitated consistent with established fisheries management objectives.

### **Goal #2: Sustainable fisheries that provide benefits for Ontarians.**

A well-managed fishery, supported by high-quality fish habitat and a healthy aquatic ecosystem, is a renewable resource that replenishes itself annually and provides outdoor activity, wholesome food, employment, income, as well as social and cultural benefits for present and future generations. The economic benefits of Lake of the Woods’ recreational, commercial, First Nations, and Métis fisheries are valued at more than \$111.4 million (MNR 2020) and are important to the regional economy of northern Ontario. For First Nations and Métis communities, fishing for food, social and ceremonial purposes is a part of their traditional and current way of life, an expression of their established or credibly asserted Aboriginal and treaty rights, and often provides an essential component to their nutritional intake. First Nations and Métis peoples are also involved in commercial fishing, and in an array of other activities related to fisheries.

PFS includes three further goal statements which address how MNR develops and uses legislation, policy, and science, and how the Ministry interacts with stakeholders, Indigenous communities, and the general public. While these goals are important to the way MNR conducts its business, they do not relate directly to the establishment of the fisheries management objectives for Lake of the Woods.

## 2.2 LOTW Walleye Objectives

Two ecological objectives and three socio-economic objectives for walleye were established by the Advisory Council to address the issues identified in Section 1.3.

The LOTW Advisory Council agreed that, where there is conflict between the socio-economic objective and the ecological objective, the ecological objective should take precedence.

### 2.2.1 Ecological Objectives

#### ***Objective 2022-1: Reduce walleye harvest associated with the recreational fishery.***

Reducing mortality can be addressed directly by effecting regulatory changes intended to reduce harvest by recreational anglers. It can also be addressed indirectly through regulatory and non-regulatory actions intended to lessen post-release mortality.

Reductions in mortality associated with the recreational walleye fishery will be assumed to occur through the reduction of walleye harvest (in terms of biomass), compared to the harvests measured in LOTW's most recent open-water creels. This change in harvest is expected to be large enough to be statistically detectable in future creel surveys, as well as preserve enough biomass within the walleye population to allow the index netting programs to document the effectiveness of the regulation over time (D. de Kerckhove, MNRF, pers. comm.).

The indicator for this objective will be:

- A minimum of forty percent reduction of walleye harvest (biomass) as compared to values reported in 2017/18 creel surveys (see Section 1.2.2) (Danco 2019). This will be revisited in future planning exercises based on the most recent data available at the time.

This objective aligns with the following objectives from the Provincial Fish Strategy (MNRF 2015):

- Objective 1.3 - Restore, recover, or rehabilitate degraded fish populations and their supporting ecosystems.
- Objective 2.1 - Harvest fish within safe biological limits.

#### ***Objective 2022-2: Increase biomass of larger/older walleye.***

The second and third ecological issues that have been identified (Section 1.3.1) are closely related. The walleye population in Lake of the Woods currently does not seem to be experiencing a recruitment issue; 2018 and 2019 netting exhibited strong juvenile year classes (Figure 8). However, the combination of low biomass (Figure 11) and a skewed age distribution (Figure 8) suggest that recruitment overfishing may occur.

The indicator for this objective will be:

- Increase in the observed biomass of larger walleye (> 430 mm total length, corresponding to six-year-old and older fish (Figure 8)) from netting surveys following regulation change.

This objective addresses the following objectives from the Provincial Fish Strategy (MNRF 2015):

- Objective 1.2 - Protect the composition of native fish communities.
- Objective 1.3 - Restore, recover, or rehabilitate degraded fish populations and their supporting ecosystems.

## **2.2.2 Socio-economic Objectives**

### ***Objective 2022-3: Treat all recreational anglers for walleye equally.***

This objective was recommended by the Advisory Council and included in the draft version of this management plan (MNRF 2022). The intent of this objective in the draft plan (MNRF 2022) was that all recreational walleye anglers should be subject to the same suite of regulations, regardless of place of residency. This objective was included in consideration of the following:

- The strategy of implementing more restrictive regulations for non-resident anglers has not succeeded in protecting the walleye resource in Lake of the Woods after over 40 years of implementation. New regulations will apply to all recreational anglers.
- The local tourism economy is largely based on non-resident anglers. Given the importance of tourism to the regional economy, fisheries management actions must balance ecological needs with consideration of their impact to this sector (Objective 2022-4). There is concern that further restrictions applied only to non-resident anglers will affect the tourism industry's ability to market LOTW as a destination for recreational angling.

The results of public consultation on the draft management plan (Section 4; Appendix E) indicated that resident anglers were unsupportive of Objective 2022-3. MNRF fisheries managers elected that managing the risk of increased harvest (overcompensation scenario; see section 3.2.6.1 for more details on size limit options development and compensation scenarios) was reasonable, given the likelihood of the plan objectives being achieved while maintaining current catch and possession limits. Therefore, Objective 2022-3 was not considered in selecting the final suite of management actions (Section 3.3). However, this objective may need to be revisited, should the results of future monitoring indicate that the targets of the ecological objectives are not being met (Section 2.2.1).



***Objective 2022-4: Recognize the impact of regulatory changes on the local tourism industry.***

This objective recognizes the importance of resource-based tourism to the regional economy. Where the evaluation of two regulatory proposals indicate that both would address the ecological objectives equally, the option that best allows the tourism industry to market Lake of the Woods as a desirable destination should be considered preferable.

Objective 2022-4 is intended to address the interests of the local tourism industry, including competitive fishing events.

This objective aligns with PFS Objective 2.2 – Allocate fish resources considering the needs and interests of all users, and Objective 2.3 – Increase economic, social, and cultural benefits derived from fish resources.

***Objective 2022-5: Provide additional angling opportunities for other species, consistent with the goals of the Provincial Fish Strategy.***

The final objective for walleye recognizes that achieving the ecological objectives necessarily reduces harvest opportunities for all anglers on Lake of the Woods. To offset these impacts, future planning exercises should actively seek opportunities to increase angling opportunities for other species. However, those opportunities must be consistent with the PFS, particularly PFS Objective 2.1 – Harvest fish within safe biological limits.

The nature of Objective 2022-5 makes it necessary to defer actions to address this objective until the planning exercises for other recreationally targeted species commence.

This objective aligns with PFS Objective 2.2 – Allocate fish resources considering the needs and interests of all users, and Objective 2.3 – Increase economic, social, and cultural benefits derived from fish resources.

Additionally, the communications, consultation, and education products associated with implementing this recreational walleye management plan aligns with PFS Objective 2.4 - Promote the development and use of responsible fishing practices; and with PFS Objective 5.3 – Encourage individuals, stakeholders, and communities to act as effective stewards.

## **3 Fisheries Management Tools**

### **3.1 Stocking**

The *Guidelines for Stocking Fish in Inland Waters of Ontario* (MNR 2002) specifies that “The use of artificially-reared fish should not be used as an alternative to the protection/restoration of habitat or the regulation of harvest.”

Netting results for LOTW suggest that natural reproduction is not an issue (Figure 8). The fish stocking guidelines state: “Walleye should not be stocked in waters already containing viable, naturally reproducing populations of walleye.”

Successful stocking is dependent upon the fish community of the receiving waterbody. The fish stocking guidelines caution against stocking walleye in waters containing large populations of predators (e.g., northern pike) or competitive fish species (e.g., smallmouth bass, panfish). Northern pike and smallmouth bass are plentiful in Lake of the Woods (MNRF, unpublished data).

For these reasons, rehabilitative stocking of walleye was not considered for the current exercise.

### **3.2 Fishing regulations**

Ontario uses a variety of regulatory tools to manage various species, which can be broadly grouped into six categories: licensing, seasons, sanctuaries, gear, and bait restrictions, catch and possession limits, and size limits.

#### **3.2.1 Licensing**

Currently, Ontario recognizes three general categories of recreational fishing license, based upon place of residence:

- Ontario resident
- Canadian resident (residents of Canada, outside of Ontario)
- Non-resident (anglers residing outside of Canada)

Within each of these categories, anglers have the choice of a Sport Fishing License or a Conservation Fishing License; the latter is a lower-cost license that typically comes with a lower catch and possession limit than the Sport Fishing License.

License categories are determined at a provincial scale and cannot be modified for local management plans. Changes to licensing is considered out of scope for the current exercise.

### **3.2.2 Seasons**

The intent of closed seasons is to protect walleye during the staging, spawning and post-spawn recovery periods, when walleye aggregate and are particularly vulnerable to angling. Seasons are typically determined on a regional scale based on geographic and climatic variables. The current closed season for walleye on LOTW is April 15 through the Friday before the third Saturday in May.

Reductions in open seasons seldom reduce harvest in a meaningful way (Christie 1978). Reducing seasons may not reduce overall fishing effort but only concentrate the same amount of fishing into the shorter seasons. For this reason, changes to walleye seasons are not being considered for this exercise.

### **3.2.3 Sanctuaries**

Fish sanctuaries are areas that exclude any fishing activity. Some sanctuaries are seasonal in nature, while others are year-round closures. Seasonal fish sanctuaries are extensively used in Ontario to reduce harvest in both specific spawning areas (to protect adult fish and eggs) and areas where fish aggregate pre-spawn, while still allowing angling outside the protected area.

A single fish sanctuary is currently in place on LOTW located at Nestor Falls. MNRF is currently undertaking a review of how fish sanctuaries are regulated throughout Ontario. Discussions pertaining to the LOTW sanctuary will be deferred pending the outcome of the provincial review and implemented through future planning exercises.

### **3.2.4 Gear and Bait Restrictions**

Restrictions including prohibitions on live bait, organic bait, barbed hooks, treble hooks, and multiple hooks are used in many jurisdictions to reduce hooking mortality by minimizing handling time and hooking depth. Gear and bait restrictions are currently regulated on portions of Lake of the Woods as a management tool for lake trout (MNRF 2020a).

While gear and bait restrictions can be effective for salmonid species (Bartholomew and Bohnsack 2005; Hühn et al. 2011), there is a body of evidence that shows they are generally ineffective for reducing hooking mortality in walleye (Reeves and Bruesewitz 2005; Reeves and Stapes 2011). For this reason, gear and bait restrictions were not considered for the current exercise.

### 3.2.5 Catch and Possession Limits

Catch limit is defined as the number of fish an angler may legally catch and keep in one day. The possession limit is the total number of fish an angler can possess legally, whether on-hand, in cold storage, or in transit. Possession limits for each FMZ are the same as one day's catch limit for walleye in most of Ontario; however, as part of a NAFTA dispute resolution process (Appendix B) for differential catch and possession limits were regulated for the Border Waters Area (including Lake of the Woods) in 1999 and extended to the balance of FMZ 5 (Figure 2) in 2018.

The concept behind catch and possession regulations is to limit the overall harvest, to equitably distribute the resource among users, and to promote the ethical use of the resource (Rietveld et al. 1999). Reductions in daily catch limits are only effective in fisheries where a large proportion of anglers are regularly catching their limit.

When separated from the daily catch limit, the possession limit is strictly a socio-economic tool with no utility in rehabilitating a population. Members of the Advisory Council spoke to the popularity of the current possession limit of four walleye for non-resident anglers and its importance to the tourism industry.

Members of the Advisory Council expressed concern that currently some anglers do not fully understand Ontario's rules regarding daily catch limits. Specifically, the Advisory Council voiced concerns over individuals that catch a limit of fish, consume those fish during the day (i.e., shore lunch), and proceed to catch another limit of fish later in the day.

**Recommendation:** MNRF to develop a strategy to better educate anglers about Ontario's catch-and-retain regulations.

#### 3.2.5.1 Catch and Possession Limits: Options Development

MNRF staff conducted computer simulations, based upon 2017-18 LOTW open water creel survey data (Section 1.2.2) to evaluate the potential success of two different daily catch limits combined with eight different size limits (Section 3.2.6), in achieving the 40% reduction in angler harvest specified in Objective 2022-1 (Section 2.2.1).

The two daily catch limits considered were:

Status quo:

Ontario and Canadian Residents – Sport License 4, Conservation License 2  
Non-residents – Sport License 2, Conservation License 2

Reduced catch limit:

All anglers – Sport License 2, Conservation License 1

Results of the simulations are presented alongside the size limits in Section 3.2.6.1.

### 3.2.6 Size Limits

Size limits have been used by fisheries managers across North America for decades. Some of the objectives of size limits include increasing the size of fish caught, maximizing yield, protecting brood stock, maintaining desirable population structure, and maintaining angling quality. Any size limit regulation requires that the managers have sufficient age, length, and maturity data for the effects of size limit regulations to be accurately modeled before their inception (Rietveld et al. 1999). Several types of size regulations were considered by the Advisory Council and assessed by MNRF for effectiveness, including:

- **Minimum size limit:** Fish less than the minimum size limit must be immediately released.
- **Maximum size limit:** Fish greater than the maximum size limit must be immediately released.
- **Protected slot size:** Fish within the designated slot range must be immediately released.
- **Harvestable slot size:** Only fish within the designated slot range can be harvested.

#### 3.2.6.1 Size Limits: Options Development

Using 2017-18 open water creel survey data (Section 1.2.2), MNRF staff conducted computer simulations to evaluate the potential success of two different daily catch limits (Section 3.2.5), combined with eight different size limits in achieving the 40% reduction in angler harvest specified in Objective 2022-1 (Section 2.2.1). The eight size limits considered were:

- 35-50 cm (14"-19") protected slot
- 40-45 cm (16"-18") harvestable slot
- 35-55 cm (14"-22") harvestable slot
- 35-45 cm (14"-18") harvestable slot
- 46 cm (18") minimum size limit
- 46 cm (18") maximum size limit
- 43 cm (17") maximum size limit (included on recommendation by the Advisory Council)
- 35 cm (14") maximum size limit

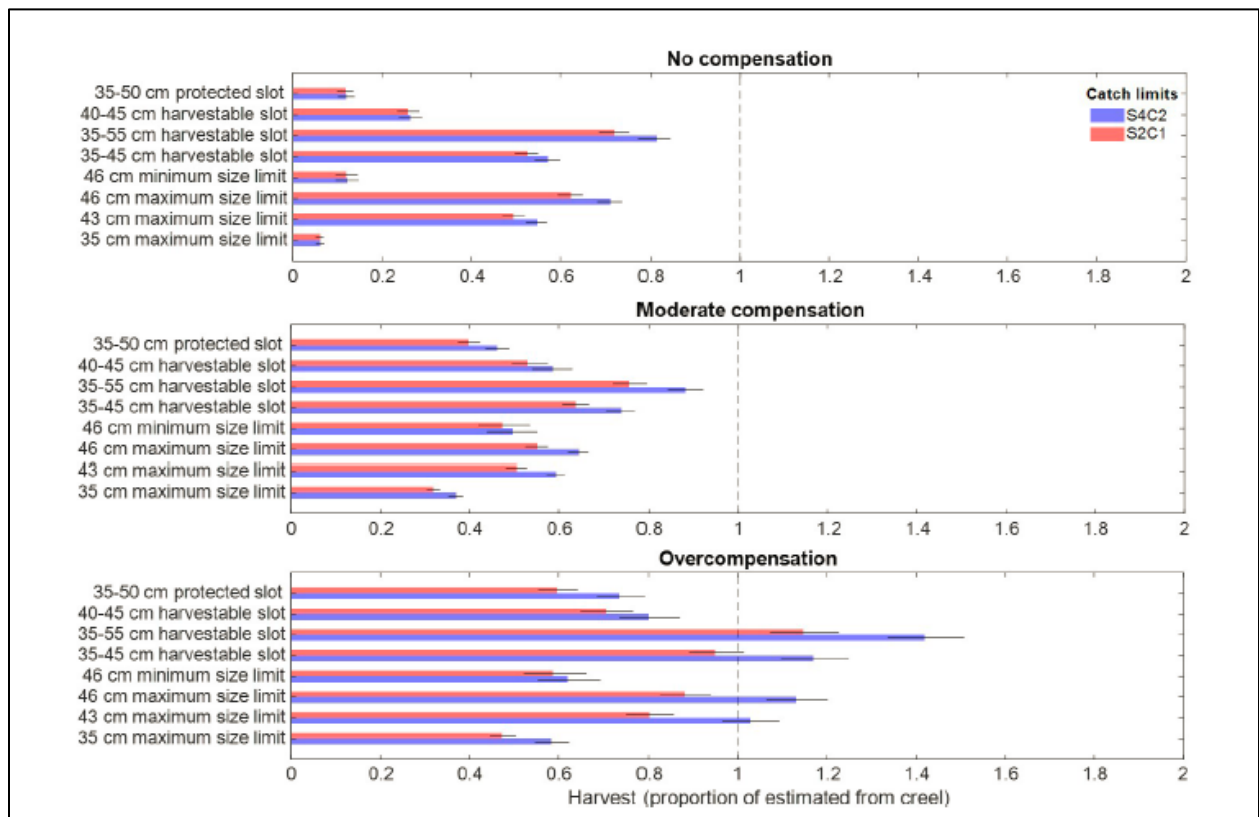
The simulations were based on the concept of angler “compensation”, representing how anglers might be expected to change their behaviour in response to perceived losses given a fishing regulation change. Three levels of compensation were included in the simulations:

- *No compensation*: given each regulation, anglers do not attempt to replace potential losses, i.e., walleye can only be lost from the original harvest. The Advisory Council considered this an unrealistic scenario and discounted these results.
- *Moderate compensation*: given each regulation, anglers may replace losses with other walleye in the catch. In this scenario the angler goal is their original harvest level. The Advisory Council considered this the most likely scenario.
- *Overcompensation*: given each regulation, anglers may replace losses with other walleye in the catch. In this scenario the angler goal is the maximum allowed harvest. The Advisory Council considered this the worst-case scenario.

A full description of the simulation exercise has been published by MNRF in a separate document (Giacomini et al. 2022).

The Advisory Council evaluated the sixteen regulatory combinations based on two criteria: achieving a minimum 40% reduction in harvest biomass under the Moderate Compensation scenario, and no increase in harvest biomass under the Overcompensation scenario. The latter criterion was based upon the Precautionary Principle specified in the PFS (MNRF 2015) and recommended by Giacomini et al. (2022).

The results of the simulations combined with the two catch limits, are summarized in Figure 12 and Table 3:



**Figure 12:** Simulated walleye harvest (biomass, x-axis) in the open water season for the 3 angler compensation scenarios, 8 size regulations (y-axis), and 2 catch limit regulations (bar colour). S4C2 = current regulation, with 4 maximum fish per resident angler with a sport license, 2 maximum per resident angler with a conservation license; S2C1 = 2 maximum fish per angler with a sport license, 2 maximum per resident angler with a conservation license. Bars represent the median values from simulated distributions; whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals; dotted line at 1 represents current harvest levels (Giacomini et al. 2022).

**Table 3:** Regulatory combinations expected to reduce recreational harvest (biomass, kg/yr) by at least 40% under the Moderate Compensation scenario, and no increase in recreational harvest under the Overcompensation scenario.

<b>Size Limit</b>	<b>S4/C2 Residents S2/C2 Non-residents</b>	<b>S2/C1 All anglers</b>
35-50 cm (14"-19") protected slot	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>
40-45 cm (16"-18") harvestable slot	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>
35-55 cm (14"-22") harvestable slot	<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>
35-45 cm (14"-18") harvestable slot	<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>
46 cm (18") minimum size limit	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>
46 cm (18") maximum size limit	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>
43 cm (17") maximum size limit	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>
35 cm (14") maximum size limit	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>

Of the size limits evaluated in Table 3, two were rejected as not meeting Objective 2021-1. Others were rejected for not meeting other objectives (Table 4):

**Table 4:** Criteria for rejection of size limits

<b>Size Limit</b>	<b>Criteria for rejection</b>
35-50 cm (14"-19") protected slot	Objective 2022-2 (protect large fish) Objective 2022-4 (impact to tourism)
40-45 cm (16"-18") harvestable slot	Objective 2022-4 (impact to tourism)
35-55 cm (14"-22") harvestable slot	Objective 2022-1 (40% harvest reduction)
35-45 cm (14"-18") harvestable slot	Objective 2022-1* (40% harvest reduction)
46 cm (18") minimum size limit	Objective 2022-2 (protect large fish)
46 cm (18") maximum size limit	Not Rejected
43 cm (17") maximum size limit	Accepted
35 cm (14") maximum size limit	Objective 2022-4 (impact to tourism)

\* Although the 35-45 cm harvestable slot was rejected, the Advisory Council recommended putting forward a 35-43 cm (14"-17") harvestable slot as an alternative option on the premise that the harvest would be less than that expected from the 43 cm maximum size limit, which exceeded the 40% harvest reduction threshold. The 35-43 cm harvestable slot was not included in the simulation.

Only two size regulations, the 43 cm, and the 46 cm maximum size limits, met all criteria when under the more restrictive catch limits (i.e., S2/C1). The 43 cm size limit was the preferred option by the Advisory Council and is expected to be an effective option for reducing harvest and protecting large fish, as well as recovering the age and size structure of the walleye population. In addition, the 46 cm maximum size limit does not



meet the 40% harvest reduction criteria under the less restrictive catch limits, which ended up being the favored choice (see Section 3.3). For these reasons, the 43 cm maximum size limit was the accepted size regulation.

### 3.2.7 “One over” modifier

While the Advisory Council desires to protect large, spawning aged fish, they expressed concern over the ability to continue hosting walleye tournaments on Lake of the Woods, should a maximum size limit of 43 cm be regulated. Under Section 12 of the *Ontario Fishery Regulations, 2007* (OFR); if an angler catches a fish that cannot be legally retained or possessed, the fish must be immediately released into the waters where it was caught, and it must be released in a manner that causes the least harm to the fish. The regulations do not differentiate between the reasons why it might be prohibited to retain a fish (e.g., out of season, size restrictions, over the possession limit).

Activities (e.g., retaining a fish to weigh or photograph it) that do not directly contribute to meeting these requirements would not be consistent with the regulations. Therefore, anglers including those fishing in competitive fishing events would not be able to delay the release of a fish outside the size-based regulations. Catch-photo-release events that include fish of prohibited size are not consistent with Section 12 of the OFR and therefore not permitted.

Recognizing the importance of competitive fishing events to the local economy (Objective 2022-4), that the three walleye tournaments on the Ontario waters of Lake of the Woods are all live-release events, and that most LOTW anglers do not harvest very large walleye, the Advisory Council has recommended allowing one very large fish greater than 70 cm (27.5”), for holders of a Sport License only. The intent of this recommendation is specifically to support competitive fishing events until such a time as MNRF can complete a review of Section 12 of the OFR. If this review renders the one-over modifier redundant it will be removed.

**Recommendation:** Include a “one fish greater than 70 cm” modifier to proposed size limits. The Advisory Council has specifically requested that it be noted in the plan that they support this recommendation only until MNRF completes a review of Section 12 of the OFR.

The “one over” modifier was subsequently added to the computer simulations (Section 3.2.6.1). The effect was negligible and did not affect the ranking of any of the size limit options.

## 3.3 Management Actions

Fisheries management decisions must balance ecological, social, and economic objectives, and require more than just science information. MNRF’s structured and adaptive approach to fisheries management and planning provides opportunities for Indigenous communities and stakeholders to provide input and influence fisheries management objective setting and decisions. This active involvement of resource users in the decision-making process contributes valuable perspectives and knowledge to complement MNRF’s understanding of fisheries resources and help to achieve broader public acceptance of management decisions.

The LOTW Fisheries Advisory Council is involved throughout the fisheries management planning process from the development of fisheries objectives to the determination of appropriate management actions. At key stages in the planning process, broader Indigenous and public input is sought, which informs the Advisory Council's advice, and ultimately MNRF's decision-making. The end results are fisheries management plans and objectives that reflect a shared vision for future fisheries and having included meaningful input, garner support from Indigenous communities and the public.

As part of the development of this management plan, MNRF and the LOTW Fisheries Advisory Council considered several regulatory options which would address the revised ecological and socio-economic objectives for walleye. These options were described in the draft version of this document (MNRF 2022), which was available for public comment on the Environmental Registry for Ontario from November 10, 2022, until January 9, 2023.

Comments received during this period are found in Appendix E.

Following the public comment period, MNRF fisheries managers weighed the results of consultation against the likelihood of the Overcompensation scenario (i.e., maximum allowed harvest) and elected that managing the risk of increased harvest was reasonable, given the likelihood of the plan objectives being achieved in the acceptance of less restrictive catch limits associated with the preferred size regulation. MNRF's robust monitoring program on Lake of the Woods should provide ample opportunity to evaluate the success of the changes to the size limit regulation; should the results of monitoring indicate that plan objectives are not being achieved, such as an increase in harvest or lack of improvement in biomass, additional regulatory measures will be considered. The following management actions will be undertaken to achieve the revised objectives for walleye described in Sections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2.

### **3.3.1 Regulatory Actions**

The following changes will be made to the recreational angling regulations for walleye in the Ontario waters of Lake of the Woods:

**Season:** January 1 to April 14 and third Saturday in May to December 31 (unchanged)

**Limits (Ontario resident and Canada resident):**

*Catch and Possession limit*

Sport 4; must be less than 43 cm or greater than 70 cm and not more than 1 greater than 70 cm

Conservation 2; must be less than 43 cm

**Limits (Non-Canadian resident):**

*Daily catch-and-retain limit*

Sport 2; must be less than 43 cm or greater than 70 cm and not more than 1 greater than 70 cm

Conservation 2; must be less than 43 cm

*Possession limit*

Sport 4; must be less than 43 cm or greater than 70 cm and not more than 1 greater than 70 cm

Conservation 2; must be less than 43 cm

Adopting these regulations addresses the recreational walleye objectives as follows:

**Objective 2022-1:** Simulations (Giacomini et al. 2022) suggest that these regulations will reduce annual recreational harvest of walleye by  $\geq 40\%$  by weight, under the Moderate Compensation scenario.

**Objective 2022-2:** These regulations protect all walleye between 43 cm and 70 cm, and limits the harvest of walleye  $> 70$  cm. Once the provincial review of Section 12 of the Ontario Fisheries Regulation is concluded, the “one over” modifier will be deregulated, protecting all walleye  $> 43$  cm.

**Objective 2022-3:** After considering the consultation results and harvest simulations (Giacomini et al. 2022), this objective was assigned a lower priority; however, it will be reassessed based on the outcomes of future monitoring surveys (Section 2.2.2).

**Objective 2022-4:** These regulations align with the suite of options selected by the Lake of the Woods Fisheries Advisory Council as best meeting the needs of the tourism industry in consideration of their ability to market the Ontario waters of Lake of the Woods as a tourist destination.

### **3.4 Non-regulatory Recommendations**

**Recommendation:** MNRF to develop a strategy to better educate anglers about Ontario’s catch-and-retain regulations.

**Recommendation:** MNRF to support the review of Ontario’s catch and retain rules (i.e., OFR Section 12). Of specific interest to LOTW are provisions that would enable competitive events to include fish of a restricted size under catch-photo-release formats.

**Recommendation:** Carry forward Objective 2022-5 (Provide additional angling opportunities for other species, consistent with the goals of the Provincial Fish Strategy) to future chapters of the Lake of the Woods Fisheries Management Plan.

## 4. Summary of Consultation

The Lake of the Woods Advisory Council Terms of Reference identifies twenty-one individuals representing Indigenous communities and organizations, and non-Indigenous stakeholder sectors and organizations, though not all of these communities, organizations and stakeholders participated actively in the council. Each representative named in the draft Terms of Reference has received copies of all meeting minutes and presentations. The thirteen First Nations with reserve lands on Lake of the Woods (Table 1) and the Métis Nation of Ontario (Region 1) also received copies of all meeting minutes and presentations.

The Terms of Reference include the following statement pertaining to First Nations and Métis involvement in the LOTW Fisheries Advisory Council:

First Nations and Métis communities will be invited to participate in the Advisory Council. It is recognized that participation in the Advisory Council does not satisfy the Crown's Duty to Consult.

The LOTW Fisheries Advisory Council met twelve times between January 2021 and February 2023 to advise MNRF in the development of the LOTW Draft Recreational Walleye Fishery Management Plan. Meeting agendas are included in Appendix C.

### **Meeting #1 – January 12, 2021**

Purpose – Organization for planning

### **Meeting #2 – January 19, 2021**

Purpose – Issues identification

### **Meeting #3 – February 9, 2021**

Purpose – Goals and Objectives

### **Meeting #4 – March 2, 2021**

Purpose – Overview of regulatory tools available for planning

### **Meeting #5 – March 23, 2021**

Purpose – Options identification

### **Meeting #6 – May 11, 2021**

Purpose – Options identification (continued)

**Meeting #7 – May 25, 2021**

Purpose – Options identification (continued)

**Meeting #8 – June 15, 2021**

Purpose – Options identification (continued)

**Meeting #9 – June 29, 2021**

Purpose - wrapping up administrative items associated with planning.

**Meeting #10 – October 5, 2021**

Purpose – review draft plan document and plans for consultation.

**Meeting #11 – August 23, 2022**

Purpose – review results of virtual engagement sessions and discuss further consultation, seek Advisory Committee’s final support to post the plan on the Environmental Registry.

**Meeting #12 – February 21, 2023**

Purpose – review the results of the Environmental Registry for Ontario public comment period (November 10, 2022 – January 9, 2023).

Following the endorsement of the draft plan document by the Advisory Council, MNRF engaged in broader consultation on the draft plan recommendations, through a series of virtual public engagement sessions held on March 8, 22, and 29, 2022. Each two-hour engagement session comprised 45 minutes of presentation by MNRF staff, followed by a moderated discussion and question-answer period. Total participation from the public engagement sessions was 83 public attendees. A full summary of the results of the public engagement sessions is found in Appendix D.

Following the virtual public engagement sessions, MNRF staff met remotely with the Métis Nation of Ontario Region 1 Consultation Committee, on May 26, 2022. This meeting included the same presentation used in the public engagement sessions, as well as a discussion and question-answer period.

The draft version of this document (MNRF 2023) was posted on the Environmental Registry of Ontario (ERO; posting #019-6067) for public review with a 60-day comment period, from November 10, 2022, through January 9, 2023. Information about the draft management plan directing interested parties to the Environmental Registry of Ontario was placed on social media (Facebook, Twitter).

Coinciding with the beginning of the ERO comment period, copies of the document and an invitation to provide feedback were sent to 18 Indigenous communities and organizations, as well as 267 non-Indigenous stakeholders, along with an opportunity for meeting with MNRF staff to further discuss the Plan.

