

Update to Underutilized Fish Resources: Response from AEP February 2017

Numerous people and several organizations have provided considerable feedback on the proposed solutions to the concern for underutilized fish stocks in our lakes in NE and Central Alberta. A proposed solution that includes a low risk harvest that will sustain fish stocks but at the same time allow for some harvest has been sent to Premier Rachel Notley and Minister Shannon Phillips.

The initial meeting sponsored by AFGA Zone 5 and clubs and two local Agricultural Societies was attended by 350 people and was held at Lac Bellevue Hall on September 7, 2016. A TEAM of concerned people was developed as a result of that initial meeting.

Another meeting sponsored by the Lac La Biche Chamber of Commerce was held in Lac La Biche on January 31, 2017. It was attended by 240 people and 19 spoke. Contributions from aboriginal people (First Nations and Metis) indicated the presence of abundant walleye and the need for utilization of this fish species. The observations of abundant walleye less yellow perch and less lake whitefish and thin pike were again mentioned in several lakes. The need for changes in fishing regulations was re-affirmed.

Eight local newspapers and other media outlets have been providing communication with the people and interchange has occurred with numerous people who have provide suggestions and support for specific requests that have been sent to the Premier and the Minister.

The following updates are provided.

1. An Alberta ReLM (Government of Alberta) survey was sent via internet to several Alberta anglers on January 31, 2017. Another survey was sent February 21, 2017. Questions on the fishing regulations on several lakes are being asked. The public meetings have indicated the option of issuing tags for walleye was totally opposed as an option. However, the earlier survey and questions did not allow for other options to be indicated. The most recent survey provides an opportunity for comments. Considering extensive communication in this regard from the public, the survey seems

to be dictating a controlled response and a controlled result. This does not seem to provide the public/stakeholders/anglers with open communication that allows choices and broader input. Specific requests have been made to the Premier and the Minister of AEP. Over 600 people have attended meetings at Lac Bellevue Hall and in Lac La Biche in the past few months. Hundreds of others have supported the request for **“low risk consumptive fish harvest regulations”** but not the use of a draw for tags. For all who may complete the recent surveys, you could suggest that the recommendation made to the Premier and Minister should be endorsed and implemented for April 1 2017.

2. The Alberta Government FWIN website with summaries and reports had been deleted and now a revised version has been provided. Several concerns with the revised site are evident. A revised approach to interpreting the FWIN from the previous collapsed, vulnerable and stable classification of walleye lakes to a sustainability index of risk has been introduced. FWIN sampling reports are still being added to the site.
3. The requests to the Premier and Minister have still not been addressed; however, some verbal communication has suggested that the government is reviewing and considering the possibility of some changes for the April 2017 regulations. The following communications have been provided:
 - Alberta Environment and Parks will in the short term gauge support of anglers to allow for harvest opportunities at select lakes. Information contributed by many Alberta anglers is very useful in understanding the response of fish stocks.
 - Some proposed changes in the interim support a longer-term strategy for evaluation of many more lakes across the province.

At this point the Next Step is to still wait for a few more days.

Background Information

For the past 20 years many public lakes in Alberta have had zero catch limits on walleye and northern pike. Anglers have expressed concern and are asking why not allow some fish to be caught and utilized by Albertans. Anglers want to have healthy fish stocks and still use the annual production. Harvest of fish

could be controlled and appropriate regulations established to allow for healthy fish populations. There is a concern that nothing will be done in all of the lakes that have abundant numbers of fish.

All the people suggested that the current fishing regulations were not acceptable and changes were required!

The suggested solution to the concern for underutilized fish in NE and Central Alberta Lakes by the large majority of people included the following.

Request #1

Revise the Alberta Sportfishing Regulations to:

“Harvesting one walleye daily limit of smaller-sized walleye (slot between 40cm and 50cm total length) for each angler in all the NE and Central Alberta walleye lakes with a specified concurrent season (all lakes in the same week or days) such as one week in June and one week in March. A shorter concurrent season for the smaller –sized lakes (less than 1000 hectares surface area) could also be a consideration. Catch and release fishing and current catch limits for other species would remain unchanged”

Request #2

Fishing regulations should be simplified and changes incorporated in the April 1 2017 Alberta Sportfishing Regulations.

Request #3

The policies and programs of the provincial government be updated to emphasize increasing fish resources by taking direct and measurable action to:

- **Control Cormorants**
- **Improve and increase fish habitat that will result in increased fish production and recreational opportunities**
- **Increase fish stocking and create supplemental walleye stocking programs in a few selected lakes**
- **Protect fish habitat and water quality**

Request #4

- **No draws for walleye tags or special permits be issued for any of these lakes**

Sponsors and Contributors

Zone 5 AFGA, Zone 4 AFGA, St. Paul FGA, Beaver River FGA, Edmonton Oldtimers Fishing Association, Lac Bellevue Agricultural Society, St. Paul Agricultural Association, Lac La Biche Chamber of Commerce, St Paul Journal, Bonnyville Nouvelle, Lac La Biche Post, Athabasca Advocate, Hiway 16 News, Vegreville Advertiser, Sherwood Park News, Cold Lake Sun, County of St. Paul, MD of Bonnyville, Lac La Biche County, Athabasca County, Cold Lake Municipality

Lac Bellevue TEAM

Reeve of the County of St. Paul, Reeve of the MD of Bonnyville, Mayor and Councillor of Lac La Biche County, Reeve of Athabasca County, Mayor of Cold Lake, public citizens Kyla Walker, Ray Danyluk, Clarence Makowecki, Kevin Johnston (Fishin' Hole business) and Ray Makowecki (Fisheries Biologist Volunteer).

We believe that the simplified changes will enhance the overall fish populations and allow the people to use the fish as food and at the same time provide economic benefits to the local communities for continued recreational fishing and tourism.

Note: MLA's Dave Hanson and Scott Cyr are completely behind any plans that open the conversation with Environment and Parks to discuss making it easier for Albertans to enjoy increased fishing opportunities in Alberta's lakes and streams. MLA Colin Piquette looks forward to continued dialogue on this issue.

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Submitted On behalf of the general public, including municipalities, Fish and Game Associations, Agricultural Societies, Recreational Groups, other organizations and many individuals.
February 2017**