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Brad Dokken: Anglers Catching, Keeping Big Walleyes In Devils Lake Basin Sparks Annual Spring Debate

Courtesy of: <http://www.northlandoutdoors.com>

I'll never forget the first time I fished the Rainy River. The fishing was unlike anything I'd ever experienced. And while I've had the privilege of wetting a line in remote, far north waters of Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario, I'm not sure any of them surpassed the walleye action we encountered those two days in April 1987.

The fish were big, they bit readily and they were abundant. For a couple of guys in a 12-foot boat with a 4-horse Evinrude who had absolutely no idea how to fish the river, the action was nothing short of amazing.

Even after 30 years, that trips remains the standard.

There was a dark side to those two days, though. Back then, anglers fishing the Rainy River could keep six walleyes, and there was no size limit. I'm not sure how many stringers of 5-plus-pound walleyes we witnessed, but they were common.

That was legal at the time, but the ethics of keeping a big walleye for the cleaning table any time of year — much less during spawning season — is questionable in my mind.

In the case of Rainy River, plenty of other people felt the same way. Lawmakers even closed the spring season on the river for a year in 1989 or 1990, but it was reopened after a compromise was reached limiting anglers to two walleyes, none longer than 19½ inches, through the close of the season April 14.

Anglers still had the opportunity to experience some pretty amazing fishing when conditions were right, while protecting spawning walleyes.

The springtime regulation on the Rainy has been in effect ever since.

The debate over keeping big walleyes has been brewing anew the past couple of weeks in the Devils Lake Basin, where anglers in places have been lined up elbow to elbow targeting fish attracted by the abundance of spring runoff.

Walleyes and current are a perfect match, and fishing along the coulees that flow into Devils Lake can be spectacular during years such as this when runoff is high and flows are strong.

I haven't made it up there myself, but I've seen plenty of photos that confirm the quality of fishing anglers have encountered, not only for walleyes, but for pike and even white bass.

Every year, it seems, sportsmen attending the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's spring advisory board meetings bring up the idea of imposing a slot limit to protect larger fish or reducing the limit at a time when walleyes, and big walleyes in particular, are concentrated and especially vulnerable.

Every year, the department says there's no biological reason to either close the season or implement a size limit.

They make a good case. The best spring fishing — much of it done from shore — lasts only a few weeks, and there's no evidence to indicate springtime walleye harvest has limited production.

According to an article in the February 2017 issue of North Dakota Outdoors, a 2013 creel survey on Devils Lake showed only 3 percent of the walleyes harvested that year were longer than 20 inches.

The article also cited a May 2013 creel survey along the coulees that flow into Lake Irvine and Lake Alice, which found 59 percent of the walleyes harvested were 20 inches or longer.

A one-over-20-inch slot limit would have protected about half of those fish, the story said, a number that would have been in the hundreds and not the thousands.

"Most of these hundreds of fish would have returned to Lake Irvine or Lake Alice, where they would have found refuge due to difficult summer access on Lake Irvine and no summer fishing allowed on Lake Alice," according to the article. "Considering the vast expanse of water in the upper Devils Lake basin, the only time many of the fish are vulnerable to anglers is for a short time in the spring."

In other words, the perception is worse than the reality.

So, in the meantime, anglers who catch a big walleye in North Dakota will have to decide for themselves whether to keep that fish, regardless of the time of year.

It might be legal, but more and more, it's becoming less socially acceptable.

Count me in that camp.


Club Calendar

July 26th.....NUASF Club Meeting
 August 12th.....NUASF Social Night at Club House
 August 15th.....Kids Fishing Contest, 3pm-7pm.
 looking for the usual volunteers

August 26th.....NUASF Club Meeting
 September 13thNUASF Social Night at Club House
 September 27thNUASF Club Meeting



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From the President.....

