

Fisheries Management Zone 10

Walleye



In Fisheries Management Zone (FMZ) 10, walleye are the most targeted species among recreational anglers in summer and the second-most targeted species in winter. Fisheries surveys indicate that walleye populations are stressed, and that walleye abundance is among the lowest of the northern fisheries management zones.

Proposed regulation change for FMZ 10 walleye

We are proposing a change to the FMZ 10 walleye regulation to:

- increase the number of mature spawning walleye ($\geq 350\text{mm}$);
- decrease mortality and increase biomass (meaning kilograms of fish in lake) in zone lakes; and
- maintain the quantity and quality of angling opportunities.

Option 1: Maintain status quo

- Size limit: No more than 1 greater than 46 cm.
- Season: Open January 1 to March 31, and third Saturday in May to December 31.
- Sport licence – 4 and conservation licence – 2

Option 2: Modify season and catch and possession limits

- Size limit: **None above 46 cm.**
- Season: Open January 1 to **third Sunday in March**, and third Saturday in May to December 31.
- Sport licence – 4 and conservation licence – 2

Option 3: Modify season and catch and possession limits

- Size limit: **None between 43-60 cm, no more than 1 greater than 60 cm.**
- Season: Open January 1 to **third Sunday in March**, and third Saturday in May to December 31.
- Sport licence - 4 and conservation licence - 2

FMZ 10 Fisheries Management Plan

The three biological objectives listed in the 2022 Fisheries Management Zone 10 Plan for walleye are to:

- Increase the percent of walleye lakes where fishing mortality and biomass meet sustainability targets;
- Maintain the quantity and quality of angling opportunities for walleye in FMZ 10 through effective regulations and stocking practices; and,
- To develop a management strategy to protect and improve walleye fish habitat within the zone.

The current walleye regulation was put in place in 2008 to achieve population objectives. Since then, there have been small improvements in some indicators of walleye status, however most indicators suggest that walleye populations remain stressed (**Table 1**).

Indicator	Survey data	Status
Zone 10 walleye lakes where fishing mortality is sustainable	Only 30% of lakes showed sustainable fishing mortality	Unsustainable
Zone 10 walleye lakes where biomass (kg fish in lake) is considered healthy	Only 10% of lakes have healthy biomass levels	Unsustainable
Number of walleye greater than 350 mm in total length (number of fish per net)	0.76 fish per net (second lowest northeast)	Improving
Number of mature size walleye greater than 450 mm total length	0.48 fish per net (second lowest northeast)	Improving
Number of walleye age groups	8.03 age groups (on average)	Unhealthy

Table 1 Walleye indicator comparison table for FMZ 10

Abundance, growth, and age structure indicators were examined to develop the proposed regulations. Fisheries surveys indicate that FMZ 10 walleye fishing mortality exceeds the value considered sustainable (see **Table 1**). The estimated biomass (kilograms of fish in the lake) is also estimated to be below the target of 1.3 maximum sustainable yield (how much a healthy walleye population can produce). Health indicators, like angler-targeted size walleye and mature size walleye showed a slight increase during the second broadscale netting cycle, however the overall abundance of walleye in FMZ 10 lakes remain well below other northern FMZs. The age structure and average age of walleye remained stable. Proposed changes for walleye regulations across the management zone are based on this assessment and recognize that reductions in harvest, particularly of mature fish, is necessary.

Reason for the proposed regulation change

Several options are being considered to improve walleye populations within FMZ 10 while continuing to provide fishing opportunities. The change in season for Options 2 and 3, closing the third Sunday in March, will provide protection for staging vulnerable walleye, while still providing fishing opportunities for anglers over the March break. This change aligns the zone with neighbouring FMZ 11. Size limits proposed for Options 2 and 3 also provide opportunities to protect mature sized walleye. Previous modelling exercises completed in 2002 demonstrated that populations would benefit from limiting harvest to no fish above 43 cm. Taking this into consideration, the advisory council endorsed Option 2, a maximum size limit of none above 46cm. Option 3 size limit (43-60 cm, no more than 1 greater than 60 cm) also protects mature walleye and is the same regulation as neighbouring FMZ 11.

Proposed changes for Spanish River walleye

The FMZ 10 advisory council expressed concerns about high harvest pressure and the current sustainability of this locally important fishery. Monitoring data collected in 2016 and 2017 confirms that walleye in the Spanish River experience the highest rate of fishing mortality among the populations monitored in Lake Huron. Observed age structure shows good development of young fish most years but harvesting pressure on the adult population is considered high. Proposed changes for walleye regulations in the Spanish River are based on this assessment and the need to reduce harvest.

Option 1: Maintain status quo

- Size limit: Same as zone.
- Season: No fishing from January 1 to Friday before third Saturday in May.
- Sport licence – 4 and conservation licence – 2

Option 2: Modify catch and possession limits

- Size limit: **None above 46 cm.**
- Season: No fishing from January 1 until Friday before third Saturday in May.
- **Sport licence - 2 and conservation licence - 1**

Option 3: Modify season and catch and possession limits

- Size limit: **None between 43-60 cm, not more than 1 greater than 60 cm.**
- Season: no fishing from January 1 until Friday before third Saturday in May.
- **Sport licence - 2 and conservation licence - 1**

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