Coinciding with the Public comment period, information centers were be hosted in Nestor Falls and Kenora on November 21 and 22, 2022 (respectively)

The Indigenous communities and organizations contacted are listed below:

**First Nations with reserve lands on the Ontario or Manitoba waters of Lake of the Woods:**

1. Animakee Wa Zhing 37 First Nation (Northwest Angle 37)
2. Anishinaabeg of Naongashiing (Big Island First Nation)
3. Buffalo Point First Nation
4. Iskatewizaagegan 39 Independent First Nation (Shoal Lake 39)
5. Mishkosiminiziibing First Nation (Big Grassy)
6. Naotkamegwanning First Nation (Whitefish Bay)
7. Northwest Angle 33 First Nation
8. Obashkaandagaang Bay First Nation (Washagamis Bay)
9. Ojibways of Onigaming First Nation
10. Shoal Lake 40 First Nation
11. Rainy River First Nation
12. Wauzhushk Onigum Nation (Rat Portage)
13. Niisaachewan Anishinaabe Nation (Dalles)
14. Wabaseemoong Independent Nation

**First Nations not located on Lake of the Woods which requested to be included in the distribution of information**

1. Mitaanjigamiing First Nation
2. Wabauskang First Nation
3. Grassy Narrows First Nation

**Other First Nations organizations**

1. Grand Council Treaty #3
2. Anishinaabeg of Kabapikotawangag Resource Council (AKRC)

**Métis located on Lake of the Woods**

1. Northwestern Ontario Métis Community (Métis Nation of Ontario Region 1)

The ERO posting had 3818 views during the 60-day comment period, generating 298 comments:

- 274 via the ERO comment submission tool
- 16 via email

- 5 via telephone
- 2 via the Natural Resources Information and Support Centre
- 1 via Twitter

The full text of these comments is found in Appendix E.

Following the 60-day comment period, the following additional consultation took place:

- Presentation to Grand Council Treaty #3 – January 19, 2023
- Presentation to Métis Nation of Ontario Region 1 – February 1, 2023
- Information Centre for Métis Nation of Ontario Region 1 – March 14, 2023

The conclusions that MNRF fisheries managers arrived at from the public comment period were:

- Local anglers did not agree with the draft objective to treat all anglers equally (Section 2.2.2)
- Local anglers did not agree with the proposed regulatory changes to catch and possession limits (MNRF 2022).

Following the public comment period, MNRF fisheries managers weighed the results of consultation against the likelihood of the Overcompensation scenario and elected that managing the risk of increased harvest was reasonable, given the likelihood of the plan objectives being achieved while maintaining current catch and possession limits. MNRF's robust monitoring program on Lake of the Woods should provide ample opportunity to evaluate the success of the changes to the size limit regulation; should the results of monitoring indicate that harvest is increasing, additional regulatory measures will be considered.



## List of Acronyms

AKRC - Anishinaabeg of Kabapikotawangag Resource Council

BAMS – Biodiversity and Monitoring Section

B<sub>MAX</sub> – Maximum biomass (carrying capacity)

B<sub>MSY</sub> – Biomass at Maximum Sustainable Yield

B<sub>OBS</sub> – Observed biomass

BsM – Broadscale Monitoring Program

DFO – Fisheries and Oceans Canada

EFFM – Ecological Framework for Fisheries Management

ERO – Environmental Registry of Ontario

FAU – Fisheries Assessment Unit

FMZ – Fisheries Management Zone

FWIN – Fall Walleye Index Netting

LOTW – Lake of the Woods

MHSTCI – Ontario Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries

MNDNR – Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

MNO – Métis Nation of Ontario

MNR – Ministry of Natural Resources

MNRF – Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry

MRNF - Ministère des Richesses Naturelles et des Forêts

MSY – Maximum Sustainable Yield

NAFTA - North American Free Trade Agreement

NOTO – Nature and Outdoor Tourism Ontario

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OFAH – Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters

OFR – Ontario Fishery Regulations, 2007

PFS – Provincial Fish Strategy

PSIF – Provincially Significant Inland Fishery

SDW – Specially Designated Waters

TOHA – Thermal-Optical Habitat Area

USTR – United States Trade Representative

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**Appendix A: Lake of the Woods Anglers by License Type (2015)**

**Table A1:** Lake of the Woods Anglers by License Type (2015). Source: MNRF (unpublished data)

Angler Group	License Type	Type Description	Number of Respondents	Estimated # Active Anglers	Total	Percentage
Non-Resident	Sport	3 yr Sport	4	685		
		1 yr Sport	90	6526		
		8 day Sport	142	12,945		
		1 day Sport	6	1545	21701	34.8
	Conservation	3 yr Conservation	2	257		
		1 yr Conservation	62	4320		
		8 day Conservation	142	13318	17895	28.7
Canadian	Over 65	no license	5	714	714	1.1
	Sport	3 yr Sport	5	1731		
		1 yr Sport	16	3356		
		1 day Sport	34	3889		
					8976	14.4
	Conservation	3 yr Conservation	4	779		
		1 yr Conservation	32	5634		
					6413	10.3
Ontario	Over 65	no license	10	1199	1199	1.9
	Sport	3 yr Sport	10	2723		
		1 yr Sport	13	2178		
		1 day Sport	1	152		
					5053	8.1
	Conservation	3 yr Conservation	1	301		
		1 yr Conservation	1	161		
					462	0.7
<b>Total</b>			580	62413		

**Appendix B: 1999 USTR Press Release**

**OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES TRADE REPRESENTATIVE**

**Executive Office of the President**

**Washington, D.C.**

**20508**

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USTR Press Releases are available on the USTR home page at [www.ustr.gov](http://www.ustr.gov).

They are also available through the USTR Fax Retrieval System at 202-395-4809.

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Corrected Version (corrects Typo in 3<sup>rd</sup> sentence).

**99-94**

**For Immediate Release Contact: Thomas Tripp**

**November 5, 1999 Helaine Klasky**

**Amy Stilwell**

**(202) 395-3230**

**U.S. Prevails in Dispute With Canada  
Over Sport Fishing and Tourism Services**

Today, United States Trade Representative Charlene Barshefsky announced resolution of the NAFTA dispute with Canada over Ontario's discriminatory regulations concerning sport fishing and tourism services. Ambassador Barshefsky stated: "I am pleased to announce that Ontario has revoked the discriminatory practices at issue. The vitality of small and medium-sized businesses in northern Minnesota was directly at stake, this action demonstrates that NAFTA works for large and small companies alike."

This ends the section 301 investigation initiated in April, but USTR will continue monitoring the situation pursuant to section 306 of the Trade Act.

Ambassador Barshefsky further stated: "We were able to address the trade matters at issue and at the same time encourage sustainable fisheries in the border lakes. I believe this sets an excellent example of how open markets and environmental objectives can be realized. This was also another precedent setting case in the level of cooperation between the U.S. federal government and a state government. Minnesota state officials participated at every stage of the consultations and negotiations with Canada. I want to thank Governor Ventura and his team for their assistance, which was critical."

### Background

Since 1994, the Province of Ontario, Canada, had sought to induce U.S. recreational fishermen to use Ontario resort facilities and services (lodging, fishing guides, boats, etc.) by limiting the amount of certain fish they could catch and keep in certain lakes that straddle the Minnesota-Ontario border, unless they lodged or otherwise spent money on the Ontario side. The restrictions, applied to 150 miles of the border, unfairly discriminated against U.S. resorts, fishing guides, and other businesses tied to sport fishing. On April 29, 1999, USTR initiated a section 301 investigation pursuant to a petition filed by the Border Waters Coalition. After several sessions, including consultations under Article 2006 of the NAFTA, Ontario revoked the "stay overnight" requirement and other discriminatory measures.

## **Appendix C: LOTW Fisheries Advisory Council meeting agendas**

### **Meeting #1 – January 12, 2021**

- Introduce new planning team
- Make clear the role of the Advisory Council
- Outline the project plan process
- Legislation and policy overview
- Regulatory change process and timeline
- What is out of scope

### **Meeting #2 – January 19, 2021**

- Review minutes from September 12
- Process review – Issues vs Objectives
- Ecological Issues
- Socio-Economic Issues
- Other Issues
- Objective setting primer

### **Meeting #3 – February 9, 2021**

- Review minutes from January 19
- Process review
- Issues – What We Think We Heard
- Objective setting primer
- Plan Goals
- Ecological Objectives
- Socio-economic Objectives

### **Meeting #4 – March 2, 2021**

- Revised project timeline
- Review minutes from February 9
- Process review
- Objectives – reminder from last month
- Fishing Regulations 101

### **Meeting #5 – March 23, 2021**

- Review minutes from March 2
- Process review
- Objectives – reminder
- Catch limits
- Size limits
- Live wells
- Discussion – 3 – 5 Options to take forward

**Meeting #6 – May 11, 2021**

- Review minutes from March 23
- Process review
- Media interest
- Open discussion
- Next steps
- Objectives and targets
- Options Evaluation
- Discussion

**Meeting #7 – May 25, 2021**

- Review minutes from May 11
- Clarification on stocking Lake Nipissing
- Process review
- Targets and Timelines
- Regulatory Options
- Discussion
- Information Item – 2021 monitoring plans
- Information Item – Contraventions Project

**Meeting #8 – June 15, 2021**

- Assistant Deputy Minister Jennifer Barton
- Review minutes from May 25
- Process Review
- What we learned last month (in plain language)
- Regulatory options for consultation
- Information Item – Contraventions Project
  - (carried over from Meeting #7)
- Next Steps

**Meeting #9 – June 29, 2021**

No agenda – wrapping up administrative items associated with planning.

**Meeting #10 – October 5, 2021**

- Draft Plan document discussion
- Consultation
- Other business
  - Bait policy implementation

**Meeting #11 – August 23, 2022**

- Summary of meetings #1-10
- Summary of March 2022 virtual engagement sessions
- Council member feedback
- Next steps

**Meeting #12 – February 21, 2023**

- Final ERO stats and analysis
- Additional Consultation
- Next Steps
- Advisory Council membership

## **Appendix D: Lake of the Woods Recreational Walleye Management March 2022 Public Engagement Virtual Sessions Summary**

### **Purpose:**

As a Provincially Significant Inland Fishery (PSIF), the Ministry is required to develop a fisheries management plan for Lake of the Woods. There is currently no fisheries management plan in place for the Ontario waters of Lake of the Woods. Furthermore, MNRF fisheries monitoring data indicates that the Lake of the Woods walleye population is below the provincial benchmark and has been for some time.

In keeping with Ministry policy, a fisheries Advisory Council comprised of local stakeholders and Indigenous communities was established. The role of a council member is to provide advice to the Ministry, while soliciting feedback from and sharing information with their respective networks.

Twelve meetings with the Advisory Council were held between 2019 and 2022. Ministry fishery specialists provided an overview of fisheries management planning in Ontario and presented the council with scientific data outlining the state of the lake's walleye population. Recognizing the need to act, the council proposed two potential changes to the walleye sportfishing regulations: one preferred option and one alternative. Both options address the proposed ecological and socio-economic objectives developed by the Ministry and the Advisory Council: reduce the recreational harvest, increase the amount of large, older walleye, treat both resident and non-resident anglers equally, and respect the potential economic impacts of any changes. These proposals were included in a draft management plan written by Ministry staff that was shared with the Advisory Council in September 2021.

A series of public engagement sessions were hosted to solicit broad stakeholder feedback. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, these sessions were held virtually. The following report provides a summary of the information shared and feedback received at these sessions.

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### **Quick Facts:**

- Three virtual sessions occurred March 8<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup>, 2022 from 6-8 pm CST
- Hosted by Dave Smith, Parliamentary Assistant to Minister Greg Rickford
- Moderated by Rob Irwin, Senior Events and Multimedia Lead, MGCS
- Invitations sent to Fisheries Advisory Council & posted on MNRF social media
- Platform: Microsoft Teams Live; Q & A portion via Slido.com
- Presentations: 45 minutes; Attendee feedback and questions: 1.25 hours
- Presenters:
  - Brian Kilgour, Kenora District Manager, ROD

- Steve Bobrowicz, Regional Fisheries Specialist, ROD
  - Dr. Dak de Kerckhove, Research Scientist, ARMS
  - Blair Wasylenko, Provincial Aquatics Monitoring Lead, BAMS
- Combined total of public attendees: 83

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### **Part 1: MNRF Staff Presentations**

The first portion of the session involved a background presentation discussing the state of the walleye fishery on Lake of the Woods. This included an outline of the planning process conducted with the Advisory Council to date. The entire presentation is included at the end of this Appendix.

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### **Part 2: Ministry Questions for Participants**

The second portion of the session involved real-time polling of participants using the Slido.com platform. Questions were developed in collaboration with Minister's office staff and the session was moderated by Parliamentary Assistant Dave Smith. Participants were asked a question and were able to view the collective results live as they came in. Nine questions were asked; seven of these had multiple choice answers, two required textual submissions. A consolidation of the three session's results for each of the nine questions is provided below.

In general, there were three main takeaways from public feedback at the sessions:

1. Recognition of and support for the science information presented regarding the status of the walleye fishery on Lake of the Woods.
2. Most participants agreed that harvest from the recreational fishery is cause for concern.
3. Regulatory options with reduced harvest and size limits are needed, they should be applied equally to residents and non-residents, and the proposed regulations are reasonable.

### **Poll Question Combined Results:**

1. *Has your angling experience reflected a decline in the quality and quantity of walleye on Lake of the Woods?*

Yes: 69% Somewhat: 18% No: 13%



2. *We talked about some potential options for the recreational walleye fishery. What do you think about these options, like keeping two fish instead of four?*

- Comments broadly supportive of reducing sportfishing licence limit from 4 fish to 2
- Some feedback regarding a desire for increased enforcement, dislike of the 1 “large” fish >70 cm proposal, and a desire for commercial fishing regulation

3. *What are your thoughts on treating resident and non-resident anglers equally (i.e., same catch limits)?*

Strongly agree: 67%    Agree: 13%    Disagree: 10%    Strongly disagree: 10%

4. *What factors other than sport/recreational overharvesting do you feel might be contributing to the decline in the walleye population? (Participants were able to vote for any number of the five options listed below. Percentages indicate the proportion of participants who voted for that option).*

- a) Commercial fish harvesting: 75%
- b) Water quality: 36%
- c) Invasive species: 34%
- d) Cormorants and pelicans: 20%
- e) Water levels: 20%

5. *Have you been contacted by an MNRF enforcement officer on Lake of the Woods?*

Never: 41%    Occasionally: 56%    Often: 3%

6. *Are you concerned with overharvesting on Lake of the Woods?*

- a) Really concerned: 82%
- b) Concerned: 18%
- c) Not concerned: 0%
- d) Really not concerned: 0%

7. *What has your experience been fishing for walleye on LOTW versus other big, popular lakes like Rainy Lake or Lac Seul? Have you caught the same size and amount of walleye, or have you noticed a difference?*

- a) Size and number of walleye caught elsewhere greater than LOTW: 42%
- b) I don't fish other big, popular lakes: 40%
- c) Size and number of walleye caught elsewhere less than LOTW: 11%
- d) No difference: 7%

8. *Quite a few people here are involved in the tourism industry on LOTW. What are your concerns if no changes are made or if new regulations are introduced?*

- Majority of comments reflect fears of a continued decline of the fishery if no changes are made, resulting in severe negative impacts to the tourism industry and local economy
- Many comments regarding the need to regulate Indigenous commercial fishing
- Some comments voicing opposition to a 2-fish limit, feeling that it unfairly targets resident anglers

9. *Do you have any questions or options that you didn't hear today through presentations or discussion that you feel might be worth exploring?*

Common responses include comments about the need to:

- a) regulate Indigenous commercial fishing
- b) increase enforcement
- c) change the regulations regarding 'catch-photograph-release'

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### **Part 3: Question and Answer Period**

The final portion of the session was a real-time question and answer period. Participants were asked to submit written questions via Slido.com and to “upvote” questions posted by others that addressed topics that were also important to them. Questions were answered live by MNRF staff.

#### **Top-5 Combined Topics ‘Upvoted’ by Attendees:**

##### **1. Indigenous commercial fishing**

###### Response:

Commercial and subsistence fishing on the Ontario waters of Lake of the Woods is carried out exclusively by members of Indigenous communities. All commercial licenses are held by Indigenous communities.

Ontario is working collaboratively with Indigenous communities and commercial fishing operators to responsibly manage the fishery. This includes a pilot project with a First Nation community that aims to cooperatively monitor the stock status in partnership with the Government of Canada. Ontario is also working with local First Nations to ensure that nets are properly marked and checked.

The Lake of the Woods Indigenous commercial fishery is small-scale and localized. Effort and harvest can fluctuate based upon a variety of factors. For example, the fish processing plant in Kenora recently closed. Prior to its closure, Ontario received three years of data from this facility. Based on these data, we estimate that recreational angling accounts for more than twice the amount of walleye harvested by commercial fishing.

In addition to Lake of the Woods, we also spoke about other large walleye fisheries across the province. Examples include Rainy Lake, Lac Seul, and Lake Nipissing. Each of these lakes has active commercial fisheries.

## **2. ‘Day-trippers’ from the United States fishing in Ontario waters**

### Response:

Between 1986 and 1999, Ontario had angling regulations in place for Lake of the Woods that put more restrictive harvest limits on non-resident anglers who were not being accommodated overnight in Ontario (“day trippers”). In 1999, the State of Minnesota filed a complaint with the Office of the United States Trade Representative, on the basis that Ontario’s fishing regulations violated the NAFTA principle of “national treatment”. Through a dispute resolution process, the governments of Canada and Ontario agreed to change the non-resident angling regulation to its current form. Although NAFTA has been replaced by the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA), the principle of “national treatment” is unchanged in the current agreement. NDMNRF staff have been advised that revisiting regulations that treat “day trippers” differently than other non-resident anglers would risk further action on the part of the Office of the United States Trade Representative, and that such a course of action is therefore ill-advised.

## **3. Tournaments: 1 “large” fish >70 cm proposal, catch-photograph-release rules**

### Response:

Competitive fishing events (“tournaments”) are an important component of the Lake of the Woods tourism industry and are included in the proposed socio-economic objectives developed by the Advisory Council. Currently, competitive fishing events in general are not specifically regulated anywhere in Ontario; participants must have valid fishing licenses and follow the applicable fishing regulations, but tournament organizers require no form of government authorization to hold their events.

Throughout North America, there is currently a movement towards fishing tournaments that operate under a “catch-photo-release” format, whereby participants photograph their catches and release them at the catch site, rather than retaining them in a live well and bringing them to a central weigh station. However, in Ontario, anglers are required to immediately release any fish captured which they are not legally entitled to possess. The definition of “immediate release” precludes retaining such a fish for the amount of time necessary to photograph it.

MNRF staff recognize that the “catch-photo-release” format is consistent with best management practices for fish handling and are currently investigating options to revise the Ontario Fishery Regulations, 2007, in order to allow this practice, without sacrificing other, necessary components of the concept of immediate release. However, such a correction is more difficult than it appears, and must be conducted on a provincial scale, rather than just Lake of the Woods. It may be some time before the change can be made.

Advisory Council members representing the competitive fishing industry voiced a concern that they would no longer be able to host walleye events on Lake of the Woods were we to implement a 43 cm (17 inch) maximum size limit. After a great deal of discussion, the Advisory Council agreed to recommend a compromise of one very large (>70cm) walleye, for holders of sportfishing licenses only, as a temporary measure, until provincial changes to allow catch-photo-release events could be made.

Concerns that many large fish might be harvested were allayed by the following considerations:

- a. Walleye >70cm are not plentiful in Lake of the Woods, proportionate to the number of fish <43cm.
- b. Advisory Council members all agreed that very few anglers, apart from tournament anglers, target these large fish, preferring smaller fish for table fare.
- c. Information from summer creels estimated that there are few fish harvested that are > 70cm.

#### **4. Stocking of walleye to offset the current decline in the population**

##### Response:

Fish stocking has been carried out throughout Ontario for approximately 130 years; for the first hundred of those years, little forethought was given to the potential consequences of stocking on the fish communities of the lakes and rivers that were being stocked. However, beginning in the early 1990s, a great deal of research on this topic was undertaken throughout North America, and this science has shaped Ontario’s policies on where, when, why and what to stock in our waters.

The success of a walleye stocking project depends on many variables, including the fish community of the receiving waterbody, the life stage of the fish that are being stocked, stocking location, temperature, and perhaps most importantly, availability of an appropriate food source for the newly-stocked fish. For walleye particularly, stocking young-of-year walleye into a lake that already contains a self-sustaining population typically results in no net gain, because of limitations on prey availability and resultant cannibalism among the juvenile fish.

Also importantly, rehabilitative stocking is only a suitable management action when a population is demonstrating reproductive failure. In the case of Lake of the Woods, our data indicates that there is an abundance of small fish in the population; reproduction is

clearly not the problem. The problem is keeping the fish in the population long enough to grow into the large, old walleye that would typically be the backbone of a recreational fishery.

## **5. Reduced angling effort due the COVID-19 pandemic and US border closure**

### Response:

While angling efforts in the summer of 2020 for all species on Lake of the Woods was estimated through aerial surveys to be 85% less than previous years (non-residents made up a large portion of the angling effort annually), the impact of this change in pressure on fish populations is not known at this time.

The expected changes in walleye biomass and age structure will be assessed through future monitoring, but generally it takes several years of reduced fishing pressure to result in a significant long-term change in the health of fish populations.

We expect the reduced pressure on the fishery would likely contribute to stronger than usual year classes that will continue to move through the fishery over time.

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### **Media summary:**

1. February 17: Lake of the Woods District Stewardship Association's (LOWDSA) 'Area News'
2. March 14: Outdoor News
3. March 17: Muskie Magazine
4. March 25: Thunder Bay Television
5. April 20: Kenora Daily Miner and News

## **Appendix E: Environmental Registry Comments**

### **Comments pertaining to the draft Lake of the Woods Recreational Walleye Plan during the Environmental Registry comment period, November 10, 2022 – January 09, 2023**

During the public comment period, 298 comments were received by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry:

- 274 via the Environmental Registry comment portal
- 16 via email
- 2 via the Natural Resources Information and Support Centre
- 1 via the MNR Twitter site
- 5 via telephone

#### **A. Comments submitted through the Environmental Registry comment portal**

Of the 274 comments received via the ERO comment portal 13 comments were submitted that contained inappropriate content and one comment was deemed off topic; these comments will not be reproduced in this report.

The remaining 260 comments are listed below; where personal information was included in a comment, it has been redacted. Otherwise, these comments have not been edited for inclusion in this report.

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ERO Comment #65630: I think the proposal to change the catch limits and size limits are very necessary and timely in order to address the walleye populations in LOW, which are currently at risk. However, as a participant of the annual Women's Walleye Tournament and an avid angler, I think it is very important to simultaneously implement a regulation that allows anglers to take a photo of a fish that is outside of a size limit, prior to releasing it.

Many of the tournaments now are catch and release by simply submitting a photo. Not having the ability to take a photo of any size of fish, has a negative impact on tournaments, whereby only a very restricted size class can be targeted. This will cause tournament anglers to lose interest, make tournaments more challenging than they already are. Having the ability to take a quick photo and release the fish, if done right, should not pose a risk to the fish as well. Recreational anglers also get a lot of enjoyment from catching and fish and capturing a memory through a photo. Without allowing this, will restrict many of these photos from being taken.

ERO Comment #65479: Yes, this is great. The walleye limit should be reduced.

ERO Comment #65804: I fully support the proposed changes but non-residents of Canada should be allowed only a conservation limit.

Also, the daily limit and possession limit for everyone should be the same - 1 or 2 fish but definitely not 4.

Enhanced enforcement is critical - you see cottagers going out multiple times a day to the same spot fishing and keeping multiple limits. This change will mean nothing to them - just a minor inconvenience

You need to move much much quicker - the fishery is in jeopardy!

ERO Comment #65824: Hey was just reading the new walleye limits I think you go with your second option can only keep walleyes between 35cm and 44cm or 45cm and one over 70cm I just look how good that slot size has helped out rainy lake for the walleye population I live on rainy lake and have caught so many big walleyes to catch and release and still can find the eaters in the slot no problem out there to. and I think the rainy river should be shut down from April 1st to June 15 on both sides of the border. make it as a fish sanctuary that is a big reason why the walleye population is hurting. Shouldn't be aloud to be in the river even for catch and release.

ERO Comment #68378: I believe in science and if this will help ensure the future of this excellent fishery in the border waters of the US and Canada; and as an American who's been fishing there for almost 60 years; I support your efforts. We fish in and around Falcon Island, to include Tug Channel, primarily. We've noticed a distinct increase in Rock Bass being caught in this area. Do you consider Rock Bass a predator of young walleyes; and if so, what can be done about it? Thanks for all you do.

ERO Comment #68429: I support the preferred option.

ERO Comment #69613: If I have to pick an option it would be option 2. However I don't understand why the MNRF can't just implement the same regulation on the lake of the woods as has been utilized for many years on the Winnipeg river system. It is basically the same fisheries. I feel the the regulation has been quite effective on the river system. Implementing the 35-45 cm slot with no fish over 45cm allowed would meet the demands. The whole idea of allowing any trophy fish to harvested is ludicrous even if they are not considered to be spawning age fish.

If the reduction of the walleye populations are to be restricted, we should be looking closer at monitoring wasteful commercial fishing practices of those permitted to do so. Many have seen the inappropriate practices and wasteful harvesting activities of commercial fish operations around many of the local area fisheries.

ERO Comment #70137: Is the data in the study representative of the whole lake? Or just the Ontario portion of LOTW?

American regulations allowing for a limit of 6 walleye each must have a significant affect on Walleye related biomass. Especially when considering the increased amount of pressure the southern basin recieves during the Winter months.

Are the same changes going to be made in the souther basin on Lake of the Woods? If not, will changes made here ultimately prove advantageous if our neighbours don't increase their conservation efforts.

I am all for stricter regulations if it helps the future sustainability of the lake but if a third of the Lake isnt being managed effectively I cant imagine changes at this wnd will be overly effective.

I believe the current regulation allowing a 4 fish limit for sport fishing is more than enough and dropping the limit to 3 across the province could be beneficial.

Over the past 20ish years I have witnessed how the Walleye populations on the Ontario side of the Winnipeg River has rebounded after the introduction of the 35-45 cm slot size. I personally find this to be the ideal size and impose the same limit on other lakes in the area when able to do so.

In regards to LOTW I feel that reducing walleye limits to 2 fish would simply move the pressure from Lake of the Woods to other lakes in the area like that cannot support increased angling pressures and would result in similar issues to LOTW elsewhere.

I believe increases efforts to enforce regulations whether changes are made or not is equally important. There are not enough Conservation officers present on a lake the size of LOTW. I haven't encountered CO's once on the lake in the past 2 years. And hear/see far too often of people willfully disregarding regulations.

Wasteful commercial and traditional fishing practices are another point of concern and I feel like not enough information is provided publicly on how these harvests are managed and limita enforced.

ERO Comment #70159: How can you have a fishery to the south (Rainy) with a 35 - 45 cm slot and one to the north with a 35 - 45 cm slot (Winnipeg River) and the one in the middle is different!!!!??? And yet all 3 are part of the same watershed/body and are all part of the same fishery. What a joke! And people can still keep a trophy fish! Another joke! I'm all in support of a reg change, but do it to help the fish populatiom not appease American anglers and tourists and tournament organizers.

ERO Comment #70558: I have read with interest the propsal for Lake of woods walleye fishery and would like to comment.

1. If this proposal goes ahead, why is there not a time line specified. ie 5 years.
2. The Winnipeg River fishery will receive a signicant amount of pressure as anglers will flock to the river because they can catch 4 fish. And this may cause an issue with first nations.



3. What data was collected to determine the fishery was in decline. Creel census?

4. This proposal will certainly punish local anglers.

ERO Comment #70859: Hello , At what length ( age) do female walleye eggs become unproductive. Or are they still spawn productive after 70 cm

ERO Comment #70874: Will there be any changes to the netting regulations by the Indigenous? Reducing allocations. Reducing gill netting permits? Reducing length of nets and mesh size. All types of fish and sizes are caught in their nets and die. We all should share in the needed process to improve the lake long term.

ERO Comment #70908: No walleye over 18" should be allowed to be kept. Why not just implement the slot size that is used on the Winnipeg River system this would make things much easier for people, keep it consistent.

ERO Comment #71022: I would hope that this information is gathered by people who have lived on Lake of the Woods all their life ...I have lived on this beautiful body of water for all of my life and fish it regularly. In all the years the walleye population does fluctuate ,some years better success rate and some years not so. currently i have seen no change if anything population has increased,as the last two years have had a decrease in fishing activity due to no tourists..ie (covid). So as far as a decreasing walleye population on the Lake of the Woods i would say walleye is in no threat in this lake. Also this lake is shared by two Provinces and a state so the proposal would include the USA side of the lake also right otherwise this proposal is void.

ERO Comment #71121: We fully support a 2 walleye limit, but it needs to be FMZ wide, else the small and medium size walleye lakes will be decimated even more than they currently are.

Also, there should be zero walleye harvested over 18-inches.

And we can't wait any longer to do this. It needs to be immediate.

ERO Comment #71332: I have been fishing on Lake of the Woods quite often in the last 7 years and for most of my lifetime before that. I think the fishery is very strong on the main lake in the north half. I don't understand why we would go to a 2 fish limit. If I thought that was the case then I would be all for it. I would want the limit to still be 4 walleye moving forward

ERO Comment #71120: Why not let resident and non residents keep 4 walleye nothing over 18 inches . The big ones make the little ones??

ERO Comment #72230: Change the limits of all non resident anglers and leave the residents limits as they are.

Buy out the commercial fishing quotas

NO day trippers from the USA via water to fish. They give nothing back.

ERO Comment #72540: As prices rise , gas and all other expenses it's going to be a big discouragement for lots of people who go out for a feed of fish. I love the lake and fish is a bonus for us. It's always been disheartening to see wild life management cutting limits and yet others can hunt and fish to extinction if they wished. I wish we were all treated equally and worked together to build our resources. We all need to be on the same page so our children and grandchildren can enjoy our natural resources. There needs to be some sort of accountability.

ERO Comment #72868: I attended the presentation in Kenora Nov 22, 2022 and found it quite informative. The proposed plan is acceptable. I hope it will help the lake re balance.

ERO Comment #73268: I hope you are sharing and working with the Minnesota DNR. They need to start following your lead if we want this fishery to remain prestigious for generations to come.

The winter fishing being done on the South end is atrocious to say the least.

