

2017

WISCONSIN

Winnebago System Sturgeon Spearing Regulations & Information



Jonathan Mielke (front) proudly displays the 59.5", 56.2 pound lake sturgeon that he harvested from Lake Poygan during the 2016 season. Jonathan was mentored by his grandfather Don Mielke and recipient of an Upriver Lakes permit transfer. (DNR Photo)

Spearing enthusiasts interested in receiving daily updates during the spearing season, as well as other Winnebago System fisheries updates can subscribe through the following link:

<http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/fishing/sturgeon/SturgeonLakeWinnebago.html>

Or by calling the Sturgeon Hotline: (920)303-5444



Dear Winnebago Sturgeon Spearer,

As I write this note in early December, another fall season has come and gone and the 9-day gun deer season is now complete. Thus many sportsmen are starting to look forward to other outdoor activities. For many, that means ice fishing and/or the annual sturgeon spear season on the Winnebago Pool Lakes. Similar to last year, we have had an uncharacteristically warm fall resulting in a later than normal freeze, but there is still some time for ice to form.

Avid spearkers know better than anyone the importance of environmental conditions such as water clarity and ice conditions for a good sturgeon spearing season. Unfortunately, water clarity during the 2016 season was quite poor (7-10') and ice conditions deteriorated throughout the season. Thus there was a full 16 day season on Lake Winnebago and a 7 day season on the Upriver Lakes with a total harvest of 703 fish (396 from Lake Winnebago and 307 from URL).

Following the 2015 spearing season there was some concern about the lack of forage (red worms and gizzard shad) for sturgeon that resulted in decreased condition (weight) of harvested fish. Forage abundance increased in 2015 as we observed very few empty stomachs (5.9% on Lake Winnebago and 0.0% on Upriver Lakes) from the fish we sampled during the 2016 season. There was a strong gizzard shad hatch on the Upriver Lakes in 2015 and the majority of the stomachs sampled from the URL during the 2016 spearing season contained shad. In comparison, the majority of the stomachs sampled from fish harvested on Lake Winnebago contained red worms. Looking ahead to 2017, our sampling indicates that there was a strong gizzard shad hatch system-wide in 2016, while red worm abundance is down from last year. Regardless, we will continue to collect length and weight data from all harvested fish and track relative condition and the percentage of fish larger than 100 pounds in the 2017 harvest.

The 2017 sturgeon spearing season will begin on February 11, 2017 and the harvest caps are very similar to last seasons (430 juvenile females, 950 adult females and 1,175 males). The main changes for the 2017 spearing season are in the tagging requirements, where you

no longer need to immediately attach the carcass tag to a sturgeon upon harvest. This year's carcass tags are printed on plain paper and still need to be validated immediately upon harvest by writing the date and time the fish was harvested (AM/PM), but do **not** need to be attached to the fish unless the spearer leaves the fish prior to registration. The successful spearker must stay with their fish and keep the validated tag on their person until registration.

Please take a moment to read through the regulations. I'm looking forward to making more memories during to the 2017 sturgeon spearing season!

Ryan Koenigs

Winnebago Sturgeon Biologist



Three generations of sturgeon spearkers! Don Muche (left), Rachael Mathwig, and Stuart Muche with Rachael's 59.3", 61.4 pound sturgeon harvested during the 2016 season. (Photo Credit: Rachael Mathwig)

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Ralph Satzer (left), Gary Bancroft, Scott Bancroft, and Ryan Bancroft (right) with their fish harvested on February 20, 2016. (Photo Credit: Ryan Bancroft)

WINNEBAGO SYSTEM STURGEON SPEARING REGULATIONS

To report violations call: 1-800-TIP-WDNR (1-800-847-9367) or cell #367

What's New in 2017

Tags, Licenses and Permits

- The new Go Wild license system (*GoWild.Wi.Gov*) offers spearkers greater flexibility to purchase and display licenses. Please note the following changes in tagging materials and procedures.
 - Carcass tags will be printed on regular white paper.
 - Carcass tags are now validated immediately after the kill by writing on them.
 - The carcass tag no longer must be attached immediately after the kill. However, the carcass tag must be attached if the carcass is left unattended. ***If you leave it, tag it!***
 - While spearing, it is illegal to possess more than one copy of a carcass tag.

Tagging Your Sturgeon: New Rules and Materials!

