

Why the zones? New regulations for keeping northern pike explained

The new northern pike fishing regulations, which were announced recently and go into effect on the May 12 fishing opener, have three distinct zones to address the different characteristics of pike populations in Minnesota, according to the Department of Natural Resources.

Each of the zones – north-central, northeast and south – provide protection for different sizes of pike, and there are reasons for those differences.

“We’re continuing to let anglers know there are new pike regulations for those who want to keep pike on inland waters,” said Chris Kavanaugh, DNR northeast region fisheries manager. “We also want to share the thinking behind the new regulations.”

North-central zone

The north-central zone is the largest of the three zones, and here the possession limit is 10 northern pike, but only two can be longer than 26 inches; and all from 22 to 26 inches must be released.

“We’re responding to

angler concerns about the over-abundance of small, or hammer-handle, pike in the north-central zone,” Kavanaugh said.

Through anglers keeping small fish but protecting the 22 to 26 inch pike, the objective in the north-central zone is to both reduce the abundance of small pike and allow medium size pike to grow larger.

The advantages of growing larger pike are twofold. While protected these medium size pike will eat small pike, helping reduce abundance of small pike. And when they eventually grow out of the protected size range they will be a more desirable size for keeping.

Southern zone

In the southern zone, where reproduction is limited, the regulation intends to increase pike abundance while also improving the size of fish harvested.

Anglers in the southern zone can keep two fish, but the minimum size is 24 inches.

“The management issue in



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This voracious predator is common throughout Minnesota and one of the easiest fish to catch because it so willingly bites lures or bait.

the southern zone is the opposite of what’s happening in the north-central zone,” Kavanaugh said. “With low reproduction, stocking is often necessary to provide a pike fishery in the south. Here we want to protect young pike and give them a chance to grow.”

Growth rates are much faster in these southern lakes so most will reach the 24 inch keeper size in a few years.

Northeastern zone

In the northeastern zone, pike reproduction is good but these lakes do not have the high density problems of the

north-central zone since they still have a nice balance of medium to large pike. Here, it makes sense to provide protection for large pike while they still exist.

“The trophy pike of the Arrowhead Region have definitely made some great stories and photos over the decades,” Kavanaugh said. “But these fish grow slowly in the cold water and if too many anglers keep trophy pike here, they’ll be gone.”

In the northeastern zone, anglers can keep two pike but must release all from 30 to 40 inches, with only one over 40 inches allowed in possession.

Other considerations

Anglers who want to keep pike will need to be prepared to measure them. Those planning to take advantage of the expanded bag limit on small pike should familiarize themselves with the extra cuts it takes to fillet the fish.

New pike regulations do not affect border water fishing regulations or special regulations that cover individual lakes, rivers and streams.

Darkhouse spearing regulations for pike differ slightly and those regulations are listed in the spearing section of the regulations booklet.

For more information on the new zone regulations

visit mndnr.gov/pike or contact a local area fisheries office. Contact information can be found at mndnr.gov/areas/fisheries or in the printed fishing regulations booklet.

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Pier Fishing Strategies for Crappie

By Babe Winkleman

I love catching crappie, and there is no better place to catch them than around piers and docks. The fall season is usually best to fish in the clearer, deeper lakes around piers.

In waters with color, pier action for crappie will often last much longer throughout the year. First some basics – wood piers are generally more productive than those of metal. Piers lower to the water are better than high ones since they provide more shade. Piers with adjacent weed and or wood cover are better than the ones on cleaner bottoms. And piers with more “character” such as cross beams, ladders, or anything else, rather than up and down straight supports, tend to be more productive. Piers that go out the farthest, or end closer to deeper water also have a higher rating.

In harbors or along shorelines where the banks aren’t straight, the ideal piers are the one that have wind or current blowing into shaded areas. That way a float and jig (or minnow) can be pitched just up-wind and allowed to drift into the pier. A 7-foot or longer rod is a plus here so you can keep your line from drifting into the wood.

If possible I like to walk the piers. If fishing from a boat, we will usually hold stationary off the end of a good com-



plex, or slowly work into the wind when covering more ground. You don’t want to have a tailwind and blow right past a good area.

In the coldest waters or when crappies aren’t very active, I use a small weighted foam float with a 1/64 ounce jig dressed with a small sliver of plastic many call a “wedge”.

Once fish get more active the smallest minnows

possible are usually best. After that various jigs and a little larger minnows come into play. Two other tips – watch for piers with a lot of stuff on them such as seats, lights, stringers, pole holders, etc. Fishermen live there and often have planted cover around their dock. Also in summer and through fall, piers that have night lights are often crappie magnets. Look for crappies right at the

edges of light penetration – a very small bobber and minnow or even an un-weighted tail-hooked minnow usually work best.

Just be quiet.

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