ERO Comment #72900: Hope the American side of the lake follows the same rules or we are just doing this so they have better fishing seems like a bunch of government people giving in to the USA. **Personal information redacted**

ERO Comment #73698: I am a 67 year old man who has fished Lake of the Woods since childhood. Anybody who does not see these new restrictions as being necessary, are only fooling themselves.

I remember in my teens and early 20's, that there was a common expression that the Walleye lost their teeth in July and August. Then the Lindners taught about fishing mid lake structure as opposed to trolling our little joes.

Then the 14 foot Lund with a20 horsepower outboard was replaced by bigger boats with larger engines to access all of the lake.

Then the ice roads which for the most part used by commercial fishermen and constructed by rut plows were replaced by roads all over the lake and can be driven by cars.

Then the electronics, with gps maps and cameras, which turned fishing into a video game.

The Walleye though never changed.

Anybody and everybody can be a successful fisherman.

I can only hope you are going far enough with new restrictions and increased enforcement will part of the strategy.

Fishing is still my favourite pastime and will be for future generations if we protect it.

You have the support of this couple who live in Sioux Narrows and spend as much time as possible on our Island in the Manitou.

ERO Comment #73721: I find it interesting that there would be a restriction on the number and size of fish that a sportsman can catch when there's no regulations on the amount or size of fish natives can catch by netting. Lake of The Woods cannot sustain the number of fish taken out by the continues year-round netting by native tribes. If the MNR is serious about trying to sustain the walleye population the netting has to stop.

ERO Comment #73729: Why do we pick on the peoples of the north west if the mnrc wants to make changes to walleye limits make the changes apply province wide

ERO Comment #73929: I support the preferred proposal. I think it strikes a balance between allowing sport fishers to still enjoy the fishery , while still reducing the overall harvest.

I believe the second proposal of the 35-43 cm slot size is too restrictive, but I would support it if the MNR felt it was the only way to protect the long term viability of the walleye fishery.

ERO Comment #74154: With this proposed change(s), have you considered the massive impact that it will have on surrounding small bodies of water that have already been experiencing a much heavier amount of angling?

You have to realize that anglers will still want their 4 walleye and will turn to these already overfished bodies.

It's a concern I've already noticed as a life long resident of this area.

ERO Comment #74304: Hello, As a lifelong resident of Kenora and surrounding area I am happy and encouraged by the Ministries announcement regarding proposed changes to our Walleye fishery regulations.

We need to keep control of our ever changing natural systems as best we can.

However, have you considered the obvious effects this will have on all our numerous surrounding lakes that will undoubtedly be (for lack of a better word) hammered by the excess fisherman that still want their 4 walleye.

I for one have noticed over the past few years that fish populations are not what they used to be on these various out of the way small lakes. In my opinion this is due to increased tourist visitation and blatant disregard for camping/fishing regulations.

I understand that we live in a very large uninhabited area which can be difficult to regulate but their needs to be some major oversight to head off what's coming.

I hate to say it but maybe your proposed decrease in limits should include all bodies of water in the district so as not to create more pressure on the small sensitive lakes.

Just a thought.

Regards

**Personal information redacted**

ERO Comment #74828: Understand the stress on LoW and the walleye population. My concern is on the increased pressure that will occur on the smaller lakes. With reduced quotas on the 'big' lake many anglers will turn to smaller lakes that have more vulnerable walleye populations. Why isn't there an over all look at the fishery in the total region? This new regulation will mean 3 different regulations in this area.

ERO Comment #74840: Compared to even five years ago the walleye fishing is terrible. Bigger 19 - 26 inch fish are definitely far far fewer and the population is now composed of 12" – 16" walleye.

Ten to 15 years ago it was nothing to catch and release 30 - 50 fish a day with lots of nice size walleye. Not any more and anyone who says otherwise is smoking dope. Your test nets PROVE it!

Get the bloody regulations changed before there are no walleye left.

Kenora will be a ghost town when the walleye are depleted.

Two fish with none over 18 inches!!!!

Just do the right and quit dribbling the bloody ball.

ERO Comment #75863: What about commercial fishing? I have seen nets left in for long periods of time and then the fishermen pulling up and throwing dead fish away many times. I am 71 and have been fishing since I was a teenager . I do not fish much any more but fishing seems better now than it was years ago. My family has had a camp on the lake since 1958 and have been going there every summer.( Hades Islands)

ERO Comment #74872: A Minnesota resident who endorses the proactive plan. Just do it. It's something that needs to be implemented on the MN side of LOW. Your changes are for the better, for our future, for our kids and by implementing this plan, you will be leading the way for the other parts of the lake to do the same.

ERO Comment #74885: Please do up to date creel surveys. I know the 2017/18 surveys weren't done correctly. The gps coordinates sent from elsewhere were in areas that don't hold walleye. The fish population on the lake is much better than it was 30+ years ago. I

have observed in the last 3 years there has been a vast reduction in sport fishing due to Covid. Unless the First Nations have dramatically increased their commercial fishing, the lake is fine, but should be monitored with proper creel surveys. If the MNRF wants to make a positive move while throwing more money at this, please hire more CO'S to look after the fisheries. The amount of enforcement patrolling this vast area is ridiculous. ...just my thoughts

ERO Comment #74886: YOU CANT CONTROL THE USA FISHING RULES OR THE NATIVE FISHERY SO YOU TARGET ONLY RECREATIONAL FISHERMEN??. TOO BAD EVERYONE CANT GET ON BOARD BUT HOPEFULLY THAT IS ENOUGH TO SAVE THE LAKE FROM GETTING WORSE. LOTW IS THE MOST IMPORTANT FISHERY IN THE NW!

ERO Comment #74892: In stead of lowering the limit, I propose that the official opening date be moved into June. My husband and I are avid fisher people and we have stopped fishing until the middle of June as we were finding that we were catching fish that still had eggs. Give the spawn a chance to be completed.

ERO Comment #74893: My opinion on this proposal is that it would drastically challenge the businesses in the tourism industry on lake of the woods. Maybe a size restriction would be best suited.

If we had a 4 fish limit with a 13.5"-17.5" rule with no bigger that 17.5" that could possibly work over time without drastically impacting the tourism industry.

I myself fish lake of the woods and don't have any trouble get fish. Most of the time I don't take more than 3. And always keep 13.5" - 17.5".

Winnipeg river has had a similar size restriction on it and has been doing great. The fishery has improved over the last 5 years.

Given what we know about the Winnipeg River I would rather see lake of the woods follow suit in that direction.

Also lower limits for non-residents with same size restriction.

Thanks you for your time and I hope my input helps.

ERO Comment #74903: One way to help LOTW walleye would be to move the date back to the end of March, or even the start of the month on Rainy River. This river is probably the biggest spawning water for LOTW and every early spring the number of anglers on the water, is ridiculous, especially on the USA side of the river and their all there to catch, hopefully the biggest walleye of their lives.

These walleye are the big spawners that the lake needs to survive, which according to you, are what needs protection.

ERO Comment #74906: this is insane.i have fished l o t w s for 30 years and the fishing is as good as ever in size and numbers.target the americans and netting,not joe blow.

ERO Comment #74963: So the American limit is 6 and the "harvesting card" limit stays at it's level but the recreational fisherman that pays for their license gets cut in half. For "unforeseen pressures" your words not mine.

ERO Comments #74969: Hello. I am in complete agreement that some kind of meaningful action needs to be taken in regards to management of the walleye sport fishing resource on LOTW. I have been fishing on LOTW for 30 plus years, and in that time I have seen significant changes. More notably, the most significant changes I have observed (outside of typical "cycles") have been in the last 5-8 years. Fewer large fish; more small fish; reduced average size; population density decrease (assumed);lower catch rates. All of this points to substantial changes to the resource requiring immediate action. We have no issues with a reduction in daily catch and possession limits however would caution against a slot (like the Winnipeg River). That seems to have created a massive population of small fish that, as soon as a fish reaches "legal", it is kept.

ERO Comment #74994: As a former City of Kenora employee, employed at the Transfer Station I witnessed on a monthly basis the Ministry workers coming up to dispose of abandoned fishing nets. I found this to be such a travesty and such a needless waste of all different species of fish. Is there not some governing body that oversees and holds accountable individuals who do not take proper care with their nets? Would this not be of grave concern to the sustainability of the fishery?

ERO Comment #75000: Iam all for reductions if everyone suffers. I don't see anything about reducing limits that would affect native population or camp owners. Will nets be discontinued. What's good for one is good for all.

ERO Comment #75012: get rid of guides that do not pay anything to slaughter the walleye and and then show off the big walleye they catch and release and then the poor fish die guys like **Personal information redacted** and the reast of the so called guides

ERO Comment #75033: I have read the proposed reductions to the fish limits on Lake of the Woods, and I have no problem with the changes although I am a bit surprised as I have fished the lake for 70 years+ and the fishing still seems pretty good. My concern however is what the impact of the reduction will be on smaller lakes in the Kenora area. I own a cabin on a smaller lake in close proximity to Kenora and with road access. Fishing on the lake is not nearly as good as the LOW but thankfully most cabin owners on the lake are pretty conscious of the negative impact of overfishing and fish conservatively. I think if you are going to reduce limits on the LOW, you should do the same for all lakes in the area., otherwise there could be overfishing of the small lakes together with increased boat traffic and pollution. I hope you will take this into consideration.

ERO Comment #75093: educate the fishermen.

do not fish any deeper than 30 feet

barbless hooks

bring fish up slowly

stop walleye tournaments

**Personal information redacted**

ERO Comment #75094: I'm a Kenora resident born and raised, and I feel there is more options available then just cutting the walleye limits in half! I wish the public had a real input because i would suggest the following:

1. No walleye shore lunches! I'm on the lake a lot and I'm always observing lodges and solo guides putting on outlandish shore lunches for their paid guests. There are so many other species available, give our walleyes a break!!

2. Close the walleye ice fishing season on Lake of the Woods February 1st!! Give those walleyes a chance to spawn, and all of those 10-14 inchers that are getting thrown back from 40 ft all perish!!

3. You're never going to win the battle with Indigenous netting but at least hold them accountable when nets are pulled and there are hundreds of rotting fish. Easy fix! All nets have to be identified with contact information. If not, then MNR have the right to pull them and fine the individuals involved. If that can't happen, then no use even slashing the limits!! Just close the dam lake down to no fishing forever!!

ERO Comment #75100: Do it, set the limit to 1, block all fishing for 5 years - whatever it takes. Its been overfished for years and its going to take so much to get it back. I can miss eating walleye for awhile to get the lake healthy again.

ERO Comment #75104: Lowering the limits even more will just hurt tourism. Will it improve the sustainability of lake? Doubtful.

If the walleye population is truly in decline its attributed to something else rather than recreational fishing.

Simply put more research is needed on this to address the root causes of a decline in fish.

ERO Comment #75118: Its amazing the power of one mans perception (retired Kenora MNR employee). I put about 200 hours a year fishing walleye on Lake of the Woods from the Kenora side, I have not seen a decline in fishing what so ever, in fact, this past season was one of the best.

It also amazes me, but not surprising that netting, and commercial fishing are not mentioned once in ideas to help to revive this fishery "issue". Numerous times I have come upon nets with no markings, full of rotten fish, left for someone else to clean up when it washes to shore in the summer, or more common in the spring before ice out finding where nets have been pulled and noting hundreds of wasted, rotten walleye, and multiple other species laying on the ice. Why are they all not being utilized if these nets are for subsistence fishing? I've sent pictures to conservations officers, biologists with the MNR with a common answer. "We know its a problem but cant do anything about it". If these professionals with conservation in mind know its a problem, why isn't the real problems being addressed? Which is why its extremely frustrating that this proposed change only affects the license buying recreational fisherman. Our limits could be dropped by 2 fish each, but why not put some rules/limits on the ones who can fish year round uncontrolled?

Northern Ontario runs on tourism, I wish these families luck once this proposal gets pushed through. Not to mention all the spin off issues that will come as well.

Trapping, fishing, hunting, owning a firearm is becoming a laughing matter when you see what has been done, when will this end? I for one am concerned what my kids will be faced with by the time there 18 years old. What will the outdoors look like for the ones who contribute to licensing and conservation? Sad.

ERO Comment #75146: Here we go again, in the last 30 years I have seen the MNR Biologists mismanage the deer population by allowing feeding the deer. Which led to overpopulation of the deer and then wolves, brain worm in the moose population and the moose population crashing so drastically that we can no longer hunt moose in this area. Also the government getting involved in the spring bear hunt leading to the overpopulation of bears which in turn caused them to come out of their dens in the spring and follow calving moose around and the bears killing calves. Now these individuals are poking their noses into how the sport fishery is managed on lake of the woods. First of all they need to find out why there are so many abandoned gill nets floating around on the lake ghost fishing the walleye and other species. Game and fish needs to set up on Manitoba border and check vehicles heading back to Winnipeg with coolers full of walleye fillets to sell. I constantly see the same boats from the welcome channel area going back to camp only to head back out on the lake to fish more. Open your eyes boys and dig a little deeper I think triple the number of CO's patrolling the lake should be the first thing that should have happened years ago. When I get check by these guys I am happy to see them, but 2 guys is not enough to patrol the lake in the summer. If we are blaming climate changed maybe you need to reduce the walleye limits province wide before you loose control of the walleye population in the rest of the province.

ERO Comment #75189: Reduce the limits and shorten the season.

Eliminate fish finders and depth finders and/or any electronic devices that take the sport out of fishing.



ERO Comment #75195: Re walleye limit reductions

Before going this route , I believe that shorter ice fishing seasons and regular seasons would lessen the impact . Reduction of tournaments , even catch and release would take stress off the fish . To fish walleye is expensive enough without the further loss of limits . You protected the trout years ago by closing season through the fall ... spawning time and this helped a lot .. Shut walleye down from oct.... feb and don't open up until June 15 .

ERO Comment #75205: This is not the way to go, keep the limit at four, the limit for walleye system is perfect the way it is right now.

ERO Comment #75215: Anything that is done to regulate the fishing season or limits must rely on a more carefully regulated water level in the lake to prevent spawning beds from being exposed during the critical spring season. 10 years ago we had up to 6 large Pickerel spawning in front of our boathouse in about 1 - 2 feet of water, now we are not having any water on that gravel bed until after the spawning period is over.

Regulation of water levels is critical and should be taken away from the present Government agency and returned to Fisheries.

ERO Comment #75218: To reduce confusion and red tape make the second option slot size the same as the Winnipeg River i.e.. keep only 35 cm to 45 cm. This would make angling much less confusing for anglers in the Lake of the Woods - Winnipeg River area as many if not most local anglers fish both waterbodies. A few years ago OMNR attempted to make the Ontario Fishing Regulations LESS confusing and harmonized many of the ""MY Lake regulations that were a barrier to fishing and caused un-necessary regulations. I doubt the two water bodies are that significantly different in fish productivity, growth rates, recruitment to justify the excess confusion and separate regulations.

Also, the ONMRF must develop a criteria, along with ongoing fisheries monitoring and public reporting commitment to return the fish catch limits to the present regulations when the fishery returns to a realistic defined fishery stock health status benchmark. As we have seen in other fisheries i.e.. the Shoal Lake (26,000 ha) Walleye fishery - which has been closed to angling (1979) longer than the Grand Banks in Newfoundland, remains closed - yet the public is not informed on the walleye health status nor any fishery stock health status benchmarks that would allow entry to local fishing opportunity.

ERO Comment #75220: I believe the limit be four but with a slot size similar to the Winnipeg river. The other problem on the lake of the woods is over fishing of walleye by certain groups and waste of other fish ie perch and pike

ERO Comment #75223: Why don't you just close the fishery on lake of the woods from Jan 1st to April 14th for a couple years .

ERO Comment #75226: "Hello I do not support either option indicted in this proposal. Any option that moves forward needs to be consistent with fishery regulations in abiting wayerbodies such as Rainy Lake, Rainy River, and the Winnipeg River. All of these waterbodies are connected to each other and anglers fish one or more of these waterbodies each season. Current slot size for walleye in these fisheries is 35-45 cm. Your proposals speak to 43 cm! You need to be consistent to keep regulations simple and not confusing to anglers!

I favor applying the Winnipeg River slot size regulation (35-45 cm) with one over 70 cm to LOW. Sport limit 4: Conservation limit 2. Monitor the LOW fishery to assess the impact of this regulation over the next 2-4 year period. If walleye population is still showing signs of stress - then move to the same slot (35-45) with sport limit of 2, and conservation limit of 1.

ERO Comment #75248: I am an ontario resident and am in favour of a change in the walleye regulations on Lake of the Woods. I am an avid fisherman as well as own a tourist resort on LOW. I have seen a decrease in the catch rates of walleyes from my guests over the years and am a huge advocate of promoting conservation. My belief is fish for the experience, not for the freezer. Over the past few years I have seen a big increase of local (resident) pressure and harvest. I believe your "preferred" option would be the best for the walleye fishery. I've witnessed many residents abuse our current regulations over and over again. However, for the preferred option to be fully effective there has to be something done about the commercial netting and commercial harvesting that is taking place. This too has been a huge detriment to the walleye fishery. There has to be concessions made on both sides for this option (or any option for that matter) to be fully effective.

ERO Comment #75279: The Ministry needs to show the data that demonstrates the decline in the walleye numbers on Lake of the Woods.

ERO Comment #75281: Ontario MNR Conservation Officers should be performing random game checks at the boat launches when fishermen come off the lake. This is a practice of Manitoba Conservation which put fishermen on notice that fishing limit infractions are serious.

ERO Comment #75284: The proposal states that there is an ecological reduction in older walleye. Help us understand why the new proposed slot size allows 1 walleye over 70cm. The proposed slot sizes should be deter targeting of large older walleye.

ERO Comment #75285: Lake of the Woods Walleye Tournaments need to be addressed/eliminated in the proposal as the tournament prizes target the larger older walleye.

ERO Comment #75230: I agree with some of the proposed changes in order to protect this fishery.

- yes to a slot size
- NO ! To being able to keep a trophy fish.
- yes to a limit reduction.

An increase of enforcement in all these areas would be welcome. Further increase enforcement on the negligent netting practices on Shoal Lake and Lake of the Woods (Sioux narrows /Nestor Falls ). On a regular basis nets on both of these bodies of water can be found abandoned and full of rotting fish. I feel this is a major cause to the decline in the walleye and crappie populations. On any given day examples of these unethical netting practices can be found.

Respectfully submitted.

ERO Comment #75330: Stop all commercial fishing on Lake of the Woods and all Walleye caught by recreational fishermen must be under 18 inches ..... absolutely no walleye greater than 18 inches can be harvested )... Sport fishing Limit stays 4 and conservation limit stays 2.

ERO Comment #75345: Strongly opposed to the new proposals for limits on sport fishing Walleye limits. No change to the American side? No change to large quantity net fishing? If population is a problem then there should be lowered limits for everyone, not just some. 2 fish isn't even worth going out for. That's not even a feed for a family of four.

Guess we'll start eating the bass and Musky, legal sizes of course.

Another knife to the heart of the tourism industry.

ERO Comment #75363: I would be supportive of the Alternate Option. A limit of 2 walleyes between 35cm to 45cm, with not more than 1 being larger than 70cm. It has worked very well for the Winnipeg River waters that in the Kenora area. I feel as though the current limit of 4 walleye for a sports license provides more than enough for food for an angler. A sports limit of 2 daily, means 4 fillets, that is definitely enough for a single license holder. My largest concern is dealing with subsistence fishing and netting practices in general. I have worked on and around most of the water bodies in our local area. I have witnessed some very disturbing instances with netting (walleyes, northern pike, pike etc, all dead and wasting away being tossed into wild rice areas as a particular instance, on LOTW in 2018. I was part of a large bathymetric undertaking for 28 reserve lands boarding LOTW, Rainy River and Winnipeg River. I was upset with the manner of netting and the lack of following net regulations).

I feel as though the subsistence fishing needs to be more observed by officials who enforce good practice methods and regular checking of the needs. **STRONG** punishment is a must for abusers of this particular PRIVILEGE.

ERO Comment #75373: As one of the first cottages at Clearwater Bay we have witnessed the downfall of a once great fishery. Building codes altered to save the trout have failed because of lack of ministry control over building in the area. Watched the Shoal Lake fishery shutdown for a 5 year period that is now going on decades. Once it is gone it is gone the pounding the lake takes from the recreational skinny boat fishers have killed it .

A set group of lake users have destroyed it in a short period of time. My cottage is 15 hours north as far as I can drive without having to fly in because there the fishing is still worth the trip. I have not put a line out on lake of the woods for 5 years not worth the price of gas. Very sad for the locals who now have to travel hundreds of miles to catch a limit of unstressed walleye population. Had it lost it not coming back if you let the tourist group have any say . Let the people who have a stake in keeping it alive instead of the ones who killed it.

ERO Comment #75450: With all these ongoing discussions a simple fix to our fishery's is to stop the non resident fisherman to have shore lunch. They take 4 fish a day for lunch / dinner x one week. Multiply that by how many lodged in the area. Stopping the shore lunch would increase the amount of fish in our lakes and you could more likely increase the limits.

Just my two cents, I've seen this in person for too long. If we want to save our fishery just do common sense fixes.

ERO Comment #75515: In my opinion reducing the keep limit to 2 fish will cause a number of unintended problems . I believe reducing the limit on the lake will cause the river to be hammered . The obvious hit to tourism is another . With the last few covid years have decimated a lot of lodge owners and reducing the limit will not help . Bad timing . Would like to see Ontario residents keep the current 4 fish limit and perhaps out of province reduced to 2

ERO Comment #75543: What are the invasive species that threaten walleye and how? How is climate change affecting the ability of walleye to reproduce? How do you expect to increase the biomass of older fish when you still allow anglers to retain a fish over 70 cm.? I suggest that you adopt the same slot size applicable to the Wpg. River and apply it to LOTW. You could also retain the 4 fish limit but remove the one over 19 in. which is a spawner.

This plan has about the same chance of achieving it's goals as the RAO that was introduced back in 1990 to protect lake trout habitat in Clear Water Bay ON. After 30+yrs. you have not achieved any of the 3 goals contained in the RAO so why don't you just repeal(rescind) it and stop harassing cottage owners who just want to build accommodation for children and grandchildren.

ERO Comment #75597: I agree with lowering the limit. My wife and I eat lots of walleye for dinner and have never needed more than 2 walleye (4 filets). I am 38 and my wife is 33 with big appetites and we still usually have some left over for lunch.

It seems like the walleye spawn is happening later too and I've caught lots of fish spawning or about to spawn. Even though I release the fish back there are lots of people that don't. As much as it pains me to say, it may be Beneficial to move the opening of the season back a few weeks to make sure the walleye are finished spawning.

Also over the past few years I have found nets that are not tended too and lots of fish get wasted when commercial fishing isn't done right. Not sure if it can be done. With their treaty rights but maybe some sort of identifying number on a net to hold people accountable for leaving Nets in and not checking them regularly.

ERO Comment #75712: I haven't personally seen any decline in Walleye population on LOTW however in order to protect the lake I think the slot limit should be 2 walleye between 35 and 43. All others released.

ERO Comment #75733: I support the 2 walleye limit but we cannot allow US tourist establishments to expand based on Ontario resources.

See supporting link.

ERO Comment #75912: I am a non-resident cabin (2) owner living near Sioux Narrows for over 50 years. I started visiting LOW in 1953 when my parents bought property in Whitefish Bay, and my adult children will soon be taking over our properties which they both love.

I am a fisherman, my kids are also, and we all fish very responsibly and follow the laws and common sense. We have witnessed the decline in Walleyes over the years, and agree with most of the steps that have been taken in past years to ease the pressure on the fishery. What we don't understand is your proposals to overturn the most recent changes before we really have had a chance to see if they are working. Going to a system which forces people to take smaller fish, less than 43 cm, and encourages keeping any fish over 70 cm makes no sense at all to me or anyone else I have talked with. The big fish that have survived the most years, probably have the best genes and contribute the most to the gene pool. We wouldn't think of keeping a fish that should be put back. What changes will the native users make, and how are the camp owners going to survive another devastating blow to their livelihood?

ERO Comment #75917: It is very disappointing that these are the only options provided. Thier should still be an option for local residents to have a higher catch as local anglers should not to be reduced so significantly and subsidize their catch and activities that are done responsibly for a few tourism operators who for decades have been very open on how they have ignored the catch and possession limits for their guest which contributed to where we are. Thier should still be a resident option.

In addition, why is there no mention of eliminating Walleye tournaments, this should be addressed as well. It is well proven the damage and mortality they cause yet they are allowed continue. Lastly should be mention of netting and increased protection of spawning areas from netting as this activity directly contributes to the reduced numbers and any potential to rebound as spawning areas are continually damaged. This plan is not fulsome and ignores some larger mortality contributors and puts almost all of the reduction and penalty on residents regardless if they come from US for a weekend and spend minimal money in town or the local residents who support the local businesses and tax base more than operators with minimal LUP fees and are. The plan seems more political than science based

ERO Comment #76216: I lived in Sioux Lookout for 16 years and watched the fish management of Lac Seul

Sport License

A slot size 45cm - 53

No live fish in live wells or stringers

This has worked well evidenced by a thriving fishery for years

Your proposal for lake of the woods has several limiting factors

#1 cost prohibitive recreation fishing my average trip costs \$50 - 65 for 2 fish

#2 People will sort out thier fish to get as large as possible to feed thier family

This will result in smaller ones sitting in warm live wells thrown back injured

#3 I have heard cottage owners wii catch 2 take them home & go catch the other 2 as possession limit is 4

The real problem is not recreation anglers trying to feed thier families it is other factors you have cited

USA residents

Indigenous Fishing

Commercial Fishing

I am afraid your current proposal will not achieve the results you are looking for

Solution Leave the limit as is introduce slot size & no live fish on board

PS I fish 100 hours per year on LOTW and have no trouble catching my limit

ERO Comment #76241: Upon reviewing the Draft LOTW Recreational Walleye Plan I would like to submit the following:

1. Given the data provided in the report I strongly support the Alternate Option despite the fact that it restricts harvest opportunities more so than the Preferred Option. The health of the Walleye population is in decline and climate change will likely compound this trend over time.

2. I strongly support the non-regulatory proposals outlined in the draft plan.

I own a recreational property in the Minaki area, decline/loss of Walleye would be devastating to the local economy. I feel that the Alternative Option will balance both the needs of the economy and the environment.

Sincerely,

**Personal information redacted**

ERO Comment #76407: I belive this choice is completely wrong. Why should we be punished and have our limit drop down to two when the first nation's will still continue to fill there nets and completely waste fish. The sport is getting more expensive each year with the price of gas, two fish just won't put food on my table for the price it would cost for me to go out.

ERO Comment #76680: Keep the limits the same and start some more fish hatcheries just for lake of the woods.

As a summer month resident in Kenora we would be seriously thinking of staying in Manioba if fishing limits were reduced. Price out buying a new 18 ft lund for 90K and then think that you are having your fishing limits reduced by 50% no thanks.

If your looking at the financial outlook stop the commercial fishing to save the lake. Recreational fishing makes the province of Ontario more money and takes less fish out of the lake each year. It's simple math.

ERO Comment #76871: What happens to people who paid for a 3 year licence . They paid for the privilege of catching 4 and 2 fish respectively. Will they still be able to take that quota or will they be reduced. And if so will the people get some sort of rebate. Also is the US planning on reducing their limits also?

ERO Comment #76942: I agree whole heartedly with either plan. Why wouldn't it be the same slot as on the river. It would be easier on C.O's, fisherman and everyone else involved. Look at What the regulations have done for the river! One regulation would make a lot more sense. I also don't see why you are allowing 1 big fish to be kept, no they aren't the prime brood stock but leave them alone. Put a slot on ,equally enforce it and life would be as good as we have come to expect in N.W. Ontario

ERO Comment #77076: Not sure comments will be useful in such a proposal, rather there is a need to publish the primary data and research to be reviewed and if empirical data and analyses are sufficient to support a need for plans to abate negative conditions, then the catch limit might be a partial component of the solution but it certainly does not directly work for many of the identified assertions in the proposal. Only size limits will affect the biomass problems and that is not discussed. I think your research/measurements need updating and your methods need to be published along with the primary data. Strongly suggest that you publish that informaiton and delay any further movement toward proposal acceptance until that research and subsequent solutions can be examined for robust statistical significance. **Personal information redacted**

ERO Comment #77918: Only way thise will work,it has to go across the board for EVERYONE,no more CONMERSHIOL NETTING on LOTWS.

Time for are Government to start standing up,make roles for EVERYONE,ANOUGH,ANOUGH.

ERO Comment #78025: Lake of the Woods is an angler's paradise. My husband and I have raised our family here and have enjoyed all the benefits of snowmobiling, hunting, boating and fishing. Now we are enjoying it with our grandchildren. We see no reason for changing the fishing limit for residents. We have found that the fishing has improved over the last few years. Covid and the high water has reduced the pressure on the lake. If anything is detrimental to the fish numbers it is the use of nets that have not been regulated or enforced. Anyone that has spent time on the lake has seen the waste of nets left in too long or forgotten completely. Other option's if a reduction is needed would be

to reduce the limit to 3 instead of 2. Do you not worry that people will start keeping other species of fish just to make there fishing experience worth the time and cost of gas? We have a multimillion-dollar tourist destination here with people hunting and fishing for their personal use as well as the fishing tournaments. It would be a shame is people started eating trophy bass.

ERO Comment #80446: Not sure comments will be useful in such a proposal, rather there is a need to publish the primary data and research to be reviewed and if empirical data and analyses are sufficient to support a need for plans to abate negative conditions, then the catch limit might be a partial component of the solution but it certainly does not directly work for many of the identified assertions in the proposal. Only size limits will affect the biomass problems and that is not discussed. I think your research/measurements need updating and your methods need to be published along with the primary data. Strongly suggest that you publish that information and delay any further movement toward proposal acceptance until that research and subsequent solutions can be examined for robust statistical significance.

ERO Comment #80471: I have no problem with slot sizes. You could adopt slot sizing that was put on the winnipeg river. It seems to have made a difference for the positive. I think it would be a mistake to change the limits.

ERO Comment #80472: Ban the use of gill nets on Lake of the Woods. Once a fish is caught in a gill net there is no option for a live release.

ERO Comment #80481: I understand and agree that the LOTW walleye population requires incremental management. However, more needs to be done to reduce/eliminate commercial fishing and abandoned/unmarked nets. Incrementally, more needs to be done with respect to the US border elements of the lake. Look at any/all American websites that are associated with LOTW. The size and quantity of fish is not sustainable and is the primary issue regarding LOTW walleye stocks This needs to be the focal point. Signed.....LOTW cottage owner and resident.

