

PROPOSAL 18

5 AAC 74.044. Minto Flats Northern Pike Sport Fish Management Plan.

Repeal the bag limit reduction and modify the open season for northern pike in Minto Flats, as follows:

Change **5 AAC 74.044. Minto Flats Northern Pike Sport Fish Management Plan** remove the reductions in bag limits and change the open season:

(a) Northern pike stocks in the lakes and flowing waters of the Minto Flats support both subsistence and sport fisheries. The purpose of this management plan is to provide the department with guidance to achieve the goals of managing these stocks consistent with sustained yield principles, providing a reasonable opportunity for the priority subsistence fishery, and providing a sport fishing opportunity. The Minto Flats northern pike management plan for the subsistence fishery is set out in **5 AAC 01.244**. (b) The department shall manage the Minto Flats northern pike sport fishery as follows: (1) the maximum exploitation rate of northern pike in the lakes and flowing waters of the Minto Flats by all users may not exceed 20 percent annually; (2) the following provisions apply to the harvest of northern pike in the Minto Flats area sport fishery: (A) the open fishing season is from **April 15 through October 14**; (B) the daily bag and possession limit is five fish per day, only one of which may be 30 inches or more in length;

[(C) IF THE SUBSISTENCE HARVEST REPORTS INDICATE THAT 750 OR MORE NORTHERN PIKE HAVE BEEN HARVESTED FROM THE CHATANIKA RIVER DRAINAGE UPSTREAM OF THE CONFLUENCE OF THE CHATANIKA RIVER AND GOLDSTREAM CREEK DURING THE PERIOD FROM JANUARY 1 UNTIL THESE WATERS ARE FREE OF ICE, THE COMMISSIONER SHALL REDUCE, BY EMERGENCY ORDER, THE DAILY BAG AND POSSESSION LIMIT TO TWO FISH PER DAY, ONLY ONE OF WHICH MAY BE 30 INCHES OR MORE IN LENGTH, IN THE LAKES AND ALL FLOWING WATERS OF THE MINTO FLATS AREA FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE CALENDAR YEAR]

; and (c) in the Chatanika river drainage upstream from the confluence of the Chatanika river and Goldstream creek to an ADF&G regulatory marker located at the boundary of the Fairbanks nonsubsistence area (approximately one mile downstream from the murphy dome road), only single hooks may be used.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? The Minto Northern Pike Management Plan (5 AAC 74.044) imposes restrictions that unnecessarily limit sport fishing opportunities without providing tangible benefits to sustainability. Specifically, when the subsistence harvest of pike from the special Chatanika winter overwintering area exceeds 750 or 1,500 fish, the sport fishing bag and possession limits are reduced from 5 fish per day (with only one over 30 inches) to 2 fish per day (with only one over 30 inches). This change does not effectively support conservation for either the sport or subsistence fishery, as Fish and Game data has shown that reducing the limit from 5 to 2 fish saves fewer than 100 small pike (“Hammer handles”) in Minto Flats—an area that has arguable over 100,000 small fish. These small fish have a very low chance of surviving to reach 30 inches, rendering the restriction ineffective in terms of sustainability.

Additionally, the management plan closes sport fishing entirely in Minto Flats from October 15 through May 31. This means that residents, including cabin owners, are unable to fish during the Memorial Day weekend. The closed period is unnecessarily restrictive and deprives local anglers of a valuable opportunity to enjoy the area.

In contrast, the subsistence fishery in Minto Flats remains open year-round without significant restrictions. Anyone can fish in the summer with unlimited use of large mesh gill nets. The only notable restriction is during winter in the special Chatanika overwintering area, where the daily limit is 10 fish (only 2 over 30 inches) to protect the female pike population. These regulations are necessary due to the extreme vulnerability of the entire population concentrated into a couple of river miles. The department recognized this vulnerability back in 1980s when it closed this area and all of Minto Flats to sport fishing in the area in the 1980s.

It should be noted that the Chatanika winter subsistence fishery is now effectively a sport fishery, with many participants unaware they require a permit. This issue has become more prominent since the discovery of the fishery on social media, which has attracted a large number of non-subsistence fishers.

Overall, there are no significant sustainability concerns in the area, and the current management plan only provides minimal conservation benefits while restricting sport fishing unnecessarily. The stipulations in the plan complicate the regulations and result in lost opportunities, particularly during the Memorial Day weekend. Background sport fishing regulations are very conservative by design to protect large female fish.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local Fish and Game Advisory Committee? Explain.

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