What to bring: carcass tag(s); pen or pencil; plastic zip-top bag or other protective enclosure for tag; fastener such as string, wire or zip-tie.

When to validate: Validate tag immediately after kill.

How to validate: Write the date and circle time of kill (a.m. or p.m.) in space provided on the tag utilizing a pen or pencil.

When to attach tag: ***If you leave it, tag it!*** You may not leave the carcass unless the validated carcass tag is attached.

How to attach tag: Secure the tag with a fastener to the sturgeon

How to protect tag: It is the responsibility of the spearker to keep the tag protected and legible. Consider enclosing the tag in a sealed plastic bag.

Register the Sturgeon! It's mandatory.

2017 OPEN SEASON – Winnebago System Sturgeon Spearing

Lake Winnebago

February 11, 2017 through February 26, 2017 on Lake Winnebago **or until any of the pre-set harvest caps for Lake Winnebago are reached, OR any of the pre-set Winnebago System-wide harvest caps are reached, whichever comes first** (as per trigger closure rules).

Upriver Lakes (Lakes Butte des Morts, Winneconne, and Poygan)

February 11, 2017 through February 26, 2017 on the Upriver Lakes **or until any of the pre-set harvest caps for the Upriver Lakes are reached, OR any of the pre-set Winnebago System-wide harvest caps are reached, whichever comes first** (as per trigger closure rules).

An annual lottery sturgeon spear fishery began on the Upriver Lakes in 2007. Spearers can either apply for an Upriver Lakes sturgeon tag or purchase a preference point (thus not included in the lottery for that season) by August 1. Applicants are notified if they were successful in receiving authorization to purchase an Upriver Lakes sturgeon spearing license by October 1. Group lottery applications of up to four persons are accepted and the group will carry the preference points of the group member with the fewest points. Spearers that applied for an Upriver Lakes license but were not authorized to purchase an Upriver Lakes license receive a preference point, and can still purchase a license for Lake Winnebago before the October 31 license sales deadline. Applicants drawn for an Upriver Lakes permit will lose their accumulated preference points regardless of whether they purchase their tag prior to the October 31 deadline. Spearers can only buy a license for either Lake Winnebago or the Upriver Lakes, not both. Sales for both Lake Winnebago and Upriver Lakes licenses end October 31. The Upriver Lakes sturgeon lottery fishery limits participation to 500 tags in 2017 (numbers of tags in future seasons may vary) and will have an allotment of the overall sturgeon harvest caps (see below). Upriver Lakes tags can be transferred to a youth (age 12-17).

Total harvest of sturgeon will be limited through pre-set harvest caps. Harvest caps for the 2017 Winnebago System spearing season are 430 for juvenile females, 950 for adult females and 1175 for males. Portions of the system-wide harvest caps have been allocated to the fisheries on Lake Winnebago and the Upriver Lakes as shown below:

	<i>Juvenile Females</i>	<i>Adult Females</i>	<i>Males</i>
<i>Lake Winnebago</i>	<i>344</i>	<i>855</i>	<i>940</i>
<i><u>Upriver Lakes</u></i>	<i><u>86</u></i>	<i><u>95</u></i>	<i><u>235</u></i>
<i>Winnebago System</i>	<i>430</i>	<i>950</i>	<i>1175</i>

The Department will close the sturgeon spearing season on Lake Winnebago before the maximum 16 days when the following conditions occur:

- *At the end of the fishing day in which 100% of any one of the three Lake Winnebago harvest caps is reached or exceeded, or*
- *24 hours from the end of the fishing day within which a harvest of 90% to 99% of any one of the three Lake Winnebago harvest caps is reached.*

The Department will close the sturgeon spearing season on the Upriver Lakes before the maximum 16 days when the following conditions occur:

- *At the end of the fishing day in which 100% of any one of the three Upriver Lakes harvest caps is reached or exceeded, or*
- *24 hours from the end of the fishing day within which a harvest of 90% to 99% of any one of the three Upriver Lakes harvest caps is reached.*

The Department will close the sturgeon spearing season on all waters of the Winnebago System before the maximum 16 days when the following conditions occur:

- *At the end of the fishing day in which 100% of any one of the three Winnebago System-wide harvest caps is reached or exceeded, or*
- *24 hours from the end of the fishing day within which a harvest of 90% to 99% of any one of the three Winnebago System-wide harvest caps is reached.*

BAG LIMIT: One lake sturgeon per licensee

MINIMUM LENGTH LIMIT: 36 inches

SPEARING HOURS: 7:00 AM to 1:00 PM.

