

November 12, 2018

Muskies Canada Inc. (MCI)  
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Re: Proposal to update FMZ11 regulations to change minimum size limit of muskellunge on Lake Nipissing and the Upper French River.

Dear FMZ11 Council,

Muskies Canada Inc would like to propose that the minimum size limit for muskellunge in Lake Nipissing and the Upper French River be increased to 137cm (54") for the following reasons:

**Improving the health of the muskellunge fishery:** Survival strategy of muskullunge differs from most other FMZ11 sport-fish species. Rather than maturing quickly to start spawning as soon as possible, success strategy of muskellunge populations depends on contribution by large specimens over the course of a long life. Protection of larger specimens in FMZ11 should contribute not only to better fishing results for those large specimens but also in significantly increased reproduction and recruitment.

**Unique Potential of the watershed:** Lake Nipissing and the French River possess a very special combination of genetics and habitat that have produced some of the largest specimens ever caught anywhere in the world. Examples include a 58" specimen caught from eastern Lake Nipissing in 2006 and a 59lb-11oz specimen harvested from the French River in 1989. This watershed is one of very few places in the world that can produce world-class muskellunge and protection should be afforded to allow some of these fish to reach their maximum potential.

**Alignment with regulations for other muskellunge fisheries in Ontario managed for trophy potential:** The OMNRF *Regulatory Guidelines for Managing the Muskellunge Sport Fishery in Ontario* document introduced size limits based on the growth potential of populations from individual waterbodies in 2003 and remains the current reference document for setting MSLs. This guideline allows the option of a 137cm benchmark MSL for fisheries deemed to possess the potential for producing world-class specimens. Examples of waters where the 137cm MSL has been applied include Georgian Bay and

the St Lawrence River. Numerous well-documented specimens from Lake Nipissing and the French River support managing their muskellunge fishery with the same management objective of allowing a portion of the population to reach its ultimate growth potential, which is beyond 137cm.

**Alignment of regulations with connected waterbodies:** FMZ10 Council is considering 137cm MSL muskellunge for tributaries of the Great Lakes but has excluded FMZ10 waters of the French River only to avoid administrative complication related to part of the French River residing in FMZ11. Administrative boundaries should not prevent the application of a 137cm MSL to all muskellunge populations of Lake Nipissing and the French River.

**Economic benefits:** In an era when the percentage of North American population that participates in sport-fishing is declining, participation in muskie-specific angling is actually growing. The largest muskie-fishing club in the US now has over 10,000 members. Some jurisdictions in the US and Canada are managing to produce fisheries with more and larger muskies (via high MSLs and stocking of strains that favour high growth potential) to attract the tourism spend of muskie anglers. 37 of the lower 48 US states have active muskie-stocking programs to attract the spend of muskie anglers, while Canadian waters, including Lake Nipissing, depend entirely on natural reproduction. Although Lake Nipissing and the French River have become increasingly popular among muskie anglers in recent years, the economic benefits of their spend currently fall in greater proportion to FMZs and US states that manage for better angling success. If more individual specimens are allowed to reach their ultimate potential size, as well as contribute to the fishery through increased reproductive capacity, a tourism benefit will be realized. This economic benefit comes at no cost. The importance of developing and promoting Lake Nipissing and the French River as muskie-fishing destinations is even more important in the context of the reduced economic benefit generated by the walleye fishery in the last decade.

Please feel free to contact MCI for further details of the proposal, or to otherwise discuss muskellunge management in FMZ11.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Andy Pappas (MCI)