ERO Comment #80484: Why not close tranquil channel to usa boarder and spots like keewatin channel longer during the spawn like on darlington Bay winnipeg river. If u must reduce our limits then alow us 2 limits in freezer

ERO Comment #80495: I have enjoyed fishing recreationally on Lake of the Woods for 53 years.

I hear what the Ministry is saying about the concern of the walleye stocks being stressed. I find this hard to believe as the last 3 years have been low fishing harvesting because of border closures and pandemic. But having said that, if If in fact we have a concern, then yes adjustments might be prudent in ALL harvesting areas.



I would hope the Ministry would consider the slot size regulation that has been on the Winnipeg River for years now with great success instead of 2 fish per day limit per person and 4 in possession you are proposing.

The slot size has really brought back the population on the Winnipeg River very well. This way, the regulations would be the same on both water bodies.

Also, the Ministry needs to consider an adjustment to the harvesting by netting by limiting the take on this also. It's not right where recreational fishing are restricted but netting harvests are not affected. This would help the stocks of walleye tremendously.

To summarize:

Go to the same slot sizes and limits like the Winnipeg River and adjust the netting take program.

ERO Comment #80451: I support this proposal. Please keep the fishery viable for future generations. Thank you.

ERO Comment #80478: As a long time resident of Kenora and cottage owner on LOTW, I have reviewed the proposed changes. The document fails to address why the walleye population threshold is declining?

As a result of COVID and the extreme high water levels of 2022, the fishing pressure on the LOTW has declined significantly over the last 3 years.

However, the one thing that has been constant during the last 3 years is the amount of First Nation netting. The proposal fails to address the impact First Nation netting is having on the walleye population. This issue has been well documented with the Kenora District OMNR, local tourism and First Nations communities. I have personally witnessed both good and poor netting practices throughout many sectors of the lake.

I do not oppose the changes to recreational fishing. However, if First Nation netting continues to take place at the current rate, then the planned management strategy is flawed and will never meet its objective.

The buyout of commercial fisheries licenses in the 1990s on LOTW, to increase fish biomass worked. However that strategy has been greatly compromised by the increase of First Nation fishing. This is compounded by the lack of harvest data resulting from First Nation fishing activities.

Many of the First Nation Communities that had their commercial licenses bought out continue to fish, unregulated and not monitored.

I have no doubt, First Nation netting has an impact on the walleye population but without proper monitoring and data there is no way of knowing what the impacts are – hence a flawed management strategy.

I understand the political dilemma that the government is challenged with. Successful management requires strong leadership.

Regards

**Personal information redacted**

ERO Comment #80491: For some reason, government is making policy by listening to what **Personal information redacted** thinks. Closing commercial fishing helped sport fishing all right but 20 years of huge populations of cormorant and pelicans negated helping the walleye, bass populations. Thank goodness for crayfish farmers in the southern states. They helped immensely buy culling those populations. When **Personal information redacted** got the trout fishing regulations changed all that happened is that there are thousands of trout destroyed as they cannot be kept except in certain areas. Now walleye. The biggest detriment to walleye is the hopelessness of the Lake of the Woods water board maintaining decent levels especially in the spring. I have fished Lake of the woods for 60 years and at this time, the walleye fishing and variable sizes of fish is excellent in my opinion. Better than 50 years ago. The northern part of the lake has lost at least 25 lodges since 1970. The fishing pressure has dropped immensely. The southern part of the lake is another story and Ontarians can't change that. There are a few areas of the lake that could use help in the spring like Tranquil Channel and Keewatin channel where walleye get a lot of pressure at spawning time and opening season should be pushed back in these areas. There are also a lot of nets left floating with dead fish. Last year I found six. All rotten. Where's the control there? MNR knows where the pressure comes from. Or does no one look at creel survey results. The limits Lake of the Woods have seem to be working fine. Why screw it up. What is a person going to do with 1 fish on conservation license. Not supposed to have another in the freezer. A lot of small fish that are pulled up compromised are going to be fed to the birds. Just like the trout. Better hire a lot more conservation officers. I know the decision has already been made, but my two cents. LEAVE what's working alone. But a lot less gas will be used and licenses bought.

ERO Comment #80552: I love LOTW (Kenora area), and am a yearly visitor. The fishing is unbelievable right now and fishing alone 50 plus fish a day was the norm this summer. I never kept a fish, but I understand people wanting a fish meal. However, some people feel the need to take a limit daily and give them away to anyone and everyone. I hope LOTW never turns into a Mille Lacs MN situation and everyone does everything involved to ensure it does not happen. It has destroyed that lake, and the local business. It has created deep anger toward the indigenous fisherman, and is out of control.

People have to stop equating a great day of fishing with bringing in their limit. That is the easy part, but enjoy the real reason to love LOTW. I am all in favor of doing anything and everything to ensure LOTW remains as it is. I understand the resorts, indigenous people, and locals have a much deeper level of knowledge about the lake compared to myself, but everyone needs to understand how good LOTW fishing is right now and want to keep it that way.

If there is a way to financially compensate groups to not net it is a better option than creating the hard feelings that are everywhere regarding rights, etc. I always thought a tag system was a good option, buy a license and if you wish to keep more fish you pay more money that goes back into the fishery / compensating for not netting. Buy a license get 6 tags, every tag after that is \$10? Slot limits are a PITA, but research based and proven to be a great management tool.

LOTW is awesome, and possibly to appreciate it you have to live somewhere in which you fish all day to catch 3 walleyes. As long as everyone listens to each other with an open mind I am sure all parties can work together to keep it a destination lake. I am truly amazed how good it is with the continued year round fishing pressure. I understand people make their living off the resource (which I have a hard time with), but I do think their voice is important and should be heard in terms of their business plan and how changes to the fishery will effect.

ERO Comment #80553: Non-resident anglers crossing from Minnesota resorts for the day flagrantly eat limits of walleye for shorelunch and then go out and catch another limit to take back them. Everyone sees them doing it daily and the lack of enforcement is laughable.

Non-resident anglers who chose not to stay in Ontario should only be allowed to fish on a catch and release basis.

I support the 2 walleye proposal - it has been working well on the Winnipeg River for years now.

Hurry up and do it!

ERO Comment #80583: I don't not support these changes. As a resident angler on lake of the woods, I find it offensive that the government would consider lowering the limits for Ontarians while keeping the limits for the non residents the same. The Ontario government has noted that the recreational over fishing is not happening in Canadian Waters it is happening in MN Waters. Why should the Ontario fishermen have to reduce their limits to support the US overharvest? The MN response to manage their overharvest is to keep their limits at 4 walleye and 2 sauger and implement a slot. That's 6 fish a person everyday. We are saying we can keep 2!

I have a family of five and I can bring home just enough fish to feed them a meal at a four fish limit. If these changes go ahead, I will no longer be able go out and catch enough to feed my family on my own.

If changes need to be made I would support a slot size of some kind and leave limits alone. Releasing all fish over 48 cm would be a good start. There is no need to keep trophy sized fish anymore. Replica mounts are much better and last longer than skin mounts.

Also consider removing the northern pike slot. Keeping all of the big predator fish in the lake to eat all the small walleye doesn't help the walleye populations and being able to keep one larger size pike to eat would also be nice.

ERO Comment #80635: I agree that something does need to be done for the sustainability of the walleye population in Lake of the Woods but these new regulations will make it hard for people to provide fish for their family. It will require two days of fishing just to feed a family of four, given the younger kids fish off of their parents limit.

I think allowing one fish greater than 70cm is a mistake given these fish are maturing into prime breeding stock. I would like to see a slot size similar to the Winnipeg River, it appears to be working there. Also, there is unregulated commercial/subsistence fishing occurring on Lake of the Woods with no regulatory oversight. I have seen multiple gill nets that have been abandoned and were full of dead fish. The commercial fishing industry on the lake needs to be regulated with nets marked, and some sort of time stamp system. If nets are found or have been out for extended periods of time they can be reported to the MNRF.

**Personal information redacted** for a number of years and other options should be looked at.

ERO Comment #80690: I support the walleye changes for Lake of the Woods. However you should go one step further.

When a family of 4 gets in the boat to go fishing, with their no licence younger kids. Kids might not even fish. But their limit just doubled. Those under age kids should be able to fish, but they should share the license of the adult fishing.

In other words if the minor wants a full limit of fish buy a licence. If not as said share to license.

ERO Comment #80932: Lake of the Woods walleyes are in big trouble! Fishing is awful compared to just a few years ago.

We support going to 2 walleyes immediately.

ERO Comment #80968: if you are going to adopt the alternative option (which seemed to work pretty well for Rainy Lake) why not keep the number the same? 35 to 45 cm plus one over 70? It seem pretty dumb to change the 45 to 43 when there is already a standard set that seems to work in the northwest.

The last change in regulations specified one pike under 75 cm for the zone and 70 for rainy lake (a change a lot of anglers still dont realize!)

It has always erked me that the RL slot size maxes out at 45 yet the rest of the zone the number to remember is 46!

Try to keep it simple for us old anglers with bad memories!

ERO Comment #81343: I have participated in the on line forum in 2022 and I have taken the time to review the proposed Lake of the Woods Recreational Walleye Plan. Below are a number of comments/concerns that I have:

1. The first ecological and social objective of the management plan is to reduce walleye harvest associated with the recreational fishery. Why are we targeting only the recreational fisherman and not including the commercial/sustainment fishing that occurs on the lake? Are we not all on board with creating a sustainable walleye fishery?
2. Has Minnesota been engaged and will their regulations reflect the changes that are occurring on the northern portion of the lake?
3. Given the proposed changes to the recreational fishing regulations, what is the estimated recovery period for the Walleye species on the lake given the lack of success pervious changes have had?
4. As per the surveys conducted on the lake it is apparent that the majority of recreational anglers are American. Given the various changes to regulations over the past 25-years that directly impact the American recreational anglers has resulted in minimal success. Why do we believe this proposed plan will have a positive effect on the Walleye stock? Perhaps we are targeting the wrong fisherman, has anyone studied the effect commercial/sustainment fishery is having on the Walleye stock?

In conclusion, I would like to thank you for taking the time to review my concerns and providing a reply. You can provide your reply via e-mail to **Personal information redacted**. Thank you!

ERO Comment #81349: LOTWs walleye are in terrible shape - you must enact the prefred option!

I support it whoileheartedly.

ERO Comment #81392: As a cottage owner on another area lake (Pickerel Lake off Minaki Hwy) I have a concern that reducing catch and possession limits on Lake of the Woods while not making the same changes on other area lakes could have the unintended effect of encouraging anglers to apply greater pressure to the walleye populations on other lakes, many of which also have declining and/or endangered walleye populations. Therefore, while I support the proposed change (preferred alternative) on LOTW, I would like to see the change applied to all lakes in the area (and the Winnipeg River for that matter.)

ERO Comment #81405: Why not have the same slot size and regulations as the Wpg River. The slot size on the river made it possible to catch your limit everyday !! If u change the Lake of the Woods to 2 fish - ALL THE LAKE FISHERMEN WILL MOVE TO THE RIVER AND DEplete THE RICER STOCKS .. Can u not realize that ????? Signed. **Personal information redacted.**

ERO Comment #81413: Being an angler on lake of the woods I have seen the change in fish size over the years. I support preferred option as it is more than fair to still support the recreational side as well as the tourism side. It isn't always how many fish you have in the freezer. There are other lakes one can go to if you if you prefer options

ERO Comment #81419: There is indeed a need for helping the walleye on lake of the woods, the sizes of the walleye this last year has dropped alot, lots of 12 inch walleyes with not many good eater size fish of 16 to 18 inch. With that being said, because of covid the summers of 2019 and 2021 there was no recreational fishing on lake of the woods. No United states residents were allowed to enter Canada to stay at resorts and fish. You would think that the two year break in recreational fishing would have helped the populations alot, but as a resort owner who was able to enter Canada and work on my resort, it was very disappointing to see all the commercial netting that occurred on our end of the lake by Morson. I witnessed first hand the extreme netting pressure that occurred day in and day out. One 1/2 mile net takes more fish on one day than my camp guests harvest in one year. Even last year the year after covid the netting was horrible. The natives were netting the same spots for seven days on a row, there was not hardly a fish left within 5 miles of our camp. A complete disregard for the fishery. If you are going to fish the walleye fishery it needs to start with the netting and getting it to stop. I am not on board with any limit cuts on walleye to any recreational fishing unless you can cut the netting. I always hear dont worry we are working on it from your fisheries group but guess what you can work on it all you want and until i see it on paper and quit seeing so much netting taking place your plan will not work even if you cut the recreational limit to zero. People are not going to stop at lake of the woods to fish with lower limits they will go farther north to better fishing and no netting. If you want to fix the fishery then stop or slow the netting. Buy out the commercial fishermen, add 5 dollars to each license and buy them out. People come to lake of the woods to catch lots of fish and release 95% of them and keep a few to eat. you all know the problem is netting so start there and make a difference now.

ERO Comment #81421: Good work on trying to address the walleye sustainability issue and best of luck moving forward with the proposed regulation changes. However, it is unfortunate that MNRF and the advisory group have chosen to discard/undo decades of work to implement differential daily catch limits for residents and non-residents on the Ontario-Minnesota border waters and in FMZ 5. This approach to catch limits took significant effort and serious NAFTA/GATS challenges to address a fisheries conservation and allocation issue in Ontario. I hope this latest proposed change to daily catch limits does not impact current regulations on other border water fisheries and in FMZ 5.

ERO Comment #81439: I don't have a problem with dropping the limits down to two however why not have the same size restrictions as the Winnipeg river 35 to 45 why 43 to confuse everything. Rainy Lake is 45 Winnipeg rivers 45 where does this 43 come in. Also why not limit the netting as a great number are never checked regularly anyway. And I think this will just put extra pressure on the Winnipeg river as people will not be satisfied with 2 fish with the high cost of everything from gas, bait, launch costs etc.

ERO Comment #81446: My wife and I fully support the reduced limit to 2 walleyes...and wish it didn't include the option of any fish over 17 inches. Two only under 17 inches. The walleye population in Lake of the Woods has been decimated in recent years. Thank you.

ERO Comment #81454: Stop all netting on the lake. Subsistence netting is a poor excuse.

ERO Comment #81472: I support the general direction of your proposal.

I like that both residents and non-residents will be subject to the same limits.

I like that most large walleyes will need to be released.

I am a little disappointed that one walleye over 70 cm can still be kept. With most people carrying cell phones that can take high quality photos and with the availability of very realistic replicas, there is really very little reason for retaining a large walleye.

I prefer the proposed recommendation over the alternative. But for most situations I don't see the 34 cm minimum being a huge negative.

One of the issues not addressed in the proposal was the sometimes indiscriminate indigenous netting of fish. On our end of the lake in the fall, the crappies school up in very large numbers in some of the deepest holes. A few years ago nets were deployed in these areas. The nets were not marked so sport fisherman were continually getting snagged in them. They harvested so many crappie that the crappie fishing in that area was pretty much destroyed for many years and has still not recovered. I realize this is more of an exception than a normal occurrence. But I would hope that there would be some self regulation that could help to avoid unfortunate results like this.

ERO Comment #81475: Hello, As a U.S. citizen resident of Iowa I have been fishing on Canadian Lake of The Woods for over 30 years. We have patronized several resorts over the years. We understand that visiting Ontario Canada is a privilege which we do hold with high value.

I have studied the proposed changes to fishing regulations. I do think that changes are unnecessary. I do believe that all regulations for limits and size should be consistent for non residents as well as all Canadian citizens. Those include aboriginal natives.

The tribal netting has more of a detrimental affect on the Lake of the Woods fishery than tourist fisher people.

A more productive investment in spawning habitat and operating a fish hatchery may be a good alternative.

Thank you,

**Personal information redacted**

ERO Comment #81603: I am in support of the regulation change - however the rules surrounding "possession" need to include an allowance for photographs to be taken before release. With the regulations as is, anglers who catch a fish outside of slot size are prohibited from photographing before releasing the fish. With a new slot size, this will be a problem for many.

ERO Comment #81604: I fully support the walleye conservation efforts proposed for Lake of the Woods. I do NOT support not being permitted to have a restricted size fish long enough to take a photo of it. Part of catching is sharing the excitement of that catch. Imagine a little kid not being allowed to have a photo of a first fish.

I have never had a released fish not swim away - they are handled carefully and with respect and care so that they do swim away. Please re-think this part of the regs.

ERO Comment #81606: I am an avid angler and support the decision for the proposed changes as it will allow for a sustainable population for future generations, but these proposed changes need an amendment that still allows for the ability to take photos of walleye within the new slot size. I am also a tournament angler and participate in the annual womens lake of the woods walleye tournament along with several other women who look forward to this tournament every year. This is the biggest womens walleye tournament in North America and without allowing for photos within that slot size will put an end to this tournament, which will be devastating for all anglers, volunteers and the entire community who support it. This tournament is catch and release, and all fish are quickly measured on a bump board and a photo is taken then the fish is released immediately. If this amendment to the proposed changes is not made to allow for photos of fish within the slot size it would not only put an end to the tournament we look forward to all year but it would also not allow people to take photos of their trophy walleye and create those memories. You are still required to handle that fish to get the hook out and allowing for a quick photo will not cause any additional harm to the fish. Anglers respect the walleye so much and put so much money into tackle, fuel, tournament fees, boats, cabin rentals and support the local economy all to fish for these walleye.

I really hope the committee reconsiders this change and allows photos to be taken. I want the walleye population to be sustainable and being able to take photos of them will still allow for that.

**PLEASE DO NOT PUT AN END TO OUR WOMENS LAKE OF THE WOODS WALLEYE TOURNAMENT !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!**



ERO Comment #81611: I personally support the recommended option but disagree with keeping any walleyes over the slot.

The walleye population needs to rebuild - the longer we wait to implement these regulations the longer it is going to take!

ERO Comment #81626: In response to the Lake of the Woods Draft Recreational Walleye Plan (the Plan), I would like to submit my comments.

First, I believe the public consultation process was very poor and bordering on irresponsible. The promised public meeting 'in early November' of 2022 (it actually was on November 23) was not widely advertised and very few people were aware of its scheduling (the meeting in Kenora was only posted on MNRF's Facebook and Twitter accounts). Most people I know did not hear of it - many, including myself, would have attended if they had known about it. I heard that there were fewer than 10 people at the meeting!

**Personal information redacted** I found the lack of consultation on these fisheries proposals alarming.

To address the specific proposals of the Plan, it's necessary to provide the proper context.

For one, resident anglers account for less than 20% of the recreational anglers on LOW - more than 80% of the anglers on LOW are Americans (source: Ontario Waters of Lake of the Woods Fisheries Management Plan Part 1 - Recreational walleye plan Draft for consultation). Given that the walleye management 'goal' is to reduce harvest of walleye by more than 40% from current levels, the proposed change to angling regulations will not, in my opinion, help achieve that goal.

It's my opinion that the proposed changes will actually result in an increase in walleye mortality from angling.

By reducing the catch limit of resident (Ontario and Canadian anglers) to 2 (which is the current regulation for non-resident anglers, so no change to their catch and possession limits in terms of numbers of fish) and introducing a slot size (both options) for all recreational anglers, anglers will try to ensure the fish they catch are as large as permissible; i.e., fish close to 43 cm in total length (both options). Fish greater than 70 cm certainly exist, but are relatively uncommonly caught and many anglers are not as keen on eating large walleye.

This means a lot of smaller fish (e.g., 30 to 40 cm), which under present regs anglers often normally keep, will be released, as will all fish > 40 cm and < 70 cm in total length (TL). However, many of these caught and released fish, regardless of their size, won't survive.

Why won't they survive?

Because on LOW, walleye angling is commonly done in water that's in the 30 foot range (or greater).

A quick Google search refers to many experimental studies that show walleyes caught in 30 ft of water have about an 8% chance of perishing, while fish from 40 ft have 18% mortality; fish from 50 ft 35% mortality. So for each additional 10 ft of depth, walleye mortality from catch and release roughly doubles. Some studies suggest that most fish caught in 30+ feet of water will likely die after release if water temps are at their peak (i.e., mid-summer). Regardless of the exact percentage of mortality, it is well documented that small fish have higher mortality rates than older fish.

Walleye, like most freshwater fish, do not have good pressure equalizing capabilities. Brought up from deep water, the air bladder expands and stays bloated. Capillaries can burst and there are other issues as well.

In other words, LOW is not a good place for extensive use of catch and release for walleye, which will likely increase dramatically with the proposed regulation changes.

There are other likely impacts of the proposed regulation changes as well. Most have not been addressed or considered, at least not in the narrative as presented.

For one, some - perhaps many - anglers (resident and non-resident) that are discouraged by the reduced catch limits on LOW are likely to target other, nearby waters to go fishing, where the daily catch limit remains at 4. Because LOW receives about 60% of the angling pressure in the Kenora District, this is not an inconsequential consideration.

Given that LOW anglers tend to be 'big water' walleye anglers, many of these anglers are likely to focus their efforts on the Winnipeg River. The Winnipeg River has a long history of high walleye harvest, which has resulted in shortened seasons (the walleye fishery closes a month earlier towards spring than other nearby waters) and slot size limitations (walleye must be between 35 and 45 cm TL).

The increase in angling pressure from changes on LOW could be substantial (and the slot on the Winnipeg River has been criticized for higher than planned for mortality, again because fishing is generally done at depths that exceed 30 ft, bad news for walleye (especially small fish) that must be released).

Some anglers - again, it seems this was not considered - could be displaced to the smaller, accessible lakes in the Kenora District. On these lakes, the walleye daily catch and possession limit is 4 (sport fish licence) for all anglers and all sizes of fish are legal (however, only 1 fish can be > 46 cm TL). These small lakes (many are only a few hundred ha in surface area) could quickly be over-fished if the number of anglers were to substantially increase.

Although the walleye daily catch limit for non-residents was reduced a couple of years earlier, the larger minimum size limit outside LOW (46 cm vs 43 cm TL) and the ability to keep 1 walleye > 46 cm TL, may also shift non-residents to nearby waters. This may already be occurring, but given non-resident angler numbers have been down substantially because of travel restrictions related to Covid-19, the magnitude of any such shift in angler preference of waterbody is unknown.

Indeed, the information on angler harvest for 2020, 2021 and 2022 is unknown, but is likely substantially lower than in the latter years for which data is available (again, owing mainly to Covid-19 travel restrictions, but also because of the extreme high water of 2022 which affected all anglers). This information has been acknowledged, but apparently has been dismissed as insignificant.

There has also been no success in having any agreement on the walleye harvest by Aboriginal and/or Metis. I recognize there are Aboriginal and Treaty Rights involved, but such Rights do not negate the possibility of negotiated agreements. Negotiated agreements on the harvest of moose in Ontario by Metis hunters have been achieved (Metis hunters must have a harvest card issued by a recognized Metis authority).

The other notable issue with respect to harvest is the commercial fishery. The commercial fishery is recognized by many (including local MNR personnel) is in disarray and poorly regulated. In addition, commercial harvest cannot have a protected slot-size limitation on harvest - the only regulation would be on the size of the mesh, which can be used to let smaller fish escape if large, but would then target larger, older fish almost exclusively. Given there is a concern that there is a dearth of older (large) walleye in LOW, it would seem logical to substantially curtail the commercial fishery, as commercial fisheries target larger fish.

There are other issues that have not been addressed in the assessment of the fishery and the proposals put forward, although they may have been discussed by the council. In particular, the regulations in effect on Lake of the Woods that target other game fish species are likely directly and indirectly affecting the health and status of the walleye population.

Firstly, the impact that has occurred to the fishery from eliminating the recreational harvest of northern pike > 75 cm TL, and muskellunge < 122 cm TL, does not appear to have been considered.

Northern pike and muskellunge are believed to have the same potential allowable yield as walleye on LOW, namely 22% of the total allowable yield of all of the major fish species. These regulations have without doubt resulted in a large and growing standing stock of these large predatory fish.

Two things stand out:

1. the annual harvest of pike and muskellunge is nowhere near the allowable yield; and

2. these large fish very likely consume a large number of walleye.

It seems to me irresponsible not to allow the harvest of at least some large northern pike. Unlike walleye, larger pike are favoured by humans for consumption owing to their bone structure (large pike are much easier to clean and produce a bone free fillet than small pike). There are a number of studies available that suggest a recreational harvest that would allow anglers to keep 1 pike > 90 cm TL is sustainable (while maintaining the present daily catch and possession limits), would retain a presence of trophy-sized pike, but reduce overall pike biomass. This would likely be a net positive for walleye populations (muskellunge regulations would not have to be adjusted as muskellunge populations in waters like LOW, where both species are present, are much smaller than those of pike. Additionally, harvest of muskellunge is low, a reflection of the angling culture).

A similar situation exists with regulations on the harvest of smallmouth and largemouth bass.

While both species are naturalized in the LOW ecosystem, the fact that both species are exotic introductions (which is an explicit concern that the proposals are meant to address: "...pressures such as invasive species...") needs to be acknowledged. Exotics are generally viewed as a negative and usually for very good reasons.

Numerous studies have demonstrated that wherever smallmouth bass and largemouth bass are introduced to walleye waters where these species were previously absent, the allowable yield and standing stock of walleye declines.

**Personal information redacted** for many years, used to say "Every bass caught in LOW should be killed", an acknowledgement of the negative impact both bass species have on the health of the walleye fishery in the lake.

If walleye are the most sought after and valued fish in LOW (they are) it would make sense to encourage the harvest of bass by anglers. Given bass are valuable to the recreational fishery, are naturalized to LOW and now have strong protection during their spawning season, at the very least encouraging harvest with more liberal catch and possession limits might reduce somewhat the standing stock of bass without undue harm and simultaneously shift productivity to walleye.

I would also like to ask why the recreational harvest of walleye on Shoal Lake, which has been closed in 1983, has not been re-opened. MNR sources have told me that the walleye fishery in Shoal Lake is healthy and in fact is one of the healthiest large lake walleye fisheries in Ontario.

If the decision has been made to allocate the walleye to Aboriginal people, this should be acknowledged.

At the very least, it is apparent to everyone that how Shoal Lake is being managed is not at all transparent. For years, there has been no effort to communicate the current status of the Shoal Lake walleye fishery.

To summarize, I do not believe the proposed changes to the regulations governing the recreational harvest of walleye will be beneficial to the walleye fishery in LOW or the surrounding waters.

I believe both proposals will be negative and will contribute to the further deterioration of the walleye fishery in LOW and surrounding waters.

ERO Comment #81638: In response to the Lake of the Woods Draft Recreational Walleye Plan (the Plan), I would like to submit the following comments:

First, I believe the public consultation process was very poor and bordering on irresponsible. The promised public meeting “in early November” of 2022 (it actually was on November 23) was not widely advertised and very few people were aware of its scheduling (the meeting in Kenora was only posted on MNRF’s Facebook and Twitter accounts).

To address the specific proposals of the Plan, it’s necessary to provide the proper context. For one, resident anglers account for less than 20% of the recreational anglers on LOW - more than 80% of the anglers on LOW are Americans (source: Ontario Waters of Lake of the Woods Fisheries Management Plan Part 1 - Recreational walleye plan Draft for consultation). Given that the walleye management “goal” is to reduce harvest of walleye by more than 40% from current levels, the proposed change to angling regulations will not, in my opinion, help achieve that goal.

It’s my opinion that the proposed changes will actually result in an increase in walleye mortality from angling.

By reducing the catch limit of resident (Ontario and Canadian anglers) to 2 (which is the current regulation for non-resident anglers, so no change to their catch and possession limits in terms of numbers of fish) and introducing a slot size (both options) for all recreational anglers, anglers will try to ensure the fish they catch are as large as permissible; i.e., fish close to 43 cm in total length (both options). Fish greater than 70 cm certainly exist, but are relatively uncommonly caught and many anglers are not as keen on eating large walleye.

This means a lot of smaller fish (e.g., 30 to 40 cm), which under present regs anglers often normally keep, will be released, as will all fish > 40 cm and < 70 cm in total length (TL). However, many of these caught and released fish, regardless of their size, won’t survive.

Why won’t they survive?

Because on LOW, walleye angling is commonly done in water that’s in the 30 foot range (or greater).

A quick Google search refers to many experimental studies that show walleyes caught in 30 ft of water have about an 8% chance of perishing, while fish from 40 ft have 18% mortality; fish from 50 ft 35% mortality. So for each additional 10 ft of depth, walleye mortality from catch and release roughly doubles. Some studies suggest that most fish caught in 30+ feet of water will likely die after release if water temps are at their peak (i.e., mid-summer). Regardless of the exact percentage of mortality, it is well documented that small fish have higher mortality rates than older fish.

Walleye, like most freshwater fish, do not have good pressure equalizing capabilities. Brought up from deep water, the air bladder expands and stays bloated. Capillaries can burst and there are other issues as well.

In other words, LOW is not a good place for extensive use of catch and release for walleye, which will likely increase dramatically with the proposed regulation changes. There are other likely impacts of the proposed regulation changes as well. Most have not been addressed or considered, at least not in the narrative as presented.

For one, some - perhaps many - anglers (resident and non-resident) that are discouraged by the reduced catch limits on LOW are likely to target other, nearby waters to go fishing, where the daily catch limit remains at 4. Because LOW receives about 60% of the angling pressure in the Kenora District, this is not an inconsequential consideration.

Given that LOW anglers tend to be “big water” walleye anglers, many of these anglers are likely to focus their efforts on the Winnipeg River. The Winnipeg River has a long history of high walleye harvest, which has resulted in shortened seasons (the walleye fishery closes a month earlier towards spring than other nearby waters) and slot size limitations (walleye must be between 35 and 45 cm TL).

The increase in angling pressure from changes on LOW could be substantial (and the slot on the Winnipeg River has been criticized for higher than planned for mortality, again because fishing is generally done at depths that exceed 30 ft, bad news for walleye (especially small fish) that must be released).

Some anglers - again, it seems this was not considered - could be displaced to the smaller, accessible lakes in the Kenora District. On these lakes, the walleye daily catch and possession limit is 4 (sport fish licence) for all anglers and all sizes of fish are legal (however, only 1 fish can be > 46 cm TL). These small lakes (many are only a few hundred ha in surface area) could quickly be over-fished if the number of anglers were to substantially increase.