LICENSE REQUIREMENT: To spear sturgeon, residents must purchase a sturgeon spearing license and tag for \$20.00 and nonresidents must purchase a sturgeon spearing license and tag for \$65.00

Only persons 12 years of age and older are eligible to spear sturgeon. No sturgeon spearing license may be issued or purchased after October 31, 2016 except for: 1) Wisconsin residents that turn 12 between November 1, 2016 and the last day of the 2017 spearing season, or 2) Wisconsin residents serving in the Armed Forces that are home on leave during the 2017 spearing season.

The sturgeon spearing license and tag must be carried by the licensee at all times while fishing for sturgeon with a spear, and no person may use or carry the tag or license of another. Lake Winnebago licenses are non-transferable, but Upriver Lakes licenses can be transferred to youth (age 12-17). **The carcass tag must be validated immediately upon harvest using a pen or pencil and the validated tag must stay with the sturgeon until presented at a DNR operated registration station.** The tag does **not** need to be attached to the sturgeon unless the license holder leaves the fish.

TAGGING REQUIREMENT

Upon harvest, the carcass tag must be immediately validated by writing the date and time (AM/PM) on the tag and remain with the sturgeon until registered at a DNR-operated registration station. The carcass tag does **NOT** need to be attached to the sturgeon unless the license holder leaves the fish, at which time the carcass tag must be attached to the harvested sturgeon.

Any harvested sturgeon must be presented by the spearer at a registration station by 2:00 PM of the same day it was speared for registration by DNR personnel. Group bagging is not legal and occurs whenever the person who tags the sturgeon is different from the person who speared the sturgeon.

TRANSPORTATION

It is unlawful for any person to transport an unregistered sturgeon in or on any motor driven vehicle unless the sturgeon is openly exposed. **"Openly exposed" means open to view by a person in a passing vehicle.**

It is illegal to possess an unregistered sturgeon speared from Lake Winnebago outside the highway boundary area delineated as follows: *from the intersection of highways 10 and 114 in Menasha, east on highway 114 to highway 55; south on highway 55 to U.S. highway 151; south on U.S. highway 151 to Winnebago drive in Fond du Lac; west on Winnebago drive to Scott street; west on Scott street to highway 45; north on highway 45 to Main street in Oshkosh; north on Main street to Waugoo avenue; east on Waugoo avenue to Bowen street; north on Bowen street to county highway A; north on county highway A to highway 114 in Neenah; east on highway 114 to the intersection of highways 10 and 114 in Menasha.*

It is illegal to possess an unregistered sturgeon speared from Lakes Butte des Morts, Winneconne or Poygan outside the highway boundary area delineated as follows: *from the intersection of highways 45 and 21 in Oshkosh west on highway 21 to highway 116; north on highway 116 to county highway B; west on county highway B to county highway D; west on county highway D to highway 49; north on highway 49 to county highway H; east on county highway H to highway 110; east on highway 110 to county highway II; south on county highway II to county highway M; south on county highway M to highway 116; east on highway 116 to highway 45; south on highway 45 to highway 21.*



REGISTRATION

A person who spears a sturgeon must accompany the tagged sturgeon at an official sturgeon registration station (see map page 6). To avoid the "end of the day" rush please bring your fish in as soon as possible after spearing it. You must be at the registration station and in-line to register your fish by 2:00 PM the day it was speared.

Any fish harvested from Lake Winnebago must be registered at one of the registration stations on Lake Winnebago. Any fish harvested from Lakes Butte des Morts, Winneconne or Poygan (the Upriver Lakes) must be registered at one of the registration stations on the Upriver Lakes.

STURGEON REGISTRATION STATIONS

Stations are operated daily throughout the season by DNR Fisheries staff. Department Fisheries staff at the registration stations will collect biological information on the size, sex and age of your fish, and will attach a metal sturgeon registration tag. Both the sturgeon carcass tag and registration tag must be retained until the carcass is consumed.

Registration stations may be closed prior to the end of the season depending on spearing activity and volume of sturgeon registrations. Any early closures will be posted at registration stations.

