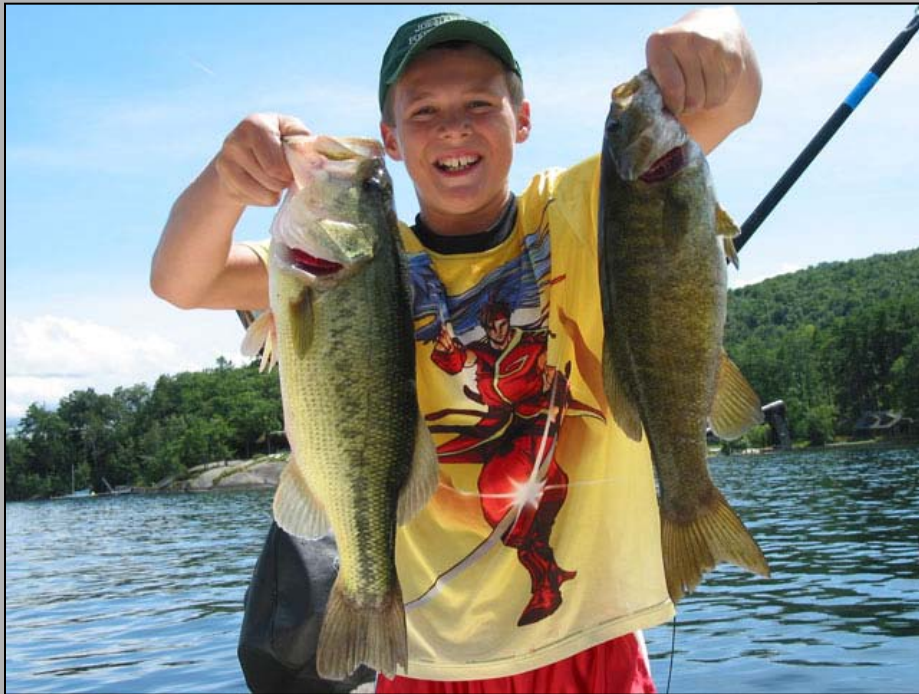


# Discussion of Black Bass Regulation Proposal



December 16, 2013 WRSC Meeting

# History

- Bass groups expressed desire to expand fishing opportunity in 1980s
- In 1988 DNR established early C&R season on 6 lakes (Holloway, Muskegon, Hardy, Cass, Pontiac, Kent)
- Bass groups expressed desire to expand fishing opportunity in 1990s
- SALBRC formed in 2002 to evaluate potential expansion of C&R season.
- Current CIR season (from walleye/pike opener to black bass opener) established in 2006
- In 2011 the Bass Regulations Evaluation Task group completed a 5-year evaluation of CIR season = “*No catastrophic effects*”
- ...but, there were many uncertainties and BRET recommended additional 5 years for evaluation (2016)

# BASS Nation Proposals

- Proposal 1: CIR season for black bass from Jan 1 to the Friday before Memorial Day, harvest season from Saturday before Memorial Day to Dec 31
- Proposal 2: Remove closed seasons for all fish. “Illegal to possess fish outside of the open season.” Exceptions would still allow areas closed to all fishing.

# Fisheries Division

## Initial Evaluation

- Workgroup developed an issue statement describing the proposals, the history of SALBRC and BRET, and a synthesis of recent information on black bass to prepare biologists for an initial discussion of the proposals

# Creel information:

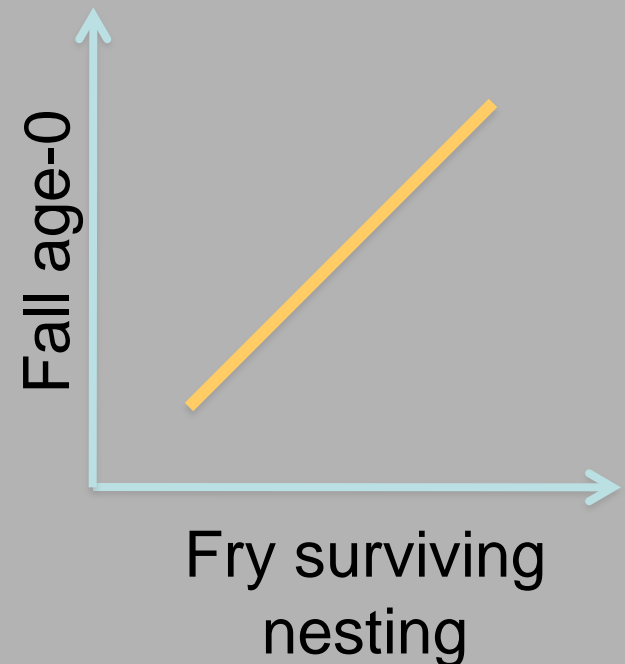
- MDNR Creel: Targeted catch rates for black bass were 1.4 times higher during the CIR season than during the harvest season.
- Angler attitudes/behavior:
  - Master angler entries show that C&R entries are on the rise while harvest entries are declining
  - 37% were not even aware of CIR season
  - 16% said they would fish more because of CIR
  - 8% were fishing in a tournament
- Calendar shifts: CIR opener = day 114-121, harvest opener = day 142-149

# Recent Findings:

## Population Level Effects of Spring Fishing

**Abundance:** *Does a reduction in successful nests (dispersing fry) result in lower recruitment?*

- ON and MI: a minority of nests produce the majority of survivors, **YET**
- Illinois reservoirs: 4 of 12 had significant positive relationship across years
- Michigan lakes: positive relationship across 4 lakes



# Recent Findings: population level effects of spring fishing

- **Abundance:** *Does fishing reduce the number of successful nests?*
- Michigan lakes:
  - Experimentally CIR fished nests tended to contribute fewer fall offspring than control nests
  - Lower nest survival during Harvest than CIR; larger reduction in high fishing lakes.
- Various experiments: Nest abandonment (failure) rates much higher for CDR than CIR

# Recent Findings: population level effects of spring fishing

- **Genetics and Behavior:** *Is sport fishing selecting for non-aggressive bass?*
- Illinois experiment: Vulnerability to angling is a heritable trait, correlated with several phenotypic traits.

