

PROPOSAL 22

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 in Harding Lake, as follows:

Several options:

- Allow catch and release fishing in Harding Lake.**

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Sportfishing for northern pike in Harding Lake has been closed since 2000. However, despite this long-term restriction, northern pike abundance has not increased to a level that can sustain a harvest or bag limit. It is time to finally allow for a catch-and-release pike fishery.

There are several factors indicating that a harvest or bag limit would not be sustainable. First, the abundance of northern pike in Harding Lake is primarily determined by the availability of suitable spawning and rearing habitat, which is directly influenced by water levels. Harding Lake levels are actively managed at a predetermined level, effectively placing a cap on maximum population size. Second, water levels are likely to fluctuate downward over the long term, which will continue to impact population sizes and the availability of suitable habitat. Third, the harvest potential is very high because the lake is a popular recreational area surrounded by cabins. Lastly, any form of harvest would remove the larger fish, leaving behind an undesirable population of “hammer-handles.”

A catch-and-release fishery would be sustainable for several reasons. Northern pike are highly prolific, hardy, and nearly impossible to eradicate. The current regulations allow only a single-hook setup, which is well-suited for catch-and-release fishing. Additionally, studies have shown that northern pike have a high post-release survival rate when handled properly, making catch-and-release a viable management strategy that balances conservation and recreation.

Allowing catch-and-release fishing will provide sportfishing opportunities without depleting the population or creating an overabundance of hammer-handles. It would also establish a much-needed, roadside-accessible northern pike fishery.

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

PROPOSED BY: Tony Hollis

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