Winnebago System Sturgeon Registration Stations:

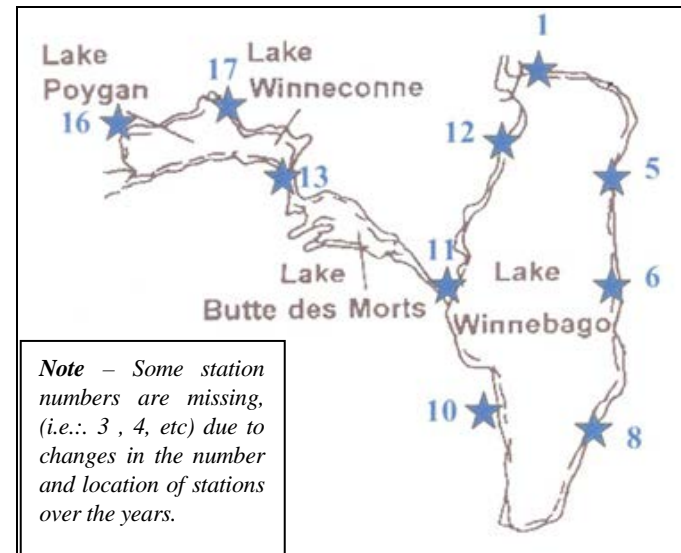
Station No. Station Location

Lake Winnebago

- 1 at Waverly Beach Resort
Junction of U.S. Hwys 10 & 114
- 5 at Harbor Bar
Stockbridge on the lake
- 6 at the Quinney Quencher
Quinney on the lake
- 8 at Jim and Linda's Supper Club
Pipe on the lake
- 10 at Wendt's Bar & Harbor
Hwy 45, 8 mi. N of Fond du Lac
- 11 at Jerry's Tavern
1210 Ceape St., Oshkosh
- 12 at Payne's Point Tavern,
Cty Trk A 3 mi. S of Neenah

Upriver Lakes

- 13 at Critters Wolf River Sports
131 W Main Street, Winneconne
- 16 at Indian Point Tavern
Cty Trk H 1/2 mi. E of Tustin
- 17 at Boom Bay Bar and Grill
7884 Cut Off Ln, Larsen



Registration crew working at Jim and Linda's (Pipe) on opening day of the 2016 spearing season. (DNR Photo)

LIGHTS, UNDERWATER CAMERAS, DEPTH LOCATORS

Use of artificial lights of any kind is prohibited while spearing or fishing beginning 48 hours before the start of the sturgeon spearing season and continuing through the open season for spearing. Underwater cameras may be used, but any lights on the camera must be disabled (turned off, taped over, or non-illuminating). Use of depth locators is permitted.

POSSESSION AND USE OF A SPEAR

No person may have under his or her control any spear or similar device in any enclosure on the ice or waters of the Winnebago System except when authorized during established sturgeon spearing seasons. No person may take, capture, kill or attempt to kill sturgeon on the Winnebago System by any means other than spearing with a spear thrown by hand from inside a fishing shelter placed on the ice during the open spearing season.

ICE HOLE RESTRICTIONS

No person may cut, use, or maintain an ice hole larger than 12 inches in diameter or square for the taking of fish in any manner through the ice except spearing sturgeon on the Winnebago System during the open season. The total area of a sturgeon spearing hole, or combination of holes, may not exceed a total of 48 square feet, measured at the surface of the ice. Ice holes larger than 12 inches cut, used, or maintained for spearing may not be covered by a shelter, shanty, or similar device, except during the period from 48 hours before and continuing through the open sturgeon spearing season.

ICE HOLE MARKING

Sturgeon spearing ice holes must be marked with at least 2 strips of wood that extend a minimum of 3 feet above the ice. The wood strips must not exceed 1.5 inches in width and .25 inches in thickness (wood lathe meets the requirement). When you first set your shanty, cut a hole and freeze the lathe into the ice for better marking of sturgeon holes. Lathe markers stuck in snow banks are **NOT** adequate because the lathe no longer marks holes when warm weather conditions melt snow.

SPEARING OF ROUGH FISH

Spearing of any species of fish other than sturgeon from the Winnebago System is prohibited during the sturgeon spearing season.

FISHING EQUIPMENT OR GEAR

It is unlawful to possess a fishing pole, hook and line angling equipment, or other similar devices that could be used to catch fish in an ice fishing tent, shanty, or ice fishing enclosure with ice holes larger than 12 inches in diameter or square.