**Emerging theme:** substantial variation among water bodies in black bass demographics, behavior, and response to angling



# Synthesis of Information

- Uncertainty remains regarding the numeric and genetic effects of angling on black bass populations.
- A key issue for discussion will be what level of risk we are willing to accept.

# Goals for Biologist Meeting Discussion

- Address BASS Nation proposal
  - *Can we support the proposal as written?*
  - *If not, what are the major concerns with the proposal?*
  - *Are there possible resolutions to these concerns?*
- *Address other options for increasing bass fishing opportunity*

Concern: The proposal has two different objectives: 1. extending the CIR season statewide, and 2. extending harvest season on Lake Saint Clair.

Solution:

- What is the most important fishing opportunity presented as part of the proposal?



Concern: The expansion of the CIR season will create the problem of fishing during the closure for walleye, northern pike, and muskellunge in inland lakes and U.P. Great Lakes.

Solutions:

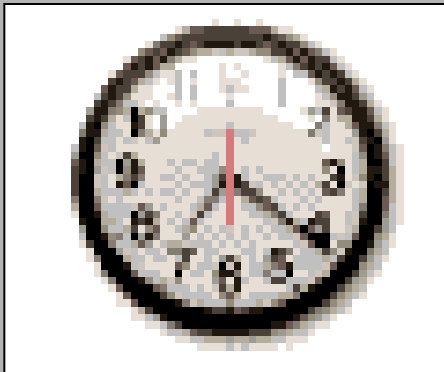
- Allow CIR or harvest of black bass from January 1 – March 15.



Concern: There may not have been enough time since the 2006 change to see population-level effects and changes in recruitment. There is the feeling that we are rushing through the issue.

Solution:

- Wait until BRET suggestion of 2016 for further evaluation of data from Status and Trends and other sources.





Concern: The available research is largely on largemouth bass and more related to southern waters. Northern latitudes are not well represented.

Solution:

- Allow time to gather more information from northern populations.
- Consider varying seasons by latitude.



Concern: Additional angling pressure on Lake St. Clair spawning bass if the harvest season were extended. It is uncertain how much CIR effort, tournament effort, and harvest/mortality would increase.

Solution:

- Try to get an grasp on current tournament effort and predict future effort.



Concern: Public perception and/or social problems related to increased tournament activity on Lake St. Clair during a period that used to be closed.

Solution:

- Discuss limitations on tournaments at State access sites.

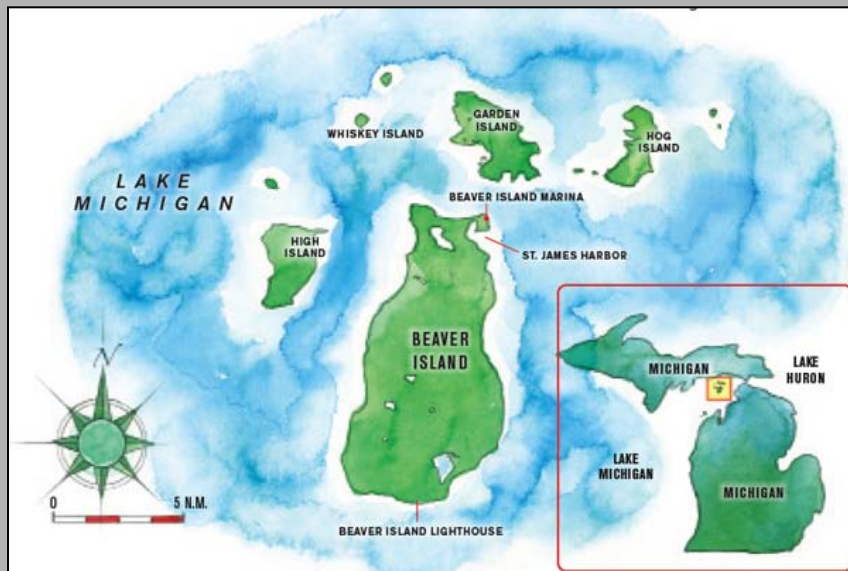




Concern: Uncertainty whether the intent of the proposal is to alter special seasons such as the Beaver Island archipelago on Lake Michigan.

Solution:

- No change to special black bass seasons waters alone.



## Other comments:

- In some locations anglers and/or biologists believe there are actually too many bass; thus, additional harvest/mortality can be good in some situations.
- Tournament anglers need to do a better job of educating general angling public.
- Do not feel there is enough time to adequately evaluate proposal, discuss alternatives, conduct public review, and conduct discussion with NRC for implementation in 2015.

# Where do we go from here?

- Additional discussion by WRSC
- Fisheries Division work group established that will facilitate internal discussion.
- Begin to engage the overall public.