Although the walleye daily catch limit for non-residents was reduced a couple of years earlier, the larger minimum size limit outside LOW (46 cm vs 43 cm TL) and the ability to keep 1 walleye > 46 cm TL, may also shift non-residents to nearby waters. This may already be occurring, but given non-resident angler numbers have been down substantially because of travel restrictions related to Covid-19, the magnitude of any such shift in angler preference of waterbody is unknown.

Indeed, the information on angler harvest for 2020, 2021 and 2022 is unknown, but is likely substantially lower than in the latter years for which data is available (again, owing mainly to Covid-19 travel restrictions, but also because of the extreme high water of 2022 which affected all anglers). This information has been acknowledged, but apparently has been dismissed as insignificant.

There has also been no success in having any agreement on the walleye harvest by Aboriginal and/or Metis. I recognize there are Aboriginal and Treaty Rights involved, but such Rights do not negate the possibility of negotiated agreements. Negotiated agreements on the harvest of moose in Ontario by Metis hunters have been achieved (Metis hunters must have a harvest card issued by a recognized Metis authority).

The other notable issue with respect to harvest is the commercial fishery that many believe is in disarray and poorly regulated. In addition, commercial harvest cannot have a protected slot-size limitation on harvest - the only regulation would be on the size of the mesh, which can be used to let smaller fish escape if large, but would then target larger, older fish almost exclusively. Given there is a concern that there is a dearth of older (large) walleye in LOW, it would seem logical to substantially curtail the commercial fishery, as commercial fisheries target larger fish.

There are other issues that have not been addressed in the assessment of the fishery and the proposals put forward, although they may have been discussed by the council. In particular, the regulations in effect on Lake of the Woods that target other game fish species are likely directly and indirectly affecting the health and status of the walleye population.

Firstly, the impact that has occurred to the fishery from eliminating the recreational harvest of northern pike > 75 cm TL, and muskellunge < 122 cm TL, does not appear to have been considered.

Northern pike and muskellunge are believed to have the same potential allowable yield as walleye on LOW, namely 22% of the total allowable yield of all of the major fish species. These regulations have without doubt resulted in a large and growing standing stock of these large predatory fish.

Two things stand out:

1. the annual harvest of pike and muskellunge is nowhere near the allowable yield; and
2. these large fish very likely consume a large number of walleye.

It seems wrong not to allow the harvest of at least some large northern pike. Unlike walleye, larger pike are favoured by humans for consumption owing to their bone structure (large pike are much easier to clean and produce a bone free fillet than small pike). There are a number of studies available that suggest a recreational harvest that would allow anglers to keep 1 pike > 90 cm TL is sustainable (while maintaining the present daily catch and possession limits), would retain a presence of trophy-sized pike, but reduce overall pike biomass. This would likely be a net positive for walleye populations

(muskellunge regulations would not have to be adjusted as muskellunge populations in waters like LOW, where both species are present, are much smaller than those of pike. Additionally, harvest of muskellunge is low, a reflection of the angling culture).

A similar situation exists with regulations on the harvest of smallmouth and largemouth bass.

While both species are naturalized in the LOW ecosystem, the fact that both species are exotic introductions (which is an explicit concern that the proposals are meant to address: ..... pressures such as invasive speciesâ....) needs to be acknowledged. Exotics are generally viewed as a negative and usually for very good reasons.

Numerous studies have demonstrated that wherever smallmouth bass and largemouth bass are introduced to walleye waters where these species were previously absent, the allowable yield and standing stock of walleye declines.

If walleye are the most sought after and valued fish in LOW (they are) it would make sense to encourage the harvest of bass by anglers. Given bass are valuable to the recreational fishery, are naturalized to LOW and now have strong protection during their spawning season, at the very least encouraging harvest with more liberal catch and possession limits might reduce somewhat the standing stock of bass without undue harm and simultaneously shift productivity to walleye.

I would also like to ask why the recreational harvest of walleye on Shoal Lake, which has been closed in 1983, has not been re-opened. Sources suggest the walleye fishery in Shoal Lake is healthy and in fact is one of the healthiest large lake walleye fisheries in Ontario.

If the decision has been made to allocate the walleye to Aboriginal people, this should be acknowledged.

At the very least, it is not apparent how Shoal Lake is being managed. For years, there has been little effort to communicate the current status of the Shoal Lake walleye fishery. To summarize, I do not believe the proposed changes to the regulations governing the recreational harvest of walleye will be beneficial to the walleye fishery in LOW or the surrounding waters.

I believe both proposals will be negative and will contribute to the further deterioration of the walleye fishery in LOW and surrounding waters.

ERO Comment #81645: In response to Walleye limits on Lake of the Woods

I have no objection to conservation and protection of the fish populations and waterways. I believe slot sizes and possession limits are great tools already in place.

I don't agree with different catch limits vs possession limits. If a family of four wants to have a meal, and only one of the family members is a fisherman, it is unreasonable to



expect the fisherman to make multiple fishing trips on multiple days to do this. An individual should be allowed to catch enough to feed his family.

I also disagree with immediate release of fish, if it is considered a sport a fisherman should be allowed to measure, weigh and photograph the fish as long as they can do it without causing harm to the fish. A time limit for sure must be considered. The safe handling should also consider allowing the fish to be dipped in the live well or lake water to ensure the safety of the fish in the process. ie. Can be dipped in livewell as long as the fish is held (make it illegal to let go of the fish in the livewell as that could be considered keeping/possessing the fish to avoid abuse of the rules)

Keep fishing Lake of the Woods a sport (pictures and measurement needed) and a family source of food.

ERO Comment #81679: Penalizing Ontario residents and license purchasers by reducing limits on Lake of the Woods is not acceptable when other alternatives are available.

1/ Residents are forced to make concessions when fishing pressure increases in the southern end of Lake of the Woods and combines with more generous daily limits for the US citizens that flock there in all seasons. Winter fishing is out of control- take a ride down through the thousands and thousands of fishing huts. Let's have both countries on board here starting with Minnesota reducing their catch limit, adjusting season openers and recognizing spawning areas, river fishing and other vulnerable areas.

2/ Establish more spawning areas for closure in late winter- springtime. Ex.. Tranquil Channel closed for fishing till mid June.

3/ End the "blind eye" turned to native netting. Regulation of nets, outlawing gill nets and limiting netting in spawning areas has to be addressed. I have personally seen the thousands of game fish discarded on ice and shore in past years. I hope all are aware that this practice continues but now non marketable fish are "deep sixed" to remove evidence. Lake trout/northern/Muskie/crappie/ large walleye discarded!!!! Why are responsible sustenance harvesters not using trap nets. Those out on the lake continually see the unmarked and untended gill nets that MNR refuses to recognize as a problem.

4/ Remove the (1 over) 18" regulation. No need for trophy fish being removed.

5/ Limit the fish taken by tourist outfitters and enforce release of all not taken for daily shore lunch. No take home limit!!

6/ Limit all non Ontario residents to a reduced limit license.

I have fished Lake of the Woods for over 60 years and see much better fishing now than in my youth. There are an abundance of all size fish caught, and releasing of the larger spawning fish has proven to be building a healthy fishery. I question the science of this recent study on Lake of the Woods and think that restricting the local license purchasers

only postpones problems. Real issues have to be addressed by the MNR with proper regulation to ensure a healthy fishery in future generations.

ERO Comment #81743: The new proposed limit should have been in place 20 years ago. We are soon going to be at a place of no return. With the advancement of newer and better electronics every year the fish no longer have a chance. So called fishermen now pull up on reef after reef until their fish finder marks fish. Then they drop a camera down to see what kind of fish they are marking. The sport of fishing is no longer their.

If at all possible all fish finding equipment should be banned on the lakes as well. (Digital fish finders and cameras banned - only depth finders to mark depths should be allowed)

The fish no longer have a chance and will soon disappear as the electronics is getting better every year.

ERO Comment #81870: To whom it may concern.

The reduction of walleye with your proposal is flawed.

It increases the likelihood of increased hook and release until the largest legal size is caught. The damage to the mouth of the fish decreases it's survival.

My proposal to protect the species is to introduce barbless hooks. By doing this you decrease the likelihood of mortal damage caused by the barbs. After fishing LOW for many years I have never caught a fish with a damaged mouth. I think this indicates that their survival rate is poor.

My proposal is all that is necessary to conserve pickeral on LOW.

**Personal information redacted**

ERO Comment #81875: I am all in favour of conservation and see the proposed rules as a step in the right direction. However, the new rules will kill the tournaments and their contributions to the economy unless there are changes for photo options on the CRR. Competitors need to be able to catch/photograph and then immediately release their fish, including Thomas's fish that are outside the recommended size limits. This does not allow anglers to keep these fish, but does allow them to photograph and compete in the tournaments that has rules such as 3 largest fish, etc.

ERO Comment #81887: Happy Holidays Mr. MNRF Biologist,

I have been a fishing and hunting guide on Lake of the Woods for over 50 years.

My father bought our property in 1970 and we built our resort on the northeast corner of the lake from the ground up. I learned the art of cooking shorelunch in the late 60's and

did my first guided fishing trip with shore lunch at 12 years old. I am now 63 years old and still guiding fishermen to keep our nine cabins filled.

My guests eat usually 3-4 smaller fillets out on a wilderness Island and they can take two fish home to share with their families. That guarantees return customers year after year. By reducing the walleye/pickerel limit so that taxpayers can no longer catch and keep enough pickerel to have a fish fry for their family is a very clear indication that MNRF has failed to manage the pickerel/walleye stock in Lake of the Woods as a self sustaining fishery.

Also, as soon as you tell people they cannot keep enough fish to feed their families in a one day outing folks will just do it anyway, which will force them to break the law just to feed their family.

We have lived through the very embarrassing walleye wars of the 90's between Ontario and Minnesota (October 1999) and it's once again pitiful to hear the same basic nonsense and misinformed opinions coming out of the mouths of those on the current MNRF advisory committee. Most do not have the experience or the knowledge required to make suggestions on such an economically important subject.

#### **Personal information redacted**

First thing I would like to say is, the walleye/pickerel,( pickerel is a more appetizing name used by the commercial fishing industry) is not only a recreational fishery but is also an important food fishery. I say that because the walleye/pickerel is about the only fish that the majority of taxpaying Canadians and non resident tourists are willing to eat. The reduced limit on this popular fish will severely impact the sales of high priced non resident sport fishing licenses, which in turn impacts the entire region as the non residents will find other fisheries with more liberal limits, taking their tourism dollars out of Ontario.

Crappie, perch, whitefish, lake trout, burbot, and some pike also fit into the fish for food category, but do not draw the tourism dollars that the ever so popular walleye does.

The recreational fish species in Lake of the Woods I consider to be musky, bass and great northern pike, lake trout, burbot and sturgeon. Tax paying Canadians are no longer allowed to fish for sturgeon in Lake of the Woods because they protected and not managed, even though the sturgeon hatchery on Rainy River is very successful the last time we visited.

The anglers are definitely not responsible for depleting the large walleye biomass on the lake. Most anglers in the last 20 years followed the length limits as they were reduced and have accepted and gotten comfortable releasing walleye over 18" and the one over 18" allows an angler to to keep a larger walleye fatally injured in the release process. and if a 30" 10 pound walleye dies during the release process and the customer would like to get that fish mounted the law allows them to. Plus a taxidermy fish is the best and longest lasting marketing tool a resort operator can have.

Also if an angler were to release a walleye in a protected slot knowing it was going to die from torn gills, dropping on floor of boat or one of the many injuries that can occur, that angler would be breaking Ontario law for allowing fish flesh suitable for human consumption to spoil.

I have been a buyer of Lake of the Woods commercial fish for over 30 years. I do believe Lake of the Woods can sustain a commercial fishery.

However the days of the gill net must come to an end.

The commercial fishers must make the switch to modern trap style gear similar to what they traditionally used before the modern gill nets.

With the current day gill nets there are far to many mature spawning non target species being killed and wasted. Many indigenous fishers are not concerned about the waste because the birds, dogs and fur-bearing animals usually eat the fish that are perfectly suitable for human consumption.

The MNRF biologists should be responsible for learning and then teaching the new methods of harvesting target species without the enormous waste that happens with gillnets.

Then continuing the education fishers can strip enough mature walleyes for the roe and milt and put them in the much needed hatchery that can be incorporated into clean water drinking systems the many indigenous communities that are asking for.

Even though the biologists over the years have said stocking walleye in our lake would do no good, I totally disagree because we need a walleye hatchery in Kenora for the education to continue.

And I believe it would show that someone cares. Right few one seem to care about the resource or the fishing industry

Last year I had **Personal information redacted** witnessing the commercial fish coming in. If I did not accept that fish most of it would have frozen in the tubs and gone to the dump. It happens all the time.

Now that Ive told my story here are my recommendations:

1. save some reprint money and leave the walleye regulations as they are, instead of confusing people and taking the fun out of fishing by levying fines for ridiculous laws and changes that people don't even know exist.

Current regulations are accepted, and for the most part understood and followed by the majority of tax paying anglers, resident and non-resident alike.

2. Four walleye/ sauger combination with only 1 over 18" should stay the same.
3. No actual slot limit is necessary.
4. Remove the walleye party fishing regulation which is insanely ridiculous. Few even know that is a law and it is never followed.

In closing **Personal information redacted** and we have spent many hours together on the land and on the international water that is Lake of the Woods and he shares my views 100%

ERO Comment #81898: Hello I don't agree with changing the limits, but think the season should be changed . Close April 1 and open 3 rd Saturday of May.

Changing slots sizes will help... but I think, changing the season, will help. I think, all people who fish LOW, should have the same limits, if we truly want to make a difference in the fishing population.

Nets should be banned, or more accountability around the use of nets! Maybe restricted the areas where they can use a net and reduce the number of nets . Nets aren't big checked, from what I saw this summer fishing. Extremely frustrating, that other people actions, again .. are impacting on me.

I find fishing extremely expensive now, to fish.... not sure how much I will fish, if the limits change from 4 to 2. I , fish to help ease my groceries bill, but with the price of gas , it is hard to go for just two fish

ERO Comment #81953: I certainly support a plan to bolster the walleye fishery in LOTW, as it is clearly under tremendous pressure. I am a Canadian cottage owner on the lake, and though I very much enjoy a meal of fresh walleye, I am supportive of changes to the regulations to maintain the fishery.

However, I do not agree with a proposal that reduces my catch limits but has no impact on the catch limits of US residents.

Given that US anglers form the lions share (by far) of anglers in Canadian waters, they are clearly having the lions share of the impact on our stocks. Thus, for changes to the regulations to be impactful, it would make sense to ensure the US angler take is reduced proportionally. In the current regulations, non-residents (US) have lower catch limits (by half) than residents of Canada. They are allowed 2 fish on a Sport or Conservation license. In the proposed regulations, US residents fall under the same Sport license as a resident, which is proposed to be 2 fish. Thus, with these proposed regulations, there is absolutely no change to the impact on the fishery that the vast majority of anglers (US) will make. The anglers who are contributing most to the decline in walleye stocks in our waters are not impacted by the proposed changes. We cut the catch limits for Canadians fishing in Canadian waters, and who make up the smallest portion of the angling effort,

and we leave the limits the same for US fishermen who make up the majority of the anglers in our waters. This makes no sense at all if the objective is to reduce pressure on walleye stocks. The number one ecological issue, Harvest is Too High, will barely be impacted by these changes, and it will be only Canadians who pay the price of the changes.

Certainly there are socio-economic issues to consider. But Section 2.2 states “Where there is conflict between the socio-economic objective and the ecological objective, the ecological objective shall take precedence.” This is clearly NOT being considered with this approach.

Given how much of the fishery pressure is born by US residents, and the proposed changes do not impact their catch limits, how can we expect to improve the fishery, if that is the primary objective? Goal #1 and Goal #2 (section 2.1 LOTW Fisheries Management Goals) are doomed to fail with this model. How can we expect a 40% reduction in the harvest when the catch limits of 81% of those fishing are not impacted by this proposal? I also wonder if changes to regulations in US waters, to match what we are doing, are being considered? As I understand, walleye fishing in the Big Traverse (mostly from US fisherman) takes an incredible toll on the walleye stocks. Are we clamping down on our catch limits to allow that unsustainable catch to continue?

ERO Comment #81957: Why do Canadians fishing in Canadian waters have their catch limits cut in half (Sport fishing goes from 4 to 2 fish), while Americans fishing in Canadian waters have their catch limits left unchanged (Sport goes from 2 fish to 2 fish)?

Cut everyone's catch limits in half and you might see a dramatic improvement. Leave the catch limits of the majority of fisherman (US) unchanged and you won't do much of anything, except anger Canadian anglers.

ERO Comment #81991: This approach doesn't seem very fair or well-balanced. For the smallest cohort of anglers on the lake, by far, Canadians, we are proposing to cut the catch limit in half. For the largest cohort of anglers on the lake, by far, Americans, we are proposing to leave the catch limits unchanged. It just doesn't make sense that this would be a strategy to reduce fishing pressure in a significant way. The largest cohort should have catch limits reduced accordingly if we expect any result. If the argument being made is that it is more the change in size limits that is the management tool, which it seems to be if we are not making any changes to the catch limits of the largest fishing cohort, then why not just leave the catch limits for Canadians unchanged since it is a very small pressure in the first place, and let the change in size limits work its magic.

This isn't intended to specifically target our friends in the US, but is simply a matter of managing two fishing cohorts, Americans and Canadians. We have to at least make changes proportionally in each demographic if we expect positive results. Leaving the catch limits of the largest cohort unchanged and reducing the smallest cohort seems a backwards approach.

How about cutting the limits of each demographic by one fish; Canadians are reduced from 4 to 3 fish, and Americans from 2 to 1. That would be more fair, and have a significant impact on the ecosystem. I don't think that reducing the catch limit by 1 fish will have much impact on the throngs of Americans coming here to fish. And even if it does, isn't that the point to some extent. We need to reduce the fishing pressure on the lake, and Americans exert the vast majority of that pressure. For meaningful improvements in the fishery we need either less people fishing on the lake, or fewer fish being kept. We can't have our walleye and eat them too. Something has to give, at least a little. We have too many lodges with too many clients being led by professional guides, and too many day-trippers, all catching too many fish. Again, this isn't a slam against our US friends or the lodges, it is simply that demographic that is too large and it has to be reined in a bit if the lake is to survive.

The current proposal does nothing, absolutely nothing, to reduce the numbers of fishermen or the catch limits of that largest demographic, but instead puts all the cuts onto the small cohort of Canadian anglers, a cohort so small that it seems pointless to reduce their catch limits if we aren't going to reduce catch limits of the large cohort. This seems quite unfair, and unproductive in terms of improving the fishery.

Have we considered the sauger population in this? Maybe it's just me, but the lake seems to be teeming with small sauger lately. Why not have a separate and fairly liberal catch limit for sauger, for those that just want a "walleye" lunch? It would reduce the numbers of little sauger, which might help the walleye. I don't know if that's viable, or even true; I don't have the data to back it up, but our fisheries biologists might.

ERO Comment #82001: This proposal should be placed on immediate hold until research design and data is allowed to be analyzed by a third party and by the public with added exploration to damages to the regional communities by way of economic pressures. The proposal includes scattered and dated research claims with no specific metric comparisons to the references supplied nor data to prove that the lake is in any way threatened for Walleye population. The further claim that climate change and crayfish are threats to the population has no basis. If the fishery is threatened, and I don't see data to confirm this, then the methods suggested to preserve biomass is biased toward cutting the limit in half and there is no suggestion nor research to maintaining a strict upper limit, nor eliminating indiscriminate gillnetting and moving to trap netting for commercial fishing, nor eliminating commercial fishing altogether. Placing the proposal with a Jan 9 cut-off across the December season has limited the public's review and access and the proposal needs to be suspended until a proper review is allowed and ensured.

ERO Comment #82121: Recreational Walleye Plan - First of your consultation process was lacking and irresponsible. Most people did not even know it happened, especially on such an important issue. I live on the Winnipeg River and have concerns of all those fishermen coming to the River or other small lakes to fish for their walleye. Which will decrease the walleye population in these areas, thus just moving the problem elsewhere. People are going to poach, as they want to eat the walleye, not bass or perch. Most of the fishermen on the Lake are from the US, not Ontario, so why not reduce their limits.

Will those fish that are caught and released survive - not likely. How do Metis and Aboriginal fit into these changes - were they consulted. Commercial fishery is in disarray and poorly regulated or checked. Commercial fisheries target larger fish. The large predatory fish will destroy the walleye population - they consume them. To summarize, I strongly do not believe the proposed changes to the regulations regarding walleye will be beneficial to the walleye fishery in LOW & surrounding waters.

Thank You.

**Personal information redacted**

ERO Comment #82123: Punishing/Targeting Local Anglers / Canadian Residents and reducing our limits from 4 to 2 doesn't make sense. Especially when you can keep 4 walleyes everywhere else in FMZ 4 and FMZ 5 specifically inland lakes and the Winnipeg River.

The slot on the Winnipeg River and Rainy Lake has had positive effects. Implement the slot but not the changes to the daily limits for Canadian Anglers. See how the slot works first. Do this in a thoughtful and gradual approach as opposed to hitting Ontario/Canadian residents during the worst time - right after covid and with inflation at an all time high.

If you're going to reduce my limit from 4 to 2 - then I want a fishing license at 50 % of the cost.

Reducing the Daily limit from 4 to 2 fish will shift local anglers to fishing on other waterbodies like the Winnipeg River and inland lakes where they can keep 2x the lake of the Woods Limit. That's a poor way of doing business, sacrifice other waterbodies to ""save"" another. Be consistent in your approach.

ERO Comment #82126: Leave it alone. There has been enough with the shut down, that the Governments imposed over the last 2 years, for the lake to recover from what ever your findings are. To all account, fishing is good on the lake and if you want to impose any further restrictions, perhaps look at limits for First Nations. They take more then needed and waste alot too. I grew up here, and fishing limits was 6 for many years. Now it is 4 which I think is reasonable and the lake can handle it. So putting it to 2 will destroy an already weak tourist economy , and affect more businesses in Kenora to a point of people leaving the area cause of over regulation. Just another nail in the coffin of Kenora. Every level of government in this area is over regulating and causing more damage then good for the people of this area.

So I say No to the reduction of the fishing limits.

ERO Comment #82127: It would be smart to make sure the new rules are similar to other surrounding bodies of water, such as the Winnipeg River. The river has had different regulations for many years after a declining fish population. It would be sad to see anglers target these areas instead of the lake of the woods and threaten the fish population.

ERO Comment #82128: Close all commercial fishing on lake of the woods for 5 years.



Do not allow non resident walleye possession and set limit to 2 walleye a day for local residents.

Do a better job with water stewardship and create an enforcement and investigation body to go after all the camps that have inadequate sewer systems. Require anyone in the water shed to go through an environmental assessment for any work done to shoreline and 200 feet from it. Set up a 1 800 number to allow people to report anyone damaging the watershed.

Better signage for boat launches to educate people about invasive species and have ministry of environment offices enforcing clean hulls and bilges at random boat launches and hand out fines to anyone who does not follow these rules. Set up more boat cleaning areas at launches and require anyone entering the water way to use them on way in and out.

ERO Comment #82129: Keep the limit at the current levels enforce possession limits. A major number of private camps on the lake are harvesting well over their limits and storing the walleye in their freezers. Once again hurting the average angler we have an enforcement issue. Need far more wardens on the lake.

ERO Comment #82130: Less aggressive fishing U.S side.....lower limits.....US side. The Minnesota portion of the lake is pressuring walleye far too aggressively. Not the Manitoba or Ontario portions. The winter fishery has exploded, more or less unchecked. Stop avoiding the most impactful threat to the fishery on lake of the woods.

ERO Comment #82131: Less aggressive fishing U.S side.....lower limits.....US side. The Minnesota portion of the lake is pressuring walleye far too aggressively. Not the Manitoba or Ontario portions. The winter fishery has exploded, more or less unchecked. Stop avoiding the most impactful threat to the fishery on lake of the woods. Minnesota resident daily limits are 4 sauger and 4 walleye, for a total of 8 fish! Ours is combined limit of 4. Coupled with the fact that the Minnesota fishery is hit with a much larger population of fishermen (seemingly endless barrage of ice huts). Our reduction will do nothing, but limit local food sources, and hinder resorts on the Ontario portion of the lake. We have got to pressure our neighbours to the south, to stop abusing the resource as such. They will kill the fishery if we idly stand by.

Respectfully,

**Personal Information Redacted** Concerned and caring steward of our beautiful and bountiful Lake of The Woods. Feel free to contact me, I will speak to the issue in discussion. Advocacy for a bright future is essential. Let's not be reactive but proactive. The numbers are speaking to us, let listen, plan and act together.

ERO Comment #82132: I agree conservation of the entire Lake of the Woods fishery for future generations is imperative. However I believe the proposed changes will have a detrimental impact on recreational walleye anglers as well as catch-and-release

tournament anglers while not addressing the over harvest of prime reproductive aged walleye. The regulations regarding not being able to possess a walleye outside the slot sizes in order to take a photograph are unreasonable and unnecessary. And allowing the possession of one walleye over 70cm makes no sense when the data shows a low number of old walleye in the system. Leaving the daily catch and possession limits as is (Resident 4 sport/2 conservation and Non-resident 2 sport/1 conservation) with a slot size of 35-45 cm the same as Rainy Lake and the Winnipeg River makes sense. Simple to follow and simple to enforce. This provides a balanced approach to achieve the desired objectives of the management plan while minimizing the economic impact on the local tourism industry including walleye angling related businesses that serve the Lake of the Woods region. Another option would be to allow the purchase of a “catch and release only” license with no daily possession limit for those who wish to fish but not keep any walleye.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into this important matter.

ERO Comment #82134: Growing up on Lake of the Woods (Morson area) I do have to say that if EVERYONE doesn't participate in this conservation effort it will not be successful. That would include the aggressive netting of fish and also the Minnesota fishing rules on Lake of the Woods state side. It needs to be ALL or nothing to be successful. Otherwise it only will affect the few locals. This will not preserve the walleye!

ERO Comment #82135: To whom it may concern The new LOW limit walleye proposal is flawed.

1- It will increase the hook and release until they catch the largest legal fish. Because of reduced limits no one will want to keep 2 small fish and will target the larger 43 cm size to have enough for a meal.

2- Hook and release has been proven to increase mortality especially during the peak summer season when the water Temps are +20, that is the time when there is most pressure on the resource.

3- My proposal to protect and increase the survival rate is to implement barbless hooks. The use of barbless hooks makes for a easier release without too much damage. Some will say it will be more difficult to hold the fish but there are techniques that can be learned to land the fish.

I personally think this is the best alternative to maintain and increase the resource.

4- In my years of fishing LOW, I have never caught a wounded or healed fish that had an obvious damaged mouth. The question is WHY.

5- Your alternative proposal for catching between 35 and 43 cm will increase mortality by having to release fish under and over the limit.

6- STOP the walleye tournaments as this is just a ruthless, damaging way to catch the largest fish.

7- Implementing barbless hooks is all you need to conserve and replenish the resource.

ERO Comment #82136: Commercial fishing needs to be better monitored. Every year people come across floating nets full of dead fish. I've personally seen dead pallet loads of fish in nets in a Morson Twp dump.

Designate Rainy River as a no fish zone from ice out to the May 24. The river is over fished during this period and the damage to spawning fish devastating. Be it catch and release or not.

Ice fishing at the mouth of the Rainy River and vicinity is too populated. Ice fishing sees more anglers coming to the Baudette Mn area than traditional summer fishing. Ice fishing villages put a terrific, location specific, strain on the fish population. Not to mention the environment concerns of garbage and human.

I realize two of these issues are international in scope but the lake and fish are unaware of that.

ERO Comment #82137: I myself have been a contributor to LOTW creel study. The first couple of times it feels intimidating. One assumes game wardens are there to search you. If you spend enough time on the lake you learn about the creel study and why they are doing it. In my opinion the majority of anglers feel threatened by the presence of what they feel is authority. Therefore they say "" we haven't caught anything yet"" or "" it's very slow today"". Hopefully after such a comment they won't be boarded to have their mandatory safety requirements searched.

I have never had such great walleye fishing on LOTW. Every trip out I catch an insane amount under 12 inches. More than I could ever want from 13-18 inches. Plenty of trophy walleye still in the lake as well. I used to guide on the south end of the lake. I still have a home here. I feel that the fish have changed their patterns. The forage is no longer in the same place, at the same time, year after year. Whether it is due to the rusty crow? Or perhaps the introduction of zebra mussels? The walleye population is as healthy as ever on the Canadian side. Changing the limit to 2 a day and 4 in possession will only force anglers to go out more to catch their 4 fish. Burning more fuel. Causing more harm to the environment. Anglers will feel they need to keep their 1 big fish every time. I feel this is a huge mistake and will only cause more problems. Limits should be reduced. On the American side!

ERO Comment #82138: The slot size on the river has not worked and with two years of COVID and tourist resorts shut down I find it hard to believe our fishing has gotten worse, we have not been affected by climate change or invasive species so I am at a loss as to where this information or proposals are coming from

ERO Comment #82139: I think that it's important to protect the walleye population more diligently during their spawning season.

In the event of an "early" spring, when the waters warm to near 40 degrees before the season is closed, the spawning population can be under tremendous pressure from anglers out after "the big one."

Even in a catch & release situation, I think many of the large spawning females are stressed by the fishing activity and a great many could be injured or die from the trauma of being caught & released.

I live and fish on the Rainy River and have noted a surprising increase in the spring fishing activity where the river is inundated with fishermen (primarily from the American side.)

The numbers of fish being caught must be astronomical & many of those caught are large females still full of spawn.

I have witnessed downstream from the "hot spots" where many large walleye are floating on top of the water and dying from being caught & released.

I think closing the season at the end of March to ALL angling for walleye would go a long way to protect them during this delicate time and would likely increase the chances of a successful spawn for the species.

A large female can produce in the neighbourhood of 400,000 eggs and if more of them are allowed to do so successfully, without outside pressure from anglers, we are far more likely to have a healthy population of young walleyes to grow into adulthood over the years.

ERO Comment #82140: Please do not ignore the issue of commercial fishing on lake of the woods.

ERO Comment #82141: Canadians, for the most part, obey the rules, but residents of the USA will never agree to lower the amount of fish caught. They will continue to rape the Lake, until they ruin the fishing for all..

ERO Comment #82142: If you decrease the walleye limit on lotw, please reduce it on Black Sturgeon and the Winnipeg river.

I believe you have to have the same limits and slot sizes on these waterbodies due to their locations.

Another option would be to go with the same slot you for Winnipeg river and lotw.