Lath properly cut and frozen into ice on two sides of spearing shanty. © Bob Rashid

LITTER

It is illegal to place or deposit any materials (including fish, fish parts or other biodegradables) on the ice or lake bed that cannot be retrieved. Any material used in a sturgeon spearing hole must be removed by the sturgeon spearer when the hole is abandoned, or if requested by a warden.

Any material that is left on or frozen in the ice or waters is the responsibility of the person who left the material (including tar paper, wood, cardboard or any other litter used adjacent to shanties).

ICE SHANTIES AND SHELTERS

The door of any occupied shanty/shelter shall be such that the door can be readily opened from the outside.

All shanties/shelters must have the name and residential address of the person owning or using the shanty. The name and address must be painted or permanently affixed on the outside with a minimum of 1" lettering.

All shanties/shelters must be completely removed from the ice (for all inland waters south of Hwy 64) by the first Sunday following March 1.

Sturgeon Guard Volunteers Needed In Spring

Each spring hundreds of volunteers have an opportunity to guard sturgeon and protect the fish from poaching at their spawning sites on the Wolf River. Sturgeon are very susceptible to illegal harvest when they are spawning along the river's rocky shorelines. Therefore, "Sturgeon Patrol" volunteers guard the spawning fish 24 hours a day throughout the spawning season. The program is coordinated and directed by DNR Law Enforcement staff, while Sturgeon for Tomorrow and sturgeon spearing license fees fund the guard program.



Once spawning has begun, pairs of sturgeon guards are assigned to the sites for twelve hour shifts. Prior to assignment, guards check in at "Sturgeon Camp", just north of Shiocton, where they receive a good meal, a generous sack lunch, an identification hat (that they get to keep), and a map that directs them to their site. At the end of their shift, guards return to camp for another hearty home cooked meal before they make their way home.

Guards for 2017 will be scheduled from April 8th through May 1st. Spawning generally occurs over a 5 to 10 day period within that time frame. We do our best to get all scheduled guards out on the riverbank to see fish, although we cancel some scheduled shifts if the fish are simply not active. In those cases, we try to re-schedule guards during an active period.

Interested volunteers for the 2017 Sturgeon Guard program can find more information on the Wisconsin DNR website by searching "Sturgeon Guard". The sturgeon guard registration process is available on-line at <http://dnr.wi.gov/SGsignUp/>. Interested volunteers can also register by calling the DNR call center at 1-888-936-7463 and having DNR call center staff input information into the on-line database. You will receive an email or call to schedule a day or night in spring 2017 that is convenient for you. If possible, make it a family outing by bringing a son, daughter or your spouse. For many it has become a family tradition.

Sturgeon for Tomorrow

In 1977 a group of sturgeon enthusiasts from the Lake Winnebago area founded Sturgeon for Tomorrow to help preserve, protect and enhance the sturgeon resource in the lake system. That group quickly grew into the largest citizen advocacy group for sturgeon in the world, currently made up of five chapters and over 3,000 members.

Through tremendous dedication and hard work Sturgeon for Tomorrow (SFT) has raised and donated to date over \$950,000 for sturgeon research and management. SFT has funded a wide variety of projects over the years including the sturgeon guard program, the Sturgeon History Project, purchase of sampling equipment, spawning and nursery site construction, sturgeon population assessments, sturgeon propagation, and the Upper Fox River sturgeon rehabilitation project. SFT also provided the support necessary to ensure the enactment of the \$1,500 fine for possession of an illegal sturgeon, and actively participates in Winnebago and statewide sturgeon management advisory committees.



If you are interested in further information about Sturgeon for Tomorrow or are interested in attending one of their five fund raising banquets held each year, please call:

Jim Patt	SFT Southwest Chapter President Banquet January 14, 2017 in Fond du Lac	920-922-7136
Dan Groeschel	SFT Main Chapter President Banquet January 28, 2017 in Kiel	920-923-1077
Wayne Hoelzel	SFT Northern Half Chapter President Banquet February 4, 2017 in Darboy	920-725-1206
Pat Braasch	SFT West Central Chapter Banquet March 18, 2017 in Oshkosh	920-231-4708
Sally Gilson	SFT Upper Lakes Chapter President Banquet September 8, 2017 in Orihula	920-573-6975