By Jason Kuester

The next BIG club event is The kids fishing contest at Riverside Park. Mark your calendar for **August 15th**. This event takes a lot of volunteers and we would appreciate as much help as possible. Most of the prizes for this event are picked up. I would like to thank all of our volunteers for their hard work putting this event together. Our main goal is to make this a fun event for the kids. At the next meeting, there will be a sign up sheet to help organize what needs to be done on the day of the event. This will help everyone plan for the event *Thanks in advance for helping with this great event.*

It is time to sell tickets... We need everyone to do their part and sell raffle tickets for the 2019 Ice Castle Ice House!!! You can pick up your tickets the next meeting. If you are unable to attend the meeting and would like some tickets, please contact Ross Nelson 507-766-7076 ross@groundzeromidwest.com or Ken Sutherland 507-276-1534 ken.sutherland@ci.new-ulm.mn.us or myself at 507-381-2041 jr@newulmtel.net

Note: If you take the tickets you will be responsible for selling them or turning them back in at or before the Ice Fishing Contest on February 10, 2019.

Summer is screaming by, take time to enjoy it! Something as simple as fishing with family and friends can build a lifetime of great memories. If you would like to use a club boat they are located at the club grounds. Your club keys will unlock the locks. If you have any questions give me a call at 507-381-2041.

Summer is here and what a great time to bring our friends and family to the New Ulm Area Sport Fisherman Club. We are always looking for new members to join. If you know of someone bring them along and show them how much fun we have at our club. As always, bring a friend and each of you will receive a free refreshment of your choice!

Hope to see you at the next meeting!!



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**Hook, Line,
and Sinker**

The Hook Line and Sinker is published monthly by Master Graphics for New Ulm Area Sport Fishermen. The opinions expressed in this newsletter are solely those of respective writers and not to be construed as the opinion of the NUASF or its members. Send all correspondence and submissions to New Ulm Area Sport Fishermen, P.O. Box 294, New Ulm, MN 56073.

The NUASF Board
President - Jason Kuester 507-381-2041; Vice-President - Gary Sprenger 507-359-9358; Secretary - Mike Studtmann 507-766-0765; Treasurer - Jen Kuester 507-766-0143; Board Members: Mike Buechner 507-354-2739, Wyman Forbrook 507-420-5828, Wes Ludewig 507-276-6092.

NUASF Monthly Meeting June 28, 2018 Members Present: 29

I. Secretary Report - Approved as read.

II. Treasury Report - Approved as read.

III. Old Business

A. Membership Update: 150 Members, 24 Due, 2 new for total of 5.

B. Area Lakes and Rivers Report:

- Water is high. No wake on most area lakes.
- Anyone hear anything about Lake Hanska and the dam going out? Yes MR was down there adding rip-rap to help save the dam.
- Ely – Wasn’t worth anything.

C. Club House & Grounds News:

- Mowing and Clean-up – Thanks to Tony and all that are doing the mowing and the cleanup. Scott Osborne offered to mow a few times.
- Club Road Repairs – Holding off due to the rain. Pulled a tree out of culvert up top.
- Tree on Power Line – Wes and Jason came out and took care of it.
- Electric Line Quote – Motion made by Mike D to approve an amount to proceed with new line. 2nd Motion by John K.

D. Other Old Business:

IV. New Business

A. Remember Elmer for the food

B. Fishing 1-2-3 Update (Mike S) – Good turnout for the class sessions. Due to weather had to cancel the field trip to the pond on 6/21. Rescheduling for Thursday 8/2.

C. Ice House Tickets (Next Meeting)

- Waiting to hear from state on raffles. Should be mid to late July for the updates and then print tickets after. Don’t want to proceed if things change.
- Ice House is done and will pick up in a couple weeks. Tony offered for us to bring the house to the Gemütlichkeit Event Sept 9, 12-4

D. Kids Fishing Contest Update (Jim H.)

- Date: August 15th (3-7 for volunteers).
- Permits: Food? City Park? Prizes?
 - Have plenty of rod and reels to use.
 - Women in Fishing donated a couple rod packages.
 - Permits are good, things arranged with City Park.

E. Other New Business:

- EE Mecklenburg Scholarship Financials
- David reviewed what’s been given thus far this year and also given to date.
- Facebook & Social Media
- Mike S to set up by next meeting.
- Auto Fest
 - Thanks to the club for the use of the popcorn machine, they donated half a box of popcorn. AF also donating canopy.
 - Few reels for sale.

V. Food for next meeting - Bring a dish to pass and bring something to grill.

VI. Meeting Adjourn @ 8:16 PM

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