ERO Comment #82143: If residents of Ontario are being forced to these changes because of the supposed reduction of fish, why are we still allowing Americans the same limits while fishing in Canadian waters?

I am a citizen of Canada and again I am being penalized for living in Canada.

The Americans are allowed to fish there waters and bring home the same limits.

This is another attack the Canadian democracy.

You did it with the extinction of the sturgeon.

We are not allowed to fight or land a sturgeon if caught on the Ontario side of the Rainy River, but yet there is still a season on the Minnesota side.

If there is a problem with the survival of walleye on Lake of the Woods it is because of the Americans, not Canadians.

ERO Comment #82144: There no shortage of walleye in lake of the woods messing with the the limits will hurt tourist operator business

ERO Comment #82145: I fell this will not help the situation of over fishing,

Netting needs to be BETTER monitored forgotten nets killing thousands of fish.  
The limit of 4 should also stand the same for Lake of the Woods in the United Staes.

ERO Comment #82146: There is a significant impact of these regulations to two large tournaments in the area. Catch and release verbage must be updated to be able to continue these Catch photo and release tournaments or significant economic impact will exist, despite the claims of this proposal

ERO Comment #82147: Leave the limits as they are. Lowering them will put more pressure on smaller inland lakes. Closing the season earlier in the spring on LOW and Rainy River or all ON lakes for that matter will have a bigger impact.

ERO Comment #82148: We share the lake with the Americans and Manitoba, so how is it fair that there is three different limits. One lake one regulation fair and equitable for all. Last year was a strange year with water level so high, so I believe that testing for fish population is askew. More tests need to be done, and in different areas of the lake to get a better understanding of the population.

I believe that the season should be closed third Saturday in March and not open until the first Saturday in June. Several times I have caught fish still filled with eggs in early April and on Opening weekend in May.

I also think four fish in a slot size like the Winnipeg River should be the next step. This would help the population greatly and a shorter season would give the walleye a chance. Thank you for your time.

ERO Comment #82149: I think the Preferred Proposal would be the best one. Always thought all fishermen (Canadian and non-residents) should have the same bag limit. We don't keep any fish over 18" and I think this is great.

ERO Comment #82150: Comments based on over 40 years on the lake and observations.

The message has been communicated consistently to the MNR that something must be done about netting by First Nation. Nets are currently sunken and unmarked, not checked regularly, fish left to die or rot, no registering of catch and people self identifying as Metis FN netting. As a property owner we have first hand knowledge of this.

Further there needs to be a collaborative limit for LOW that includes Manitoba, Minnesota and Ontario.

Lack of enforcement. Over the past 40 years we have observed American Anglers not following regulation including over limit and over size as well as culling of live fish held often resulting in death. Rarely do we see enforcement staff.

The notation in evidence regarding free trade access to resources in Ontario was never formally challenged. During the period non resident anglers were required to have property or stay at licensed resorts the free trade access issue was raised by US. It did not go to legal challenge but was abandoned.

As an Ontario resident and property owner you are subject to the same rules as non residents which is unfair.

Until the above issues are addressed the recovery of the fishery will be hampered.

ERO Comment #82151: Well, well, it looks like our fishing lodges have gotten all lawyered-up, otherwise why would the survey ask if the feedback is personal or from a lawyer representing a client. And they have managed to bully the Panel into making no changes to the catch limits of non-residents. Since almost every angler on the lake is a non-resident that amounts to doing nothing to reduce the walleye harvest, so I suppose we can expect the walleye population to go the way of the Atlantic cod. What will our lodge cartel do then, when the non-residents simply stop coming because there are no fish left. And to add insult they have cut the resident catch limit in half, the ones who there are so few of they have almost no impact on the walleye harvest. I suppose we are easy targets.

Socioeconomic factors rule the day, again. The non-residents come, take, and leave. When the fish are gone, they will be gone. They fished out the land of 10,000 lakes, and will do the same to LOTW. Yet the residents who actually own the lake, who own

properties, pay taxes and contribute untold millions to the economy don't seem to matter. Short term gain for long term pain. Brilliant!

Who on the Panel was representing the interests of the resident anglers? Who on the Panel was representing the interests of the ecology of LOTW, which the Panel was charged with protecting in the first place? It seems no one. This proposal should be dumped, along with the Panel that created it.

ERO Comment #82152: The Ontario Government (namely Toronto) is again using policies and mandates and the ""maybe"" climate change to inflict more restrictions on Northwestern Ontarians. The preferred and optional proposed regulations are discriminatory to the local sport fishing people.

I believe the harvesting practices also need to be addressed, regulated, monitored and enforced. More work needs to be done in consultation with First Nation communities on LOTW. Gaining the collaboration of the FN leadership to promote the understanding of the harm in overfishing within their communities is important.

Have the netting methods and sizes of net webbing been studied/addressed?

Instead of the reduction in the daily limits for sport and conservation limits, why not use size restrictions to sustain the older/larger walleye populations?

MY COMMENT: KEEP THE CURRENT FISHING REGULATIONS ON LOTW!  
A Kenora Metis fisherwoman with an ancestral history on LOTW.

ERO Comment #82154: Having worked for the government for 30 years this proposal has all the wording and earmarks of final decision having been made. And doubtful that anything will change what is about to happen. LOTWs has had two summers of Covid-19 regulations that prevented non-residents from coming into Canada and Canadian resorts during the summers of 2020 and 2021. This had to have a major positive impact on the fish population. Has this had no effect on the numbers. Are they even included in the numbers used to determine the negative impact on the fish populations. It seems it's possible this has been in the works for a number of years and will not be changed. My experience is that this is a done deal and a total waste of money doing consultations. The government will meet its duty to consult, but don't expect anything to change.

ERO Comment #82155: I do not support these changes for Ontario residents, this is an attack on working class people that simply want to enjoy a walleye feed for dinner, with a daily limit of 2 that is no longer possible.

ERO Comment #82158: In my humble opinion you need to monitor / place restrictions on First Nations fisherman / women as well. I think their fishing rights are mostly responsible for the depletion of walleye supply. I am not a racist and hold a Metis card myself but in all fairness you need to first do a study on how many fish / year they are taking out of the lake. And you want to limit the rest of us ? let's make this fair / not racial / but fair please.

ERO Comment #82159: I'd like to see sanctuaries at tranquil channel like there is in Ignace area. They saved Indian lake. And stricter slot sizes.

We all know the Metis cards are going to be coming out and the fish are going to be kept anyways.

Thanks

ERO Comment #82160: We should still be able to take photos of the fish. This is ruining the women's tournament. We do not harm any fish. Please allow photos to be taken of the fish.

ERO Comment #82161: This is a very disappointing policy

I fishing in a women's fishing tournament

It is a catch and release - we just take picture of the fish we caught and send it in

How does taking a picture hurt?

Please revisit you policies and think of people already doing their part to keep a healthy fish population!

I think , every one should be accountable if their catches , regardless of who we are

Thanks

ERO Comment #82162: This is going to impact our economy more then we realize, as well frustrate locals who fish lake of the wood and or own property. It is going to make lake of the woods a less popular destination for locals and tourists alike.

Could we not just have the 14-17" slot and keep our limits the same , there is no point in keeping a walleye over 18" and that is the breeding population ! Can we learn from the slot size on the river and how that has seemed to work great ! It make social gatherings of friends and family for a fish fry very hard if not impossible. This is our lifestyle and I understand something has to be done but lowering the limit is not the answer in my opinion.

Lac suel regulation seem to work well

ERO Comment #82163: Start with taking sport to 3 fish. I think the sizing changes are good. I would say zero over 70 cm. No need to kill trophy fish. Do tournaments get exceptions?

ERO Comment #82164: Anglers should be able to take photos of fish outside the sized-based regulations. The LOTW Women's Walleye Tournament would not be able to run without taking photos of these fish. I imagine it would also harm the tourism industry. If anglers can't take a photo of the big fish they caught, they aren't going to want to fish



LOTW and outfitters will lose business. I agree with including one fish greater than 70cm until the MNRF can review Section 12 of the OFR.

ERO Comment #82165: We need to take photos of the fish we catch for our women's walleye tournament to be a success.

We monitor and practice safe catch n release of the walleye in lake of the woods.

ERO Comment #82166: HI There

I am excited to see changes to protect the Walleye on Lake of the Woods but more now then ever we need to be able to take pictures of our catches no matter what size or species. The regulation that says a fish must be released immediately needs to be changed to allow a quick picture. If this could be amended at the same time as the other regulation change that would be amazing.

There is the Ladies Walleye Tournaments that is Catch, record and release and the new regulations are going to hurt it. Allowing the picture change can keep the LOTWWWT it alive but can only encourage conservation buy encouraging other tournaments to go the same way.

Beside, taking a child or grandchild out and having to release a big fish with out getting a picture is just sad :(

Please share with the Minister of Natural Resources Graydon Smith & Minister Greg Rickford

Thank you

ERO Comment #82167: As a part of the LOTW Women's Walleye Tournament, it is incredibly important for anglers in our tournament to be able to photograph all fish caught before release.

The tournament switched to the Catch-Capture-Release format a few years ago to ensure that fish survival rate was at its highest.

I am in favour to the new rules in order to protect the species but also, please allow for tournament anglers to photograph all of their fish as an exception to these new imposed rules.

ERO Comment #82168: You are not addressing the elephant in the room on the Canadian side of the lake, we all know what the problem is on the US side it's 10000 fish houses with not enough enforcement. The few fish that the tourists, and recreational anglers are taking on the Canadian is nothing. There is no mention of all the nets in the lake, which are unmarked, it's absolutely disgusting of what's going on, and I've personally been told by you (the mnr), you really have no idea how many lbs are being taken out this way, fish

are being sold and not reported. The mnr is afraid of telling the truth, afraid of the backlash of actually addressing this problem.

ERO Comment #82169: We need to be able to take photos of fish we RELEASE for LOWWWT

ERO Comment #82170: The people in eastern Ontario deciding what is best for us dumb northerners again. I live in Kenora and a lot of people I know have heard the rumours about the changes but the east has now made it fact. Not much consultation with the general public, just with a bunch of yes men. Well one good thing is if the limit is cut in half, so should the price of a fishing license. Don't you agree or is this all about money. Have a good day.

ERO Comment #82171: I agree with this decision for 2 years only then to go back to existing arrangement

ERO Comment #82172: "I'd like to be able to release the fish I catch in the annual Lake of the Woods Womens tournament I participate in.

**Personal information redacted**

ERO Comment #82173: The MNR should review whats happening on the MN side of the lake. The amount of fish kept on the canadian side is a drop in the bucket in comparison to whats leaving the lake from the minnesota side.

ERO Comment #82174: The change to limits isn't going to make things better. If anything it is either going to deter people from fishing as often and enjoying the water or it will give people more reason to poach. I am a guide on LOTW and the walleye population to me is better then ever. The walleyes are simply just shallower chasing bait. Less walleye live in the main basins which is why I think this is a flawed analysis. Keep it 4 and take the limit down for non-residents as they are the ones who take over limits as they eat there shore lunch and take a limit home every day they go. Also, the change to the picture regulation is only going to steer people away from fishing and enjoying catching quality fish. Tournament officials who stand by protecting the fishery by only using photo images are not going to have the opportunity to grow the sport. Promote safe handling and don't steer people away from the joy of fishing, that's the memories.

ERO Comment #82175: Limiting the amount of walleye we are allowed to keep is going to hurt our entire lake of the woods area. Tourism is a huge part of our economy and this will deter people from coming.

Also a lot of us rely on the 4 walleye we can keep as a good source. It might be more affective to limit the slot size of the 4 fish we are allowed to keep.

Also in our area the winter harvest of walleye from the communities netting is drastically decreasing the walleye population. I'd propose there needs to be limits put on them if you are truly looking to boost the fishery.

2 walleye per person is going to hurt business and people.

Also for tournaments this will kill the local tournaments and hurt businesses and the community that benefits from the increased foot traffic.

Thank you so much for your consideration.

**Personal information redacted**

ERO Comment #82176: The walleye fishing gets better every year on lotw. If anything apply same slot size as Winnipeg river - lac seul

ERO Comment #82177: I believe catch and kill regs should have been implemented years ago. Never understood why LOW would be different than Lac Seul. Culling rules have been a large contributor to our problems as well as protective regs for northern pike

This problem should have been addressed much earlier and we likely wouldn't be in this situation

ERO Comment #82178: The normal guys going out and catching a limit is not the problem for lotw!!! Why shame on us?? Get rid of them damn privileges for nets that catch hundreds at a time never mind the countless ones that I have found full of dead rotten fish - WE ARE NOT THE PROBLEM

ERO Comment #82179: Absolutely not. Constantly throwing more restrictions on hunting and fishing that all of us anglers/hunters are expected to remember and when we don't we are hit with a fine and thrown into the news .

Put the restrictions on the atrocious amount of netting that happens on LOTW. No one monitors that and there is a ton of waste from it.

ERO Comment #82180: I do not agree with the proposed changes. I have been fishing on Lake of the Woods by the entire life. The fishing has not declined. Leave the limits alone. We feed our family with these fish in a traditional way. It is our way of life and our land. If you want to do a slot size like the Winnipeg River that would be fine. The price of gas to go out two days in a row is absurd! And what about USA limits!!!! Really they can already take more than us and it is the same Lake just an invisible border! Please don't go ahead with the proposed changes. It will also severely affect tourism in our area!

ERO Comment #82181: This reduction in limits on lake of the woods is ridiculous. I agree a slot size should be imposed, however the average family that uses the lake and would like to consume fish simply can't acquire enough for a daily meal by this methodology. Rather than penalize patrons of the water body, how about some enforcement for the irresponsible indigenous netting that is going on in the lake? Floating nets with 100s of dead walleyes are common in recent years. This is more impactful to the water body than sportfishing.

If Ontario schedules a change to the regulation, then limits must also be reduced for Manitoba residents as well as Minnesota residents. Crippling tourist camps and chasing away commerce by reducing limits isn't the answer.

ERO Comment #82182: Hey I think the proposal is dumb.

1- limits are 6 across the boarder(same lake)

2-netting ( a lot of illegal nets )

3- fishing the last few years with covid had alot less traffic because of lock ups and tourist camps closed

4- as a Ontario resident the limit should be kept the same. Any out of province and none Canadian citizens should not have the same as a resident of Ontario (Kenora) we get hit so hard with fuel prices and launching fees for this lake. It's like we are a minority of commenters but should be respected

ERO Comment #82183: 2 under 17 2 over 22

ERO Comment #82184: The issue is not the normal fisherman or weekend fisherman. Lake of the woods problem is netting that takes place. Many people have found abandoned nets or piles of wasted fish on shore from the nets. No one is ever held accountable and instead there is a push to lower the limits of regular fisherman. This will not fix any issues when the netting continues .

ERO Comment #82185: First of all, any changes to sport fishing regs are mostly meaningless without addressing indigenous commercial and sustenance fishing. I'm thinking of one gentleman from **Personal information redacted** in the fall of 2021 putting a sustenance net across the southern entrance to Stoney portage bay and retaining 1100 walleye in a 1 day set, then boasting about it around the community. (At least it was just a 1 day set, but don't get me started on long/forgotten sets). That spot went from hundred fish afternoons to hardly catching anything the rest of 2021 and it was also no good in 2022. I also fear reduced limits will end up increasing demand on commercial fish. Finally, when cooking fish fries at local resorts and breeding the commercial fish used, it is worth noting that there are a large number of the fish that would fall in the proposed slot. What is the point of protecting these fish from recreational anglers and then allowing them to fall to the commercial fishers who seem to have no limits?

As far as the proposed regulations go, it is a shame that we are in a position of having to reduce resident limits in conjunction with the introduction of a slot. All the operators and guides I know have been screaming for a slot for years. It would have been nice to see if the introduction of a slot years ago would have prevented us from having to also reduce limits. I don't keep fish over 18, or allow my clients to. But many non-guided Americans, and residents alike, have never thought twice about keeping a prime breeding sized walleye - because it was their right to do so! I love the slot, but don't love the resident limit reduction. I wish you would have listened years ago. I brought this issue up in 2006 at the MNR meeting in Nestor falls that was addressing the decreasing moose population.

At the time the bios there said that the lodge operators didn't want to see the slot brought in. Over the years since that meeting, I have never met a lodge owner who said they were opposed to a slot. So it's about time, and you all really should be ashamed that it has come to having the LOTW walleye population showing signs of trouble before doing something. Although I'm not surprised.

ERO Comment #82186: It would be nice if a walleye stocking program was initiated. Especially in whitefish bay where there are not many walleye to begin with.

ERO Comment #82187: I have no problem with only being able to harvest 2 walleyes on lake of the woods. The only concern i have with the limits is that the americans should have to follow suit. from my understanding the limit on the american side of lake of the woods is 6 walleyes. in the past few years I've joined a fishing page of facebook which is called lotw fishing, i was absolutely blown away by the amount of people coming to this lake to fish. along with the countless amount of outfitters that plow endless roads and rent ice shacks. i had to check it out for myself and when i got down there i could not believe the amount of fishing going on in that end of the lake. personally i don't think we are the problem.

ERO Comment #82188: This is not a welcomed idea at all. If we are going to bring in a better slot limit, then eliminate the possession of anything bigger than 21”.

If someone wants a trophy, then make it this way, no fish between 21-30” to be kept. The lake is full of walleye, and we do not need to restrict the possession limit.

ERO Comment #82189: I totally disagree with the proposal you are thinking for implementing. It is time you address the problem and quit hiding behind the elephant on the lake.

On the Canadian side I have witnessed unmarked nets even hit them with our boat. They are gps marked using the cell phone to find them so the MNR has no idea how many are out there. The tourists and private fishermen take a very small percentage of fish taken. I personally have seen net lifters come in with a boat filled to the gunnels on a daily basis. We have found abandoned nets full of dead fish. When they are not tagged the licencing body has no idea who set them or how many there are.

On the American side, the number of wheel houses and sleeper houses are getting to be unreal. The fishermen live out there for a week at a time eating fish daily and then fill their cooler to take home. They are moving farther out on the lake and now are almost to the boundary between the 2 countries.

Decreasing the limit for the tourist or private fisherman will never solve the problem. As for people keeping big fish. As far as keeping them to eat. We all know they are too grainy and coarse to eat so I would say 99% of them are released.

ERO Comment #82190: I totally agree that walleye populations have been declining significantly. Believe it or not I feel as though covid was a very good thing for lake of the woods. I believe that option 2 is better for a more restricted slot size. Another problem that seems to never be mentioned is that if a shore lunch is offered to guests at lodges then they theoretically have already caught their catch and eaten it. They should not be allowed to fish for that species once they have done that. In theory if a group comes to our area. Fishes all day and has a shore lunch they should not have the same possession limit. Now they have eaten 4 walleyes over the 2 days of fishing and now they are heading home with another 4 to max out their possession limit. Guided trips should be mandatory. Guides should have to meet guidelines and know what they are or are not allowed to do. The laws that are being spoken of don't protect against this from happening. Proper and improper ways of fileting fish also should be mentioned. I personally have witnessed non residents removing the back straps only from fish at lodges. I was a guide for over 20 years and I spent a lot of time educating other guides on proper ethics. These ethics should be a mandatory course that the mnrf supplies on a face to face basis. 90 percent of guides on lake of the woods I would bet have not personally read the regulations. The lodges have been their own worst enemies. Improperly educating traveller's and Not monitoring catches and limit restraints. Another major problem is how electronics have changed the fishing world. GPS has made it so that people can pull up on a spot with ease. Trolling motors have made it so that when they find the fish they can spot lock on the school. Further advancements on sonar and imaging have made it so that people can literally look around an area and cast right onto the fishes heads. I can't see it being too long before these units become banned as well as I feel they should be. Nothing is left to the imagination anymore. Never mind the advances in boats the past 30 years. There is a huge difference between doing something once the problem is already an issue and trying to get ahead of the curve. I suggest at a minimum the mnrf should impose a possession limit as no more then one day's catch in addition to option number 2.

ERO Comment #82191: Myself and my female family members compete in the Lake of the woods walleye tournament every year. We need to be able to take pictures of the fish we catch and RELEASE. We are not keeping these fish for any amount of time unnecessarily. You can guarantee that anyone that catches a bigger fish is going to take a pic and weigh it. For the amount of time it takes to measure and snap a quick pic, which can be done in less than 30 sec, it's no different than any angler taking a picture of a monster trophy fish of any species they catch and keep. Please allow pictures to be taken so we can continue to participate as a family.

ERO Comment #82192: Canadian side of lake of the woods does not need the change, the American side does, how is it that myself, as a Canadian, can catch and only retain 2 walleye, yet I can boat across to the American side and catch + retain six walleye, does not make sense. I do believe that setting a slot size is important to the fishery, perhaps 1 fish between 18-23 can be kept, anything bigger to be released...

ERO Comment #82193: I take part in the annual Lake of the woods women's walleye tournament and with this new regulation we would not be able to take photos of some of the larger fish we catch and release. Please consider this

Thank you

ERO Comment #82194: Do not like the proposed changes. Seems "rushed". Lets table this motion and re-visit it next year.

ERO Comment #82195: As long as there is a unregulated commercial fishery nothing will save our lake.

ERO Comment #82196: Ban net fishing. Period.

ERO Comment #82197: I've seen more fish in one abandoned net than I've caught in my life.

ERO Comment #82198: I have to strongly DISAGREE with the proposed changes to the lake of the woods walleye limits, I believe there are many issues with this change and it can be managed in a better way.

Dropping the limit to 2 fish per person will have a negative effect in the following ways: surrounding lakes and rivers will get over fished, tourism and local businesses will be strongly effected in negative ways, this wont stop the poachers and illigal activities but will most likely increase them, shared lake waters with the US will still have a 6 fish limit defeating the purpose of this limit reduction, families will not be able to feed thier family with 1 day catch.

A couple ways I believe would help without having to have this change but be fair to all stakeholders: extended closed season (most fish are still in spawn when season is open), extended closure of sanctuary areas with high spawning (tranquil channel, keewatin channel), slot size to protect prime spawners and allow young to grow, hold netting practises accountable with Treaty 3, hire more conservation officers to monitor the large area.

I have fished for many years and just recently started bass fishing in tournaments and it is nothing to catch a large amount or walleye while bass fishing throughout the entire year, I believe there are still really good numbers in the lake and they are still reproducing well. As with everything comes change we have invasive crawfish which have eaten a large amount of the vegetation in the lake so the fish need to adapt to the change and they are now up on shallow rock areas all year round, just because some people dont catch fish in the same spot they did 30 years ago doesn't mean the lake is dead. I know for a fact that I will not be able to bring home 2 walleye and feed myself, wife and 2 kids with that, small lakes and the winnipeg river are going to get hit hard so people can make thier trip out worth a dinner. Guides and resorts will take a huge loss with this change and may even have to shut down after just barely making it through Covid. This still does not address the issues around gill nets and the accountability that needs to come with them. A lot of the time during the opening few weeks of the season high precent areas where fish spawn get very over fished and majority of the time a large amount of fish are still in spawn the closed season needs to be extended and sanctuaries need to be made on the

lake. Poaching will get worse and increased officer enforcement will be needed and is needed already but this change will put even more on the hard working officers we already have.

Thank you for your time and hopefully this gets looked at a bit closer and some other options get taken into consideration.

ERO Comment #82199: The OMNR has the data about the walleye population in the lake and it's conclusive.

What in the world is left to discuss.

Do nothing and it only gets worse.

Please, implement the preferred two walleye reduced limit option.

ERO Comment #82200: Leave the limit at 4 with none over 17 inches. Why take any mature spawners out of the lake at all? Lots of big Northern pike caught while ice fishing. They eat alot of walleye. Why are they protected?

I fish the south end of the lake and haven't noticed a drop in fishing. Maybe make regulations for the north end of the lake where there is alot more pressure

American side rapes the lake with overfishing .. they say its sustainable . ..how are their studies done?

ERO Comment #82201: I fully support the proposed limit reduction and size restrictions

ERO Comment #82202: I support the proposal

ERO Comment #82203: I am supportive and think this was overdue

ERO Comment #82204: It's ridiculous to believe changing the limit on the canadian side will have any effect on the walleye population when the US side has a city built out on the ice with 50000 shacks set up at any one time. Consult with the MN DNR to have them make changes with the findings your biologists have found before changing our limit

ERO Comment #82205: Eliminate net fishing for everyone.

ERO Comment #82206: I'm an avid fisherman and guide I target all species and have fished on lake of the woods for over 40 years. I disagree with lowering the walleye limit to 2. If I had to decide on ways to increase the walleye population on Lake of the Woods I would implement a 2 fish limit for none residents and all fishing lodges, guides, outfitters etc would only be allowed to keep enough fish for shore lunch, all other fish caught would be released. Also I would declare Tranquil Channel a fish sanctuary where anglers would not be allowed to fish this area until early June as it is a spawning habitat for the walleye



and year after year I have witnessed countless anglers coming and going from this area in May taking more walleye than needed. Also I would implement a slot size similar to the Winnipeg River. I am of Metis decent and hope my comments are read and taken into consideration.

ERO Comment #82208: I support the proposal to make the walleye limit the same for all anglers and reduce the slot to 43cm.

ERO Comment #82209: I won't be popular in saying this but stop the season in December and open after the spawn. The hard water season does a number on the breeding stock decline every year. Fishing is not like it used to be and serious action is needed now. The 2 limit is a minimum and I wouldn't rule out a complete catch and release for a couple years.

ERO Comment #82210: I really don't think this will make a difference. What's next, put the limit down to one fish?? I could be wrong, but on the American side of the lake, is the limit still 6????

ERO Comment #82211: How about stopping the commercial fishing all together, it is not being done traditionally and is a huge impact on our lakes! Stop the sale of our resources, especially the shipping out of the country.

ERO Comment #82212: Why do we always have to complicate everything so much starting to get ridiculous the 2 fish limit won't even be enough to feed a family one meal and with the fuel prices I would have to go out twice three times just for a meal we should just make it the same as the Winnipeg River 4 fish between 35 cm and 45 cm look at how well the river has come back with the slot and definitely shouldn't be able to keep anything over the 45 cm thanks

**Personal information redacted**

ERO Comment #82213: I am a participant in the Lake of the Woods' Womens Walleye Tournament the largest growing women's walleye tournament in North America. Not being able to legally take photos of our fish for this catch and release tournament will end this tournament. the tournament is a huge economic boom for the city of Kenora at the start of tourism season. Seems no one can have fun anymore because you failed to institute proper protocols years and years ago and I suspect the new mines are part of the problem too.

ERO Comment #82214: Rainy Lake has the same regulations as the proposed Lake of the Woods regulations. Has there been a proven positive change to the fishing on Rainy? If so, why are we not allowed to catch 4 walleye with one being over 18.1? Alternate the regulations so at least one lake can be fished with ease.

I also think the new regulations will have a negative affect on the Rainy River District tourism especially if 2 large bodies of water are restricted for walleye fishing. With COVID

restrictions having caused so much financial hardship to the tourism industry, is it really in the District's best interests to make these changes since the border opened up?

ERO Comment #82215: As a fishing guide on Lake of the woods since 1985 I have seen a dramatic drop in walleye populations. This government buying out commercial fishing should have made a difference in fish populations but it didn't. With Covid and the closing of the borders for 2 years should have made a huge difference in fish populations but it also didn't. Opening up netting to any individual for sustenance is what is decreasing fish populations. Nets do not allow fish to be released nor do they distinguish between sizes. A net kills every fish that goes into it. Even the fish that are unmarketable or undesirable for eating. I have seen many piles of fish dumped to rot because the people netting them couldn't make money off them and were unwilling to eat them. Reducing angling limits will never get the desired effect if the netting is not regulated or removed entirely. The entire tourism industry for walleyes is being put in jeopardy but a limited number of people with nets taking advantage of a renewable resource that is not being regulated.

ERO Comment #82216: I agree with reducing walleye catch limits on lake of the woods. This is an important resource that must be managed and sustained for the future. All recreational anglers should practice more catch and release. I would like to see increased enforcement of the reduced limits in the future as I believe that 95% of recreational anglers play by the rules. We need to stop the 5% that don't. There should also be signage erected at common boat launch points that clearly show the new limits. I find that recreational anglers who don't have english as their first language, often have trouble interpreting fishing limits.

ERO Comment #82217: The new fishing limit proposal is highly unfair.

The new fishing limits target residents who are not the problem! The problem is overfishing in the culture designations that have no fish limits at all. The culture designations are a huge population proportion in places like Kenora in Northwestern Ontario. If the fish population are in decline, put limits on everyone across the board no matter their culture. It is only fair. After all, it is the fish population that is in crisis, isn't it?!

The new proposal does away with the designation between residents and non-residents. Again this is not fair at all. Why punish the residents for non-resident behavior? Residents, like myself, who decided to make Kenora, Ontario our home pay taxes to support the city of Kenora, why should we get punished for making this our home? We want to enjoy where we live and fish and boat and enjoy our lakes.

If these new fishing limits are installed, DECREASE the cost of the fishing license for the residents of Kenora. It is only fair.

ERO Comment #82218: Follow Rainy Lake slot size

ERO Comment #82219: This should have been addressed a long time ago. LOTW should have implemented the same slot size at the same time as when the Winnipeg

River slot size was put into effect. No one should be keeping walleye over 45 cm. There is no reason anyone should be keeping walleye over 70 cm. If this gets implemented on LOTW do you not think the fishing pressure on the Winnipeg River will increase dramatically. The people on the Winnipeg River embraced the slot size restrictions for many years and as a result enjoy a reasonable fishing experience today. No walleye under 35cm. should be harvested as they are the future of a viable fishery. Had this been done on LOTW you would have a much stronger fishery today. As you well know the Winnipeg River fishery is going to get over fished in a very short period when LOTW anglers move over due to the increased catch limit. Then in short order you will see the same problem on the river as you have on LOTW. A dog chasing its tail. I think there should be a slot size on LOTW Walleye sport (4) and cons (2) 35 to 45 cm only. Too many fishers on LOTW are keeping fish well under 35 cm. All indigenous nets should be clearly marked as to the identity of the owner and the first time that net is found with dead and rotting fish that person should be banned from netting again. No excuses and no second chances. The same goes for black marketing fish. This is a problem going on far to often. Thank You

ERO Comment #82220: Not in favour of these changes at all. More pressure needs to be put on the state of Minnesota to reduce their limit. In Ontario it can be a combination of Sauger and Walleye to a total of 4. In Minnesota it's 6 with no more than 4 walleye.

