

PROPOSAL 21

5 AAC 74.010. Seasons, bag, possession, and size limits and methods and means for the Tanana River Area.

Allow a catch-and-release fishery for northern pike and modify gear in Harding Lake, as follows:

To ensure the protection of Harding Lake's northern pike population, we propose the following regulatory framework:

Fishing Season:

Open year-round or seasonally (May–October) to coincide with peak fishing periods.

Gear Restrictions:

Single-barbless hooks only to minimize injury.

No use of bait to reduce deep-hooking risk.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?

Harding Lake, one of the largest and deepest lakes in Interior Alaska, has historically supported a population of northern pike (*Esox lucius*). Currently, the lake remains closed to sport fishing for northern pike to protect population dynamics. However, based on biological assessments and angler interest, we propose opening Harding Lake to ****catch-and-release- only**** sport fishing for northern pike. This regulation change would allow recreational fishing opportunities while ensuring the long-term sustainability of the pike population.

Current Management Status

- Harding Lake is presently closed to northern pike sport fishing under existing ADF&G regulations.
- The closure aims to protect and rebuild the pike population after previous declines.
- Limited biological studies have been conducted to assess population trends in recent years.

Justification for Catch-and-Release Sport Fishing

1. Sustainable Recreational Opportunity: Allowing catch-and-release fishing provides angling opportunities without negatively impacting the northern pike population.
2. Minimal Biological Impact: Research indicates that catch-and-release fishing, when practiced with proper handling techniques, has minimal long-term effects on pike survival rates.
3. Increased Monitoring and Data Collection: Opening the lake to catch-and-release would encourage data collection through angler reports and ADF&G studies, improving population assessment efforts.
4. Boost Local Economy and Outdoor Engagement: Expanding fishing access at Harding Lake would benefit local guides, bait shops, and tourism-related businesses while promoting outdoor recreation.

Expected Benefits of Proposed Changes

Conservation-Friendly Access: Maintains protection for pike while offering anglers a responsible way to enjoy the resource.

Improved Fisheries Data:*Increases opportunities for ADF&G to assess the pike population and its recovery.

Community and Economic Growth: Generates interest in Harding Lake as a destination for sport anglers, benefiting local outdoor businesses and tourism.

Educational Value: Provides an opportunity to promote ethical fishing practices and conservation awareness among the angling community.

Conclusion and Next Steps

We respectfully request the Alaska Board of Fisheries to review this proposal and consider implementing a trial period for catch-and-release northern pike fishing in Harding Lake. This approach ensures that recreational fishing can be enjoyed while safeguarding the long-term health of the fishery. We welcome discussions with ADF&G biologists, local stakeholders, and angler groups to refine and implement this plan.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local Fish and Game Advisory Committee? Explain. The Fairbanks Fish & Game Advisory Committee met on April 9th, 2025 and voted unanimously to submit this proposal.

PROPOSED BY: Fairbanks Fish and Game Advisory Committee Jeff Lucas, Chair

(EF-F26-140)