There is no talk of Minnesota lowering their limits and why should non-residents be allowed the same as resident for fishing the Ontario side.

Also more enforcement should be in place for US residents launching in Minnesota, but fishing on the Ontario side without an Ontario licence.

ERO Comment #82221: Leave limits as is and go to slot size

ERO Comment #82222: Maybe the government should hire more Conservation Officers to protect the resources first , Theres a lot of poachers out there and never see a C O

ERO Comment #82225: Stop allowing Americans to come over the border freely without launching on Canadian boat launches first. They come over multiple times a day everyday and take limits, this is a huge issue on Rainy Lake as well as LOTW. You cannot control limits as they take fish and are gone across the border with no enforcement, If they had to cross a land border you can setup checkpoints, but as of now there is nothing. Guide services/resorts from the states take guests into Canada and return with fish unregulated everyday. American citizens are free to come over daily and take a limit with no way to enforce a possession limit as I'm sure MNR officers are not allowed into the USA to search freezers. Rainy lake will be next if this rule is not reversed. How was this legal to begin with? Isn't it illegal for a US company to profit from a Canadian resource without paying taxes? Fishing within a couple hundred feet of the borderline is marginal but being allowed to fish inside of Canadian water anywhere from an online license sale is a travesty which my children will suffer the consequences. This law sells a few extra fishing licenses on boreer towns but hurts local Canadian economies already hurting from lack of tourists,

now they can just stay in the states and boat over at free will and take multiple limits per day. Please change this law, make American tourists cross a land crossing before fishing on our beautiful lakes. Our businesses and future of our fish population counts on it.

ERO Comment #82226: 1. I would like to see Lake of the Woods walleye fishery move to barbless hooks (even if the present limit is reduced)

2. No longer allow tournament fishing to take place.

ERO Comment #82227: 1. Stop all tournament fishing - catch and release from the deep at a quick speed is death to all species.

2. Introduction of barbless hooks, across all species. Time to put ""sport"" back into ""sport fishing""

3. Restrict lodge limits, as lodges are just a form of commercial fishing.

4. Ban all high tec electronics (fish finders) - people are fishing structures they never knew existed. Fish do not have a chance when all fishers are glued to their screens watching the fish breathe!

ERO Comment #82228: Time to create a two tier system. Have the choice to buy a license with a limit of 6 if you fish without electronic aids. Or an electronic aid license with a limit of 2 if you need the help of electronics.

ERO Comment #82229: So your going to hurt fishing tourism while continuing to let others Gil net and take thousands, got it. What about netting during spawning / off season? Will that continue? So many dead walleye thrown back in the lake... sad.

ERO Comment #82230: I agree that walleye conservation is very important and steps must be taken. However, I'm concerned that going from 4 to 2 for sport license will unnecessarily impede the enjoyment of those who fish casually. I would prefer that as a compromise the sport limit moves from 4 to 3, and as well that steps are taken to curtail the individuals and groups who engage in high volume harvesting.

ERO Comment #82231: I am all for protecting the walleye population on lake of the woods but don't think lowering the limits are my first choice. How about all the netting that is destroying all species on lake of the woods? I have come across too many abandoned fishing nets with loads and loads of rotting fish! Don't you think this could be a cause of the decreasing walleye population? This needs to addressed first. I recognize this is a tough conversation to have between government and indigenous communities but things need to change and the government needs to stop being scared to talk and make a rule. My equipment is also being damaged hitting these nets! Stop the netting!

ERO Comment #82232: I agree Lotw has pressure with harvest level, tourism is 38% of the harvest with a daily shore lunch included, that impact alone is tremendous on the

Lake, year after year and we know this will be acceptable as it is mostly about money. The Native population is growing also with a fishing impact that will increase as well and this will be acceptable as well. The local people (recreational people), who fish the lake has minimal pressure, people who fish the lake less than ten times a year, who work and contribute and support the community already struggle to afford to go enjoy a day on the lake with the cost of fuel and food consistently rising are once again the main target expected to accept less for their efforts. Two go out the Lake for two walleyes is not acceptable and or affordable but you already know this. This will not promote recreational fishing in Kenora it will diminish it. Lastly the way this is set up with a password required and an e-mail address is another deterrent for the people impacted, the site should be an open form. - born in 1967 in Kenora Ontario and still residing here.

ERO Comment #82233: How can the walleye population be falling as you say when the border was closed for 2 years?

They have Copious amounts of Ice shacks on the USA end of the lake every year that pull more fish out of the lake than Anyone up on the Canadian side of the border..

The limit should ve the same as it is now or even add a few a cpl for people....

It will Kill the tourism for the Canadian camps if guests can Only keep 2 walleye.. Big waste of money to travel 200kms to only take 2 fish back home with you..

Like come on....

ERO Comment #82234: I disagree with this proposal. 1) old fish do not spawn therefore that point is invalid. 2) a picture of them won't kill them 3) lake of the woods will not be "emptied" of walleye.

ERO Comment #82235: Limits should stay as is for residential anglers. If limits need to be changed, then lowering non-resident limits makes more sense. Id like to see non-residents being able to enjoy a shorelunch, but take nothing home.

Also, how does one intend to control the fisheries when those with status cards are allowed to take unlimited sizes and quantities at any time? That's like having a bucket of water full of holes and only plugging a few holes... eventually it's gonna run dry!

ERO Comment #82236: I do not agree with the proposal. I have fished LOTW all my life and it's never been better . Look at what you did to Shoal Lake after you closed the walleye . There are so many there now I catch them on top water lures fishing for bass . You are trying to make it unaffordable to go fishing

ERO Comment #82237: I am a local Lake Of The Woods fisherman. I get to go walleye fishing occasionally and when I do, I like to bring home three or four fish to feed two or three people. I don't get the opportunity to accumulate four fish. Tourist camp fisherman on the other hand do have that opportunity as they go fishing daily.

I have a great many friends who are avid fisherman. All of them, including myself, have observed that walleye fishing and Lake Of The Woods has never been better. I know this is anecdotal evidence, but it leaves me to question the validity of the observations made by the ministry ie. that the walleye biomass is down particular with regards to old fish .

I have spent tens of thousands of dollars on fishing equipment, gas, bait, etc. all within the community of Kenora. This year for example I had planned to spend \$30,000 on a new motor for my boat. Reducing the limit to two fish will make fishing an activity which will not be sustainable for me. I cannot justify spending \$100 a day to bring home two small fish.

As an aside, these last few years, on account of Covid restrictions has resulted in a huge decrease in the amount of fishing done on Northern Lake Of The Woods. Were the ministry's observations made prior to or after Covid? These restrictions intuitively would've resulted in an increase in walleye populations.

Reducing the daily limit to two fish and possession two fish will not practically effect the tourist camp industry. On the other hand these proposals will have unfair and negative effects on the the local occasional fishermen and the communities that they live in around Lake Of The Woods.

I have a suggestion for a third proposal. Leave the daily limits and slot sizes as they are except don't allow fisherman to bring home large fish! That is, no fish over 46 cm. And why would the ministry even consider allowing fish to be kept over 70 cm?!

One might also consider applying these new limits to non- residents. As I've mentioned it really will not effect the number of fish that they can catch and keep if they are staying at a tourist camp.

Can I trust that the ministry will take these suggestions seriously? Sincerely, a distraught local fisherman.

ERO Comment #82238: I worry that people will just go fish the other lakes where they can get 4 fish, especially the Winnipeg river. Why not have a slot size that seems to work really well.

ERO Comment #82239: The impact of aboriginal peoples using nets wherever and whenever is not discussed anywhere and should be thoroughly evaluated and restricted accordingly as a mitigation measure. I live on Lake of the Woods and see the extent of aboriginal peoples using nets wherever they wish even in spawning season.

ERO Comment #82240: Keep the limits as they are but close the season much earlier. Near the end of the current scheduled season closure, we always find fish full of eggs that we would have released had we known

ERO Comment #82241: I am wondering why no one is addressing that commercial fishing must have a huge impact on the walleye numbers decreasing. It should be publicized how much walleye is being netted. I'm sure its staggering.

ERO Comment #82242: In my opinion, 16.9" to 27.55" (43 to 70 cm) is too tight on the lower end....maybe consider using round numbers and go with 45 cm to 75 cm....easier to remember, and gives a slightly larger fish able to keep (up to 45 cm or 17.7")...still protects breeders and gets the job done. If someone really wants to keep a trophy, its gotta be 75 cm or 29.52" to keep, basically a 30" fish, a true trophy.

In a few years, it may be hard to find a 14" to 16.9" fish.....as the whole side of the lake will be looking for the same size fish.....open up the keeper slot a hair, unless you want people keeping 12" walleye.

I completly agree with protecting the breeders, I've seen people keep 23, 24, 25" walleyes for no other reason than bragging rights of the biggest fish in the cleaning house.....protect those fish, but don't tighten up the reasonable keeper slot too much. Thank you!

Im a 44 yr old fisherman from Iowa, and have been fishing out of Sioux Narrows, when we could make it, on annual fishing trips since I was 5 yrs old.

ERO Comment #82243: Being a guide on Lake of the Woods for over 30 years I disagree with the lowering of the limit , the number of tourists on the lake has been in steady decline and fish population has flourished as evidenced by the ability to catch and release as many as you have minnows or leeches in the boat you are fishing from

The lowering of the limit will also cut down the number of tourists that will frequent the region as well this will hurt already struggling businesses that are already finding it hard to operate with the new taxes and inflationary higher costs been forced upon us by this government

Please leave the limit alone as it is the tourist business is not doing well and this will not help them or affect the already thriving walleye population

**Personal information redacted**

ERO Comment #82244: This new Proposed ideal of photos of fish not permitted will kill the LOTW womens walleye tournament. The purpose of the event is to promote women and their confidence in the sport of fishing. Participants are lectured prior to the event about safe and quick handling of fish to maintain the health and well being of our prized species, the walleye! We are locals who respect the water and our natural resources and want to sustain the sport of fishing for future generations.

I ask that you reconsider or make an exception for this tournament.

I do not agree with this proposal as a general rule considering the same body of water has no restrictions on photos of a fish and the limit of walleye is triple for the Americans. It is time to collaborate and focus on sustaining a health fish habitat not on the photo a fish!!!!

Sincerely,

**Personal information redacted** a past participant of the tournament and a local licensed fisherwoman !

ERO Comment #82245: I am a participant in the women's walleye tournament. With the proposed new rules the tournament will no longer be. I am neither for the reduction in limit to 2 fish or not being able to photograph a fish prior to release. Especially when the limit on the us side will remain at 6, on the same body of water. Not to mention the effect this reduction will have on tourism, the camps that are just starting to come back from the covid affects. As a participant of the only women's walleye tournament in NWO, this proposed rule will kill the tournament. We as locals care about our prized walleye and make every effort to protect them. I don't believe that taking a photo of the fish prior to releasing will in anyway adversely affect the fish population. Please reconsider this rule.

ERO Comment #82246: Both sides of the boarder need to work together and as well as the First Nations must stop the use of gill nets period

ERO Comment #82247: **Personal information redacted** I will pose a question to you - How many fishing licenses do residents have that live within a 45 minute drive of lake of the woods vs how many seasonal licenses do non residents have that live in Minnesota? Nobody with the exception of a handful of people in Fort Frances and nobody from Dryden regularly fish lake of the woods. They have better fishing closer to home. These proposals punish the local Nestor falls/sioux narrows people. Most of these residents fish only a couple times per summer. The seasonal license holder form Mn is where you can make the biggest impact. They drive from as far away as Duluth and maybe farther to fish for a day. Many of them own cabins and now use it well into October. Adding 1 month to the pressure the lake get. I have spoken to some them at the landing on Whitefish Bay First nations after a day of fishing the Dogpaw Chain. I know many residents of international falls that travel daily to lakes in our area for the day not spending a penny in Canada besides the license. For example just this December a met a guy by himself from international falls fishing in Nestor Falls he caught his limit and told us that he was not coming back. The next day he was back with 4 other people. He also said on January 1st he was going to the Manitou. That 1 person from International falls caught and kept more fish than any local Nestor Falls and their household combined over those two days. There are many day trippers that travel by boat from the Northwest Angle to do the same as they are allowed a Minnesota limit and a Canada Limit. The MNR has no way of enforcing the laws or know hte total catch if these fishermen catch a limit in Canada and label it fish caught in MN when they get back to the USA. But yet there is nothing in your proposals that addresses this. You have the perfect example of what to to - Rainy lake rules, they worked magic, and no seasonal licenses for non residents of Canada. That would be a big start. There is still several US fishermen on the lake every day that stay in Rainier despite the reduced limit, size restrictions and no live bait. The truth is



that they have no other place to go and money is no object due to the lower cost of living. If you don't believe me lets go for a ride on some Saturday and Ill show you.

ERO Comment #82248: Does this have to do with mercury levels in fish and limiting dangerous consumption under the guise of fish stocks being in trouble?

ERO Comment #82253: I have been fishing on LOTW for more than 50 years almost always for walleye. I go out often and know the lake well.

The walleye fishing did go through a low point in the late 1970's and 1980's but it rebounded dramatically in the late 90's and early 2000's.

The fishing in the last few years has never been better. What is so different now is the number of large walleye I catch. A 10 pound walleye that would have gotten you a picture in the local news paper back in the 1970's is now so common place that it is hardly worth mentioning. It is not un common for me to catch 50 walleye on one trip ( I let almost all of them go)

I DO NOT support the reduced limit for some people. It is not necessary.

Also why is Minnesota and Manitoba who also share the lake not doing the same thing? This is because there is no crisis as the MNR seems to think. Leave the limits as they are

ERO Comment #82254: Firstly, I have been a recreational fisherman for over 45 years. I have seen a lot of changes to the regulations in those years. One thing I have NEVER seen is a reversal of those changes. MNR says these changes are needed to improve wildlife and fisheries. Well, is it working? If the answer is yes on any specific issue then these changes to the regulations SHOULD be reversed and yet I have never seen this happen. If, reducing the walleye catch on Lake Of The Woods is necessary to revive the fish population then I am ALL for it. What scares me is that this decision could become a one-way street. A great example of this is the Winnipeg River fishery. A slot size was put in a few years ago to bring back the spawners that were apparently in short supply. Being a Winnipeg River resident and angler for close to 50 years, I have seen a huge increase in the larger walleyes on the river. In fact, I can go out and catch numerous walleyes that are too large to keep. At the same time I can catch numerous walleyes that are too small to keep. This tells me 2 things: 1: There are plenty of large spawners on our river and 2: the spawning is working just fine. So if this is the case then why can't the MNR tweek these slot size regulations to allow for the possession of at least one fish over 45 cm. Again, I am one for the betterment of fishing, but the lack of reversal to these changes is what worries me the most.

ERO Comment #82255: I believe there needs to be proper enforcement of the rules we have now, that alone would provide the conservation necessary to keep fish stocks where it needs be. Possibly more Conservation Officers may be needed to enforce the present rules.

There are people that are over fishing and getting away with it. These same people will not take heed to these proposed fishing regulations as they don't abide by the present regulations. Also there has to be a reasonable recognition to conservation of fish stocks by people that have traditional or inherent rights.

ERO Comment #82259: OFAH feedback on LOTW Walleye management plan (*transcribed from formatted letter*):

Subject: Lake of the Woods Draft Recreational Walleye Plan (ERO number: 019-6067)

The Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH) is Ontario's largest, non-profit, fish and wildlife conservation-based organization, representing 100,000 members, subscribers and supporters, and 725 member clubs. We appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry's (MNR) draft recreational Walleye plan for the Ontario Waters of Lake of the Woods (LOTW) Fisheries Management Plan (FMP). The OFAH recognizes that changes to the current Walleye regulations are warranted; however, we are uncertain whether the preferred regulation option will be effective in its delivery.

### **Management Options for Consultation**

The OFAH offers the following comments on each option presented in this draft plan.  
Status Quo

The OFAH questions the Ministry's decision not to model status quo in full, seeing as the current one-over 46 cm rule was not factored into the simulation exercise. However, based on similarities between current regulations and the 46 cm maximum size limit, which was rejected under all catch limits, it can be assumed that status quo would have failed. This, in conjunction with the observable failures of the current system to effectively conserve Walleye in over two decades, is reason to disqualify the status quo from consideration.

### **Alternate Option**

- **Season:** January 1 to April 14 and third Saturday in May to December 31 (unchanged).
- **Limits** (All anglers):
  - o Daily Catch-and-Retain Limit
    - Sport 2; must between 35 cm and 43 cm or greater than 70 cm and not more than 1 greater than 70 cm
    - Conservation 1; must between 35 cm and 43 cm
  - o Possession limit
    - Sport 4; must between 35 cm and 43 cm or greater than 70 cm and not more than 1 greater than 70 cm
    - Conservation 2; must between 35 cm and 43 cm

The proposed alternate harvestable slot of 35 to 43 cm was not included in the simulation exercise either, but is expected to have similar outputs to the maximum size limit of 43 cm. This scenario was rejected under the catch limits of 4(S) and 2(C) and 2(S) and 2(C) but passed with a catch limit of 2(S) and 1(C). A similar harvestable slot of 35 to 45 cm was also modelled but failed the harvest reduction threshold under all catch limits.

We question the significance of a 2 cm difference between these models, as it seems unlikely that biological outcomes for such a slight variation would be detectable, never mind significant. Overall, we doubt that this alternate option would be sufficient to conserve Walleye compared to other regulatory options.

### **MNRF's Preferred Regulation**

- **Season:** January 1 to April 14 and third Saturday in May to December 31 (unchanged).
- **Limits** (All anglers):
  - o Daily Catch-and-Retain Limit
    - Sport 2; must be less than 43 cm or greater than 70 cm and not more than 1 greater than 70 cm
    - Conservation 1; must be less than 43 cm
  - o Possession limit
    - Sport 4; must be less than 43 cm or greater than 70 cm and not more than 1 greater than 70 cm
    - Conservation 2; must be less than 43 cm

The OFAH is unable to provide full support for the preferred option due to a lack of supporting evidence. Although the MNRF asserts that the preferred option would balance the ecological and socio-economic objectives detailed in Section 2.2, there are several unknowns at play. For one thing, one-over regulations were not considered in the simulation exercise despite their proposed inclusion in the preferred option and despite the fact that the simulation exercise allows for slot size-specific catch limits (e.g., only one walleye > 46 cm per angler per trip). This could be a major misstep in understanding how the LOTW Walleye population would respond to this scenario.

The majority of recreational anglers on LOTW are American non-residents who have had a legal requirement to comply with the long-standing reduced daily limit of 2(S) and 2(C) (only one greater than 46 cm) and a differential possession limit of 4(S) and 2(C) (only one greater than 46 cm). Seeing as the universal bag limits being proposed are essentially the same as the above non-resident restrictions, these regulatory changes would have little impact on harvest by the vast majority of anglers. We are unsure that enacting restrictions that only apply to a small percentage of resident anglers will reach the desired forty percent reduction in Walleye harvest. Moreover, the performance of the preferred regulation is further obscured because the differential possession limit was never modelled under the reduced catch limit. Anglers may, for instance, redistribute their activities to another day to obtain their desired quantity of fish.

The vast majority of size limits modelled by the MNRF failed to reduce the recreational harvest by at least forty percent under the catch limits of 4(S) and 2(C) and 2(S) and 2(C). For this reason and considering the uncertainties noted above, it may be necessary to move towards a standalone, reduced catch and possession limit of 2(S) and 1(C) as well as implementing a maximum size limit of 43 cm or other similar performing size limit.

### **“One-over” Modifier**

**Recommendation:** *Include a “one fish greater than 70 cm” modifier to proposed size limits. The Advisory Council has specifically requested that it be noted in the plan that they support this recommendation only until MNRF completes a review of Section 12 of the Ontario Fishery Regulations (OFR).*

The OFAH is surprised that the preferred option would retain a one-over rule, considering this approach’s inconsistent track record across many Ontario Fisheries Management Zones (FMZs) and other Provincially Significant Inland Fisheries. Modelling results suggest that current one-over regulations in FMZ 15, for example, do not adequately protect Walleye. Similar mortality and biomass concerns have been identified in FMZ 10, where the Ministry is proposing to remove the one-over rule, and in FMZ 14. Simulations using comparable one-over rules for Lake Nipissing have also showed poor outputs for the Walleye fishery.

Although part of the risk associated with a one-over rule comes from anglers who harvest large, mature Walleye, there are also issues associated with the “culling rule” (Section 23 of the OFR) and competitive fishing events, wherein anglers fishing from a boat may catch, hold, and selectively live-release more Walleye (and other sportfish) than the daily limit. In these scenarios, some of the largest, most biologically important fish are held for extended periods, transported long distances, and eventually weighed and released.

With well over 250 boats from only three large-scale events that target Walleye, not including the many other smaller scale events that go undocumented each year, these stressors in particular may have serious consequences for an already unstable Walleye population. Such concerns could be partly mitigated if the MNRF took a more active role in overseeing fishing tournaments by, for example, gathering an accurate count of these events, conducting targeted creel surveys, and partnering with academic institutions to carry out fisheries research projects on the LOTW.

Despite these widespread concerns, neither current nor proposed one-over rules were modelled in the Ministry’s simulation exercise as part of the Draft Recreational Walleye Plan. As such, we feel there is too much risk and insufficient supporting evidence associated with the continued implementation of these regulations. While setting the one-over rule higher than the status quo (proposed 70 cm) will likely reduce some degree of risk for adult Walleye in LOTW, we feel strongly that maintaining this rule in any capacity is misguided.

We also feel that the latter part of this recommendation, with reference to Section 12 of the OFR, also requires further elaboration. According to the FMP, if the review of Section 12 renders the one-over modifier redundant, such regulations will be removed; however, this is not explicitly mentioned in the recommendation itself. If the Section 12 review does not occur due to insufficient public support or some other unforeseen barrier, or if the resulting amendments are inadequate what will become of the one-over modifier? Considering the Advisory Council is only conditionally supportive of retaining the one-over modifier, a significant amount of faith is being put towards the outcome of the consultation process without considering all the alternatives.

The recommendation should also be rewritten as a specific action item for the Ministry to carry out instead of the emphasis being on the request of the Advisory Council.

### **Non-regulatory Recommendations**

**Recommendation:** *MNR to develop a strategy to better educate anglers about Ontario's catch-and-retain regulations.*

The OFAH supports the proposal to develop a strategy to better educate anglers about Ontario's catch-and-retain regulations (e.g., difference between catch and possession limits). We do, however, feel this to be more of an ethical dilemma than it is a question of education. Anglers who engage in "double-dipping" (i.e., having an overlimit of fish) are most likely aware of the long-standing rules for catch and possession limits and, as such, there may be no standalone solution to the issue. To help with non-compliance, we encourage the Ministry to move forward with their proposal to increase set fine amounts and create new ticketable offences, continue investing in the number of conservation officers on the landscape, and explore innovative approaches for educating anglers about fishing rules through online tools like Ontario's fish and wildlife licensing service.

### **Closing remarks**

Although well-intentioned, the proposed preferred option attempts to satisfy the appearance of doing something with the least amount of impact but provides little in the way of a conclusive meaningful effect in protecting the LOTW Walleye fishery. In this case, the ecological implications related to the one-over modifier and reduced catch limits, combined with a differential possession limit, are largely unknown. Moreover, regulatory add-ons, differences between sportfishing and conservation fishing licenses, and other regulatory exceptions and rules will likely confuse many anglers. Regulatory differences in other jurisdictions that overlap with LOTW, including Manitoba and Minnesota, will only add to the complexity.

A comprehensive management plan for Walleye should also include strategies for mitigating environmental stressors as well as considering other mortality factors (e.g., commercial fishing). The government's proposals to reduce barriers and red tape for developers and weakening long-standing environmental laws in Ontario could threaten the conservation of our fisheries, yet recreational anglers are on the chopping block.

There are far too many unknowns and uncertainties with the proposed 'half in, half out' approach to the preferred regulation. A more restrictive option may not be widely accepted but will help ensure the sustainability and ongoing productivity of the Walleye fishery, in addition to enhancing the socio-economic status of the region in the long-term. However, we recognize this may require further consultation and engagement with the Advisory Council, the broader public, and stakeholders. Thank you for your time and consideration of our comments.

Yours in Conservation,

**Personal Information Redacted**

ERO Comment #82267: MNR communications plan for this proposal was embarrassing and provided minimal public notice. There was no advance notice provided to local media of information sessions in Kenora & Sioux Narrows and as a result I believe only 6 people attended;

-I fish exclusively in the North sector of Lake of the Woods near Kenora. Walleye fishing in recent years has been incredible and most local anglers I have asked, share this view. The broad scale monitoring data provided is an average for the entire lake, with it's 6 sectors having varying status, and the quality of fishery in north sector is misrepresented. And I appreciate that sector specific Regs are not an option.

-while my preference would be to consider a 43cm max with one over and keep existing catch & possession limit of 4, I know that one of the 2 options presented will be chosen. Therefore I reluctantly would prefer option 1 over option 2.

In closing, I hope that future proposals will include improvements in notifying local media and anglers....Kenora has 2 radio stations that are always willing to provide info to their listeners, give them a call!

ERO Comment #82268: Re: Lake of the Woods Draft Recreational Walleye Plan

Background: The comments below are representative of the Territorial Planning Unit (TPU) of Grand Council Treaty #3. Grand Council Treaty #3 is the Traditional Government of the Anishinaabe Nation of Treaty #3. Grand Council Treaty #3 represents 28 First Nations across the Territory. Grand Council's mandate is to protect the future of the Anishinaabe people by ensuring the protection, preservation, and enhancement of inherent and treaty rights. The TPU is a department within the Grand Council that works with the Treaty #3 Leadership to protect the lands, water, and resources within the 55,000 square miles of Treaty #3 Territory. The TPU is guided by Anishinaabe Inakonigaawin - Manito Aki Inakonigaawin (Great Earth Law) and Treaty #3 Nibi (water) Declaration.

Governance: Treaty #3 territory is governed by Anishinaabe law, called Manito Aki Inakonigaawin (Great Earth Law), and the Nibi declaration. Manito Aki Inakonigaawin represents respect, reciprocity, and responsibilities with all relations in regards to Mother Earth. The law signifies the duty to respect and protect lands affected by over-usage,

degradation, and unethical processes. The law is unique to Treaty #3 territory and passed on through our elders and knowledge keepers.

The Nibi Declaration represents respect, love, and the sacred relationship with nibi (water) and the life that it brings. It is based on teachings about water, lands, other elements like air and wind, and creation. The declaration is meant to preserve and share knowledge with youth and future generations. The declaration guides us in our relationship with nibi so we can take action individually, in our communities, and as a nation to help ensure healthy, living nibi for all creation.

#### Preliminary Comments & Questions:

The TPU has reviewed the Draft Recreational Walleye Plan released on November 10th, 2022. Upon review the TPU has summarized its comments and questions below for your review.

- MNRF's draft Walleye plan is informed through western science methods but has no mention of working with Treaty #3 First Nations for information and input into it to inform the draft plan through Traditional Knowledge. Did MNRF work with Treaty #3 First Nations to include Traditional Knowledge in decision making for the draft plan? If so, how? If not, Grand Council recommends working with Treaty #3 communities further for this prior to accepting the current draft plan as the final plan.
- Who did the Advisory Council consist of? Was there equal representation between First Nations, Government, tourism operators, and other?
- The draft plan makes mention of the amount of money that recreational Walleye fishing brings in. It does not seem that the amount of engagement held for this was adequate. Three public engagement sessions were held for a total attendance of 83 attendees. In Appendix A it is estimated that there were 62,413 active anglers in 2015. Based on this MNRF was able to engage with about 0.1% of anglers that frequent lake of the woods for Walleye fishing and the number would be less if you include non-anglers affected as well. Grand Council highly recommends increasing effort to engage with the public on this.
- The draft plan states 14 First Nation communities were contacted for engagement on the draft plan. How many of these communities were actually engaged with by MNRF beyond initial contact efforts? What did engagement look like with communities who continued along with the MNRF engagement? What were participation numbers from First Nation engagement, was it higher or lower than the 83 from public engagement?
- The Terms of Reference acknowledge that First Nation participation in the Advisory Council does not satisfy the Crown's duty to consult. Does MNRF believe they have adequately met the Crown's duty to consult through their engagement process? Based on information provided in the draft plan, Grand Council believes that more effort

could have been put into engaging with the Treaty #3 First Nations for their input into the draft plan.

- There is a disproportionate emphasis put on the importance of Walleye for economics and regional tourism compared to the cultural importance of Walleye for Treaty #3 First Nations. More emphasis should be brought to the importance of Walleye for Treaty #3 food sovereignty.

- More emphasis needs to be put on how much greater recreational fishing impacts Walleye populations than Indigenous commercial fishing. This information is buried in the appendix section which very few people will read. This draft plan has already begun to put more unneeded scrutiny to First Nations commercial fishing.

- Under Objective 2022-4 for socio-economic objectives it states “Where the evaluation of two regulatory proposals indicate that both would address the ecological objectives equally, the option that best allows the tourism industry to market Lake of the Woods as a desirable destination should be considered preferable.” This objective outright ignores the cultural importance of Walleye to Treaty #3 First Nations in favor of economic importance. Is MNRF’s intention of the draft plan to cater directly to the Walleye tourism industry and disregard all other importance such as food sovereignty for Treaty #3? As PSF Objective 2.2 outlines – “Allocate fish resources considering the needs and interests of all users,” and PSF Objective 2.3 outlines “Increase the economic, social, and cultural benefits derived from fish resources,” the proposed draft plan ignores considering the needs and interests of all users and ignores the social and cultural benefits in favor of economic benefits.

- Under Objective 2022-5 for socio-economic objectives it states, “provide additional angling opportunities for other species, consistent with the goals of the provincial fishing strategy.” This is a good idea and opportunity provided that MNRF properly engages with Treaty #3. First Nations both in number of participants and communities reached but also working with them for Traditional Knowledge to better inform which species to target and harvesting regulations. Many fish species in Treaty #3 have cultural importance for Treaty #3 communities. As PSF Objective 2.2 outlines – “Allocate fish resources considering the needs and interests of all users”, and PSF Objective 2.3 outlines “Increase the economic, social, and cultural benefits derived from fish resources” to meet these PSF objectives for draft plan Objective 2022-5 MNRF will need to properly engage and consult with Treaty #3 First Nations.

- In Appendix D question 5 shows that 41% of attendees have never been contacted by an enforcement officer. The new fisheries management regulations will not have an effect if a large portion of anglers are never subject to compliance.

- The draft plan states that a summary of feedback will be included in the final amendment document. For transparency will the raw feedback be made publicly available?



- 3.2.7 “One Over” Modifier (allowing one very large fish greater than 70cm (27.5”), for holders of a Sport License). This proposed change is not supported as it is only to be in effect until the review is completed of section 12 of OFR. It takes time, effort, and money to enforce compliance with the new rule. It would be much better to place this compliance effort on the new regulations based on the review.

- How often is the closed season for walleye re-evaluated?

- 2.1 LOTW Fisheries Management Goals (page 22): “PFS includes three further goal statements which address how MNRF develops and uses legislation, policy and science, and how the Ministry interacts with stakeholders, Indigenous communities and the general public. While these goals are important to the way MNRF conducts its business, they do not relate directly to the establishment of the fisheries management objectives for Lake of the Woods.” The draft plan did not include three goal statements as they were deemed not directly related to the fisheries management, but rather how they conduct their business. Why does legislation, policy, and science not directly affect fisheries management? How does interacting with Indigenous Communities not effect fisheries management (this land and water is Anishinaabe territory)?

- The draft plan states that equal regulations for all anglers will have better success than stricter restrictions on non-residents compared to residents. However, the introduction provides evidence that the majority of recreational anglers are non-residents.

- Both the “Preferred Option” as well as the “Alternate Option” do not provide stringent enough regulation changes needed to increase the Walleye population on Lake of the Woods to sustainable levels. A better option would be “two Walleye in the slot limit, two possession limit, and no Walleye over.”

- Part 2: Ministry Questions for Participants (page 53)

4. What factors other than sport/recreational overharvesting do you feel might be contributing to the decline in the Walleye population? (Participants were able to vote for any number of the five options listed below. Percentages indicate the proportion of participants who voted for that option).

- a) Commercial fish harvesting: 75%
- b) Water quality: 36%
- c) Invasive species: 34%
- d) Cormorants and pelicans: 20%
- e) Water levels: 20%

Why did the Ministry add “commercial fish harvesting” to the list of options for participants to vote for? Why wouldn’t the Ministry leave the question open-ended so that participants could provide their actual opinions on what they thought the factors of overharvesting could be? This question is biased as it promotes only the five options given as well as no option for “other.” This question is also contradictory to a statement on Page 55 of the Draft Plan under “1. Indigenous commercial fishing.” MNRF staff stated that, “The Lake

of the Woods Indigenous commercial fishery is small-scale and localized” we estimate that recreational angling accounts for more than twice the amount of Walleye harvested by commercial fishing. Was this information given to participants before they voted on Question 4? If the MNRF don’t see commercial fishing as having a significant impact on the Lake of the Woods Walleye fishery, then why would they put it as an option for Question 4?

- It has been brought to our attention that an “Aboriginal Advisory Council” was initially formed during the initial stages of the Recreational Walleye Plan Draft for Consultation. Is this true, and if so, why is the council no longer operational?

- Minnesota Walleye regulations do not align with the proposed new Ontario Walleye regulations (options 1 & 2).

a. Minnesota Regulations - Season: May 14, 2022 to April 14, 2023 - Walleye and sauger: all Walleye from 19.5” (49.53 cm) – 28” (71.12 cm) must be immediately released. Possession limit 6 in combination, not more than four can be Walleye, only one Walleye over 28”.

b. Ontario Preferred Option: Sport 2; must be less than 43 cm (16.9”)

c. Ontario Alternate Option: Sport 4; must between 35 cm and 43 cm (13.8” and 16.9”)

No matter what new option is chosen, American anglers will still be allowed to keep 4 Walleye over 16.9” but under 19.5” where Ontario resident anglers cannot. This does not align with the Ontario Walleye Management Objectives.

- There seems to be a lot of “misinformation” and/or “lack of information” when it comes to Indigenous commercial fishing and subsistence harvesting of Walleye. There could be a potential for increased racism among non-indigenous members of the public towards indigenous people as they may be under the impression that Indigenous commercial fishing and subsistence harvesting is the main cause of low Walleye population on Lake of the Woods. The same rationale can be used to point the blame on the Indigenous people with respect to the proposed changes to the Walleye regulations. That being said, the following statement needs to be implemented within the Draft Walleye Management Plan – “There are four guiding teachings within Manito Aki Inakonigaawin (MAI) - Respect, Rights, Reciprocity and Responsibility. Within Respect, it states that Anishinaabe only take what is needed from Ginkeminaan (Mother Earth). Within Responsibility, it states that Anishinaabe have a responsibility not to harm the land.” It is vitally important that the Ontario public are aware of these Traditional Laws and their importance.

#### Key Recommendations:

- The draft plan must include consultation with communities to include Traditional Knowledge and community input into the proposed plan.

- More transparency must be given to the data that went into making the proposed regulation updates.

- More effort needs to be put into engaging with Treaty #3 First Nations communities and organizations for input on the proposed plan to properly meet the duty to consult.
- More emphasis should be put on the cultural importance of Walleye to Treaty #3 communities rather than solely focus on the economic importance to the tourism industry.
- Grand Council Treaty #3 must be engaged with in this matter. Meaningful engagement as laid out in Manito Aki Inakonigaawin processes must occur and GCT#3 does not accept that the duty to consult has been fulfilled.

These comments are prepared by the Territorial Planning Unit of Grand Council Treaty #3.

ERO Comment #82270: Coming from a woman who absolutely loves to fish- tournament fishing or with my family, the change of regulations on LOTW is taking away so much potential sport fishing for so many people. Although I am a Status Indian, the applicable rules will not allow me to fish with my husband in a walleye tournament, or my best friend for the woman's only tournament. Something needs to be done in order for these tournaments to run!!!! Think bigger picture, the fish aren't being harmed if a picture is being taken with a measurement! Watch this video of a fish being released in seconds-

ERO Comment #82272: Implementation of new Walleye limit needs to be done as soon as possible. To protect the fish population we need action now.

ERO Comment #82273: Glad you are doing it, it needs to be done. Better late than never. What you did for the Winnipeg River worked (as a property owner there for over two decades I saw a positive change)

Now what's going to happen is that people are going to hit the Winnipeg River hard which isn't good.

But you still need to reduce limits and have slot sizes on the Lake of the Woods. It may be unpopular with the tourist outfitters but they will benefit in the long term.

I've lived in Kenora for almost 70 years and I've seen the decline and the increased fishing pressure over those years.

Something needs to be done.

ERO Comment #82274: Expecting the local recreational anglers to solve the issue of over fishing is a pretty big ask. The issue of commercial fishing needs to be addressed. The commercial fishers may be targeting small to medium sized fish but gill nets take all sized fish including the largest. It also needs to be properly monitored. When it comes to the tourist industry maybe in this time and age the lake cannot support 60 some tourist facilities on the Ontario side of the lake. This is a conservation issue and everyone needs to stand up and do their part not just one of the stake holders. Everyone I've talked to over the past few years has agreed something needs to be done. No one I have talked to thinks this is the answer. I have concerns you do not have the ability or the will to

actually manage the walleye fishery on lake of the woods. Part of my concern comes from the management or lack of walleye management on shoal lake. Thanks for the opportunity to comment.

ERO Comment #82275: I am an avid fisherman on Lake of the Woods. Fishing has actually improved in the last couple of years because I would suggest the fish stock is up. If there is a goal to protect the species, more effort and expense should be spent on the Ministry doing enforcement of fishing regulations for those that poach versus than penalizing those that follow the limits will go much further to protect the health of the population. I have been fishing this lake regularly for 25 years. I've never been stopped or seen an enforcement officer. Think about that. 25 years fishing 30 times per year. That's 1,875 fishing days where an inspection has not taken place. That is the problem.

ERO Comment #82278: I applaud and support the efforts to develop a management plan to maintain a healthy and sustainable walleye population in the Lake of the Woods.

From a quick review of the draft plan, I have four comments.

(1) A plan like this can only work if it is based on the best available evidence which here comes from fish and ecosystem science. In this regard, I am surprised by the paucity of scientific references in the bibliography. Is this a sad commentary on the state of research in Ontario and Canada? For example, on page 26 a 1978 study by Christie is quoted as follows ""reductions in open seasons seldom reduce harvest in a meaningful way"" in order to dismiss any potential for considering changes to the open seasons. It may be that Christie's work has been unequaled in the past 45 years but if this is so then it must have been referenced by many more recent works which are the ones which should have been listed here in relation to Christie's seminal paper. As it appears in the draft plan, the conclusion cannot be supported by a paper of this antiquity, given all the ecosystem and social changes in the past four decades. A quick glance at the references shows very few peer reviewed papers listed here were written recently, although these are the scientific evidence needed to develop such a plan - . Many, like the paper by Christie are too old to be referenced alone without more recent references referring to them and supporting their old but still valid conclusions with newer evidence. A majority of the more recent references are in-house papers or non-scientific reports.

With the above, I am not saying that the science underlying the conclusions made in the report are incorrect; I am saying that the conclusions are not adequately supported by the science as it is presented in the report.

(2) My second point is somewhat similar to the first. The creel surveys are the primary evidence of what is happening with the walleye population. Now I have not read them, but when I read the report these surveys assume a great importance as the basis upon which the entire argument is based. I would have liked to have seen some discussion of the methodology of these surveys, not only their validity and reliability but also their adequacy in terms of providing the basis for the projections. I am not criticizing the use of this evidence to draw the conclusions, but rather how it is presented in the plan.

(3) My third point concerns the need for future data to understand and assess the impact of any new plan. This should be part of the planning process itself.

(4) And my fourth point is a question about why Minnesota data and reporting on the south end of the Lake system is not included in this plan since the fish do not go through customs. I learned at a forum on Lake water quality that Minnesota has better research in this area than existed in Canada. Is the same true for research on fish populations? If so, it needs to be part of the plan.

Thank you for this work

## **B. Comments submitted by email**

1. I will be dealing directly with Ministers Rickford and Smith on this matter which I very much disagree on most of it.

So I am assured that after 52 years in the tourism biz. on Lake of the Woods That My voice matters.

Cheers

**Personal information redacted**

2. Being a guide my entire life and now running a fishing resort for the past 5 years I know that this change is going to make my job tougher. But I also have seen fish populations go up and down over the years and know that a change like this is only going to make our fishery healthier. I have never seen the need to keep a walleye bigger than 18" so the drop to 17" I believe will benefit the population in a huge way. We do however need to be allowed to take pictures of the larger fish that will be released, it helps guides and resorts advertise the healthy fishery. On Sabaskong bay I have noticed a major decline in northern pike numbers, especially in the last 5 years. I am not sure what the cause of this may be (commercial netting, healthy pike limits, etc.) but we need to address this issue as well.

This change is going to have a negative impact on operators all over the lake, and although it will make a positive impact on fish numbers it will be tougher to draw clients our way. We must think of ways to help our local communities that rely on tourism to survive. Opening closed road systems to operators to access may help in our area. It would give us options for our clients to be able to fish lakes they never would otherwise. Even if was catch and release on those lakes.

3. I thought the information was good and having a background in tourism feel the treatment of non-resident fishers was the best that could be at the time. I have never felt that there was a need to keep a walleye over 18" so the drop to 17" not an issue, however the ability to legally photo a fish over should be pursued.

I believe locally there are concerns over the commercial and sustenance fishery especially as populations grow. I also know that little can be done to address that issue. One of the main concerns is incidental catch and disposal of other species (northern, muskie, whitefish).

As certain parts of our fishery become less of a draw for international anglers, we must think of ways to keep our regional towns viable in the tourism market. Perhaps the opening of closed road systems to all with certain safeguards could help down the road.

4. I have recently received an MNR letter regarding this plan and appreciate the opportunity to respond via your email address.

It surprises me that the Ministry perceives that the Lake of the Woods has a walleye deficiency. During the "Covid" years there has been little recreational or commercial fishing on Sabaskong Bay. We are situated just north of Nestor Falls proper. All locals and others fishing this water have suggested the past few years have been the best fishing in years and this relates in all size categories. Due to high gas prices, most fishing has been conducted close to home. This is true of the indigenous population, as well. The Nestor Falls fishing population is small and may not be representative of the Kenora, Sioux Narrows and Morson areas. The Ministry letter does not indicate where the walleye survey was conducted. One further note, the 2022 high water level altered traditional walleye fishing holes. I found the best walleye fishing were in holes that best produced a catch 50 years ago. It makes me wonder if the members of your committee perceive a decline of fishing after failing to alter their fishing attack.

I would like to note that our customer base at **Personal information redacted** are mostly families. Most already purchase a sports license in order that the daily catch may feed their family. Most are not looking to take home fish. Those that do purchase the conservation license will discover the inability to feed their family. Your proposal will likely alter the purchaser of this license form to true catch and release fishermen. Others will be forced to pay additional funds by converting their license purchase to a sport license. I am uncertain if this is a detriment to them. I wonder, however, why you continue to offer a conservation license under your current proposal. It may just offer another reason for our tourist base to grumble. I should also note that I have no issue with the reduction of catch by the citizen or non-tourist base. Flack, if any, will come from the local citizenry.

Last, a quick note on catch size. I have never understood the need to keep trophy fish. One should set the trophy size and indicate all fish above this size must be returned to the water. One should also make it easy to determine the legal size of your catch. Hard to believe people keep tiny fish. I say this as a camp owner that fears a fisherman may inadvertently keep an improperly measured fish. Once burned, such tourists will never return to Canada.

Thank you for this opportunity to offer comment. I appreciate the work you do.

**Personal information redacted**

5. First, I would like to thank you for providing an expedient reply to my questions/concerns pertaining to the proposed LoW Recreational Walleye Plan. I have a few follow up questions/concerns with the responses you provided, they are:

1. I look forward to part - 2 of the walleye plan for LoW. However, I am uncertain how MNRF are going to facilitate changes to the commercial/sustainment fishing on LoW given the different jurisdiction between province and the federal governments as well as treaty rights. Can you share MNRF strategy to address this?

2. It is disappointing to learn that Minnesota DNR do not share the same level of concern for the walleye fishery that Ontario MNRF does.

3. Given the period of time that recreational fishing for walleye has been closed on Shoal Lake why has the walleye stocks not rebounded? Has MNRF completed additional studies on the lake to determine why the ceasing for recreational walleye fishing was not successful in the recovery of the walleye stocks? If so, can you share the data with me?

4. The data clearly identify non-resident anglers as the majority of fisherman on LoW, it is also reasonable to believe that they also harvest the majority of the walleye on the lake, yet the proposed regulation changes basically only target residents of Canada with minimal changes to the existing non-resident regulations. How can we facilitate the recovery of the walleye stocks by reducing the harvest of the minority of anglers on Lake of the Woods and disregard the majority?

5. In conclusion, I feel that this proposal will be as effective as the measures implemented on Shoal Lake but I hope I am wrong. I look forward to a healthy walleye population on Lake of the Woods.

Thank you for taking the time to discuss this important and sensitive issue.

**Personal information redacted**

6. It is my understanding this is the last day for commenting on proposed changes. The proposal does not appear to be well advertised and after contacting Fort Frances, Dryden, Kenora and Thunder Bay MNR offices, I was able to obtain your name. Rather than comments, I have some questions:

1. Why does this proposal not appear on MNR's website as proposed changes to Zone 5 Fisheries Regulations?

2. As you are no doubt aware, Americans contribute to a great deal of fishing pressure on the south portion of Lake of the Woods in Minnesota. Has the State been contacted and, if so, what is being done to align the limits with their regulations?

3. Will the proposed changes affect walleye limits on the Rainy River downstream from the dam in Fort Frances? There does not appear to be any mention of this in the

"Lake of the Woods Draft Recreational Walleye Plan" which I was finally able to find in the Environmental Registry.

Sincerely,

**Personal information redacted**

7. My name is **Personal information redacted**. My Great Grandfather came to Kenora in 1879 before the railroad was complete and he was a fisherman. That's my background in a nutshell. My 4 children and 9 grandchildren all have a stake in lotw. My very simple solution to the pickerel problem is not to stop the commercial fishing but to stop the commercial fishing during spawning season that I know for a fact goes on. If this problem could be enforced we all would be better off. Thanks for your time

8. in our area we have a large Sauger population most are under 13.78 inches, we use them for shore lunch a lot, instead of small walleyes. there should be some exceptions for that species,being they count as walleye.

9. As it stands now the indigenous and metis have no harvest limit, use nets which harvest huge amounts of walleye daily, year round yet there are no proposals to limit their harvest, why? Is their unlimited harvest not a threat? That doesn't make sense,and they make revenue as well. Our non-residents with bushels of money get verification from the indigenous and haul huge amounts of fillets home. Why should they be able do that.? Seems ludicrous to put the smackdown on resident anglers and not impose any restrictions on the indigenous. It may escalate the bitterness and blame people already feel towards the walleye decline.

10. I would to comment on the Lake of the Woods Draft Recreational Walleye Plan.

1) I felt the public consultation process could have been better organized. More information should have been made available to access the virtual meetings in March. You had all summer to advertise the public open house at the Days Inn in Kenora held in November. I never heard about the open house until I received a call from the local office on the day of the meeting.

2) I'm all in favour of reducing the harvest if the lake is in trouble. When your modelling (not an exact science) shows the harvest must be reduced by 40 percent there were only 2 options that fit this scenario. The only people affected by this proposed change is the Ontario and Canadian residents. I understand that you cannot reduce the limits for non residents as it would put the lodge owners out of business. You also want to treat all anglers equally. When I asked about a 3 fish catch and possession limit for everyone you said it didn't meet the 40% reduction target. What would the reduction be with the 3 fish limit. I think this information should have been made available.

3) Since this proposal only applies to the Lake of the Woods, more pressure may be put on the Winnipeg River and surrounding lakes.



4) Did you consider changing the season for walleye, ie close the season March 1st rather than April 14th. The extra 6 weeks would take a lot of pressure off the spawning walleye.

5) The fishing pressure on Lake of the Woods over the last three years has been greatly reduced because of the pandemic and high water last year. I would like to suggest a reduced limit of 3 for everyone. Monitor for a couple of years and if that is not working go to the 2 fish limit.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

**Personal information redacted**

11. Yes, do put me on your stakeholder list. My musky partner and I are very interested in anything to do with musky management in your region. I was just speaking to my musky partner (**Personal information redacted**), and we are interested getting more informed on some of the management issues facing musky out your way and perhaps getting a bit more involved at some point.

My thoughts on your walleye plan:

It is a step in the right direction. My view is the more aggressive version makes the most sense as far as your overall objective. As with here in Manitoba over the years, I would assume you have some resistance to aggressive changes in creel limits and to some extent size limits. I don't know if you've followed the progression in regulations here, but buy-in by folks in the media and folks in the online forums, together with continuous support from the lodge and outfitter community has been highly beneficial in moving them forward

Our reg changes for next year can be found here:

[https://www.manitoba.ca/nrnd/fish-wildlife/pubs/fish\\_wildlife/fish/manitoba\\_recreational\\_angling\\_strategy.pdf](https://www.manitoba.ca/nrnd/fish-wildlife/pubs/fish_wildlife/fish/manitoba_recreational_angling_strategy.pdf)

You will note that we have finally managed to implement a no-over reg on a number of species. We've sold that bigger fish = bigger and more eggs and eggs with more viability, and that the concept of senile (old fish are not viable reproductively) is a debunked myth. Just as the none-under rule selects for slow growing fish, allowing for an over selects against the fastest growing and most robust fish. The none-over is actually is a very easy sell to the angling community as everyone likes to catch big fish and CPR is now well ingrained.

I would recommend moving to a zero over in your region as well - and that would include of course muskies (zero and zero across the board for them, not just for the conservation licence).

Again, thanks for your quick reply. If available at some point, I would very much be interested in the creel census data (raw or otherwise) I was fortunate enough to participate in a couple times this year up Minaki way.

Regards, **Personal information redacted**

P.S. - apologies, I just noticed this showed as replied to, but was still in drafts folder, hence tardiness in getting back.

**Personal information redacted**

12. This is **Personal information redacted**. I am now going into my 45th season in 2023, and I would like to give you my comments and thoughts on the proposed new changes to the LOTW walleye fishery. I am not understanding how these changes will help the walleye fishery at all by simply still allowing guests on a sport license the ability to possess 4 walleye, but only now they have to go over two days instead of one? How does that help, as none of our guests ever stay less than 2 days? They would all take the same amounts regardless. The exact same goes for the conservation limits? If they can still take 2 over two days, how does that help the fishery?

What I do see happening is that with allowing guests on a conservation license to only have one Walleye for shorelunch, other fish will be heavily targeted all summer long like northern pike and bass to fill in for that one extra walleye to eat every day that they now enjoy. In my opinion, this hurts the lake overall and creates more problems elsewhere.

My other thought is that 99.5% of all of our guests go strictly catch and release, because of the large and significant discounts that we offer to not take any fish home at all. Now you will be encouraging these guests to also keep every walleye they catch over 70 cm to eat for shorelunch. Again, how does that help our fishery if we keep depleting the bigger walleyes just to have a daily shorelunch? Makes absolutely no sense to me.

What will ultimately end up happening is that everyone will buy a full sport fishing license just to be able to have a shorelunch. That means they now will want to take home full limits of “all species” just like they used to all do in the old days. Again, this just does not make any sense to me after we have worked so hard for 25 years to change things to catch and release. What about modifying these new regulations to include simply allowing two walleyes a day “only” just for the sole purpose of shorelunch, and then no more are allowed to keep at all?

After 45 years in the business I guarantee everyone will start to figure out ways to either keep the walleye over 70cm, or substitute other species. Please, let’s not start to do that now, as the pike in particular are already very sensitive to low populations. What is the logic behind cutting the walleyes down from 45cm to only 43cm? Are the ones between 43-45cm really the big breeders?

Here at **Personal information redacted**, our standard in house policy is that we do not allow our guides to keep or bring fish back into the lodge at the end of each day. Now with these new regulations, I guarantee our guests will be asking our guides to bring in their limit of 2 each day, or 4 total over two days, so they can have those to take home also, since they will be eating theirs on the lake each day. I sure hope you can understand all of our concerns. We deeply appreciate the efforts of the MNR to help us to preserve our lake, and ultimately our livelihood, but please let's not create further problems along the way. Our tourist business is extremely fragile now as it is. While I understand your intentions are good, I truly feel these new regulations will greatly hurt our industry while having very little to do as far as conserving our walleye populations. Plus what about all of the nets we see year round that harvest and kill so many walleyes and a lot are left in the nets to rot? Why aren't you stopping that as well?

In conclusion I could support all the proposals suggested. Again, it will not affect whether guests need to stay one day or two days to take their limits, since they all stay a minimum of two days anyways. If you could, also please explain why you are proposing cutting the size limits down to 43cm from 45cm. If it makes sense, then I could fully support everything currently proposed. Perhaps you could find a compromise or solution for us, so our guests could still buy the conservation license and enjoy and eat two walleyes per day, or at least 1.5 walleyes per day. Actually with that said, our guides rule of thumb is to keep 1.5 walleye for shorelunch. That means a group of 4 guests would keep six walleye to allow each guest the 3 fillets for lunch, so perhaps you could even allow 1.5 walleye per day on conservation for shorelunch purposes only.

You asked for our comments, and I hope after 45 years you will see that we have some great credibility. We absolutely want to keep our beautiful lake healthy for many years to come. With the understanding that almost none of our guests take fish home, getting their limits over one day or two makes absolutely zero difference to us here. However, not having 1.5 walleyes for a great shorelunch would greatly diminish the highlight of their trip and what THEY HAVE ALL COME ENJOY AND LOVE THE MOST OF ALL!

Thank you **Personal information redacted**

13. I have read the proposal and did not see any changes to the commercial harvests on lake of the woods. Did I miss that portion or are there no changes to it.

Thank You

**Personal information redacted**

14. **Personal information redacted** You may find this report interesting. I remind you that **Personal information redacted** would like to finally catch a walleye.

I notice that there is no discussion in the report of bait fish reproduction or the significance of the maintenance and restoration of connectivity of tributary streams for spawning of the many species in the food chain. These tributaries are also significant for the traditional food harvests that are described in the treaties. There is I suspect an opportunity here

for MNRF or First Nations to champion some meaningful Fishculvert and other river connectivity projects at Lake of the Woods.

Let's go fishing again.

**Personal information redacted**

15. The tourism industry is just coming off three devastating years. Covid diminished our American guests to zero and Canadian visitor numbers dropped dramatically. All lakes feeding into LOTW and LOTW itself suffered access problems last year due to “one in a century” high water levels. Everyone I know just wants a return to normality and consistency. Coupled with the devastating effects of disease and environmental challenges are the costs of business and the insane regulations and regulatory suggested changes/costs. From TSSA to the federal initiative to do away with the Boater's Rental Agreement to Natural Resources Bait License for re-sellers to expiry dates on leeches - one could write entire articles on why the tourism industry is one of the top pressure cookers in the business world.

IF Natural Resources wishes to be seen as a competent player in the environmental/conservation sphere, they must begin to address several issues: 1). Education must be a major thrust in the Walleye initiative. There must be posters distributed to all tourism/fishing-related business that speaks to the issue in clear and precise terms. The rationale MUST be explained in a user-friendly manner that focuses on the positives of the initiative. Posters must be posted in schools and First Nations buildings. All must be seen to be a part of the solution. 2). There must be tangible evidence that the conservation of fish stocks is a priority. Re-stocking must be a priority. I know that you believe the young fish population is healthy; but, the perception is that Natural Resources does nothing but cut costs, cut programs, and is only entered on enforcement and the dollars it brings in.... Perception is reality! 3). There must be some regulation of netting on LOTW. You have heard the stories of ghost nets - fill with fish, not harvested, nets sink, fish rot, nets rise and the cycle repeats itself. Culled fish from nets are thrown on islands to rot. This does not contribute to a healthy narrative around conservation. 4). Natural Resources, generally, must be more pro-active about changing the way the public perceives the Department. These should be ambassadors, educators, individuals you can ask questions of without feeling threatened. Have them make visits; phone ahead so that individuals don't move to “panic mode.” We have had officers confiscate guns and deer only to find out later they had the wrong suspects - no apologies. It happens more often than not so it becomes not worth the hassle of opening any longer for deer season. Obviously, after an encounter like this, guests do not return, although we have friends from Vermont who have experienced this type of treatment and they still come back (and spend major dollars in our area.) 5). All fishermen should be allowed one over the 17” slot size. Our guests never take trophy size Walleye unless they will not survive a return to the water. Depth or major hook damage will in the future just result in wasted fish. 6). Ensure that wardens do not penalize a photo-taker for taking a picture of “The big one”, whether it's 22” or 27”. This is vital to the tourist economy. Social media and the bragging rights of hooking the “big one” is our cheapest form of advertising for

the region. Again, education - how to handle a fish (quickly and safely) and how to release - most anglers already know this - just reinforce it without prejudice.

I appreciated your team at the presentation. They seem knowledgeable and caring. Hopefully, this translates into a program that includes both those elements. Natural Resources needs to re-establish itself as a steward of the land and waters. They need public support and common sense from the powers in Toronto - hopefully you get both. How this all plays out will depend on whether the system is perceived as fair and responsive.

Thanks for asking for input. I worked for **Personal information redacted**, so I hope this isn't "smoke and mirrors."

**Personal information redacted**

16. A draft I just found.

Good morning **Personal information redacted**,

As a Lake of the Woods Resort owner and operator and guide for over 50 years I am also a commercial fish buyer for 30 years.

I guess I am a fish monger because I enjoy eating all fish flesh and Large Snapping Turtles from Lake of the Woods.

I have to say I strongly disagree with the proposed changes to the Walleye limits. Your science is outdated and incorrect.

Your only penalizing the taxpayers and tourists with this reduction in walleye limit because MNRF does not want to touch real issue of the gill net harvest I met two young boys last year at a Christmas party that sit on your advisory committee and they didn't have a clue what they we're talking about. They thought no one needed more than 2 walleye to eat. It's way bigger than that.

I believe the current regulations have been accepted by the majority and should not be changed.

A change like this will cripple tourism and dolittle for the fishery. Turn honest conservation minded fishers into criminals just so they can have a family feed of their favourite fish. The money it will cost taxpayers to change and reprint the regulations can be saved.

I do a lot of corporate guide trips and we eat 3 fillets or two small walleye each guest for shorelunch and the guests get to take 2 walleye home as a special treat for their family. Plus they buy our fish fry coating we retail and everyone is happy and they return for future trips.

The reasons many guides do not let guests take fish home I believe is because of another stupid law that won't allow guides to clean take home fish at shore lunch and transport fillets in the boat.

Also most guides and fisher people don't have a fish cleaning spot when they get back to land.

There should be government supplied fish cleaning facilities at the public boat ramps in Ontario Like there is in about every other boat ramp in North America.

My opinion is that if MNRF implements this foolish change to Lake of the Woods walleye regulations. That MNRF has completely failed to manage the walleye fishery.

And that failure means your job description must change too.

You must ban the gill net use on Lake of the Woods and indigenous fishers must go back to the traditional fish trapping methods used before the gill nets arrived.

MNRF biologists should be responsible for teaching these methods with modern materials and also be able to collect accurate fish biology data from walleye and the highly value able non target species such as Bass, Muskie, Lake Trout, Pike, Sturgeon many of which are killed in gill nets and piled on shore or deep sixed because the current fishermen can't sell them and the taxpayers cannot legally purchase them.

Also MNRF's failure to manage our self sustaining fishery means the time has come to start government run fish Hatcheries in conjunction with the clean water facilities taxpayer's are building in indigenous communities.

Please do not go ahead with your plans that will do no good for tourism or the walleye fishery.

**Personal information redacted**

### **C. Comments received via the Natural Resources Information and Support Centre**

1. I am writing to protest the new rules being proposed about fishing, the first is cutting down the length of our 4th pickeral from over 18" to all under 18" inches also we as anglers do not want the removal of live bait from our rights as fishermen. Please help us to stop the MNRF from taking away the rights of everyday fishermen and women. Thank you.

**Personal information redacted**

2. Hello ; I would like to comment on proposed changes to Lake Of The Woods walleye regulations ! I am in favour of the ALTERNATE OPTION : leave the current limit but go with the size limitations .

Thank you ,

**Personal information redacted**

#### **D. Comments received via the MNRF Twitter site**

1. In advance of providing feedback, the following two key factors must be known: Is the MNRF working with, Manitoba and Minnesota officials ?

Will Indigenous anglers be subject to all new regulations? A response is appreciated but by no means expected.

#### **E. Comments received via telephone**

MNRF staff received five comments by telephone. Those conversations have not been reproduced for this report.