

2019

Winnebago System Sturgeon Spearing Regulations & Information Pamphlet



Alex Woods (right) along with his father Matt (left) and Uncle Andy (middle) with Alex's 56", 47 pound lake sturgeon harvested from Lake Poygan on February 10, 2018. John Woods (Alex's grandfather) was an avid spearer and transferred his tag to his grandson just 7 days prior to his passing. What a great example of the family tradition associated with sturgeon spearing.

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,

Another sturgeon spearing season is just around the corner and anticipation is starting to build for many spearkers. Water clarity and ice conditions are the two variables discussed most leading up to the season and are unknowns as I draft this letter. Channels and bays on the Winnebago System were already iced over on November 14, but mild weather throughout December have not helped ice formation. Hopefully, upcoming temperatures between now and February 9 will be on the cooler side and set the stage for a safe and successful 2019 sturgeon spearing season.

The 2018 spearing season brought mixed results between the two different fisheries. Unlike the 2016 and 2017 seasons, cold weather prevailed throughout the 2018 season and ice conditions held up. Water clarity was a different story, as clarity readings on Lake Winnebago were the lowest (average of 6.5') they've been since the 2006 spearing season (average 6'). There were 654 fish harvested from Lake Winnebago during the 16-day season. The Upriver Lakes fishery is not as affected by water clarity conditions due to the shallow composition of the lakes, and closed after a 4 day season with a total harvest of 297 fish.

The use of underwater cameras during sturgeon spearing has increased over the last 5 years, particularly during dirty water years like 2018. This practice has become a contentious issue amongst spearkers. Additionally, spearkers have expressed concerns about the use of large, "non-traditional" spears during recent seasons. Both issues are currently being viewed by the DNR as social issues, given that the harvest cap system is in place to protect the sturgeon population from overharvest and that harvest during dirty water years has remained well below the system-wide harvest caps.

I want to assure everyone that the DNR is aware of the pros and cons of both sides of these issues and is working to address them. In fact, a sturgeon spearing survey to poll spearker opinion on the use of large, "non-traditional sturgeon spears and underwater cameras was implemented in September 2018. The survey was distributed to 2,000 randomly selected license holders. There was a strong response rate of 58% and the data provide great insight into spearker opinion on multiple issues. For starters, 52% of respondents supported the DNR working with a stakeholder group to define parameters of a sturgeon spear (22% were opposed and 27% were neutral). Based on these results, the DNR and the Winnebago Citizen Sturgeon Advisory Committee met on November 6, 2018 to discuss a potential rule proposal to define a sturgeon spear. After discussion, there was consensus from the committee to advance a regulation to define two parameters of a sturgeon spear: 1) the tines may only be arranged in a single straight line and 2) maximum spear head width of 18" (measured from the outside of the tines). This proposed regulation will be included on the 2019 Wisconsin Conservation Congress spring hearing questionnaire, so plan to attend your county meeting if you are passionate about this issue.

As far as the use of underwater cameras during sturgeon spearing, the survey results indicate that this continues to be a polarizing issue. 25% of the respondents were strongly opposed to the use of underwater cameras during sturgeon spearing and 25% were strongly supportive of underwater cameras. Altogether, 41% of respondents supported camera use, 38% opposed and 21% were indifferent. These results are fairly similar to past surveys, showing that the spearing community is split on this issue. The DNR is not currently

planning to ban camera use, as there is not biological justification to do so and there is not a majority of the spearing public in favor of regulation. Further, the DNR does not limit technology in any other aspects of recreational fishing. However, we will continue to monitor harvest trends and use available data to best manage the fishery.

Looking forward to the upcoming season, there are a couple noteworthy items. First, the system wide harvest caps of 430 juvenile females, 950 adult females, and 1,200 males are the same as the 2018 season. Also, the 2018 gizzard shad hatch appears to have been pretty weak, but Chironomid (red worms) catch rates during August sampling were higher than 2016 and 2017. It will be interesting to see how fish condition responds after back to back years of low shad abundance and a couple years of below average Chironomid abundance prior to 2108.

Good luck during the 2019 sturgeon spearing season!

Ryan Koenigs

Winnebago Sturgeon Biologist



My dad (Pat Koenigs; left) and I with lake sturgeon that we harvested on Lake Poygan on February 11, 2018.

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James Price with his 78.1", 136.7 pound lake sturgeon that was registered at Wendt's on February 17, 2018.

WINNEBAGO SYSTEM STURGEON SPEARING REGULATIONS

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

Important things to know for the 2019 spearing season

Tags, Licenses and Permits

- Spearers **ARE STILL** required to register their sturgeon at a registration station by 2 PM of the same day the fish is harvested.
- Carcass tags must be validated immediately upon harvest by removing the validation stub.
- 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 prior to registration. ***If you leave it, tag it!***
- While spearing, it is illegal to possess more than one copy of a carcass tag.

Tagging Your Sturgeon:

What to bring: your carcass tag; 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 harvest.

How to validate: Remove the validation stub of the carcass tag below the dotted line.

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 to the sturgeon with a fastener

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

Register the Sturgeon! It's mandatory to register your sturgeon at an official sturgeon registration station (see map on page 6). Call in or online registration is **NOT** available for registering harvested lake sturgeon.

2019 OPEN SEASON – Winnebago System Sturgeon Spearing

Lake Winnebago

February 9, 2019 through February 24, 2019 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 9, 2019 through February 24, 2019 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 by October 1 of whether they were successful in receiving authorization to purchase an Upriver Lakes sturgeon spearing license. 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 not drawn for an Upriver Lakes license receive a preference point and can purchase a Lake Winnebago spearing license. Applicants drawn for an Upriver Lakes permit will lose their accumulated preference points regardless of whether they purchase their tag. Spearers can only buy a license for either Lake Winnebago or the Upriver Lakes, not both. License sales for the Lake Winnebago season ends October 31. The Upriver Lakes sturgeon lottery fishery limits participation to 500 tags in 2019 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) or a person holding a valid Class A, B, C or D disabled permit.



Total harvest of sturgeon will be limited through pre-set harvest caps. Harvest caps for the 2019 Winnebago System spearing season are 430 juvenile females, 950 adult females and 1200 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>Juv. Females</i>	<i>Adult Females</i>	<i>Males</i>
<i>Lake Winnebago</i>	<i>344</i>	<i>855</i>	<i>960</i>
<i><u>Upriver Lakes</u></i>	<i><u>86</u></i>	<i><u>95</u></i>	<i><u>240</u></i>
<i>Winnebago System</i>	<i>430</i>	<i>950</i>	<i>1200</i>

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

- At the end of a spearing 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 a spearing day which concludes with a harvest of 90 to 99% of any one of the three Lake Winnebago harvest caps being reached.*

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

- At the end a spearing 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 a spearing day which concludes with a harvest of 90 to 99% of any one of the three Upriver Lakes harvest caps being reached.*

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

- At the end of a spearing 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 a spearing day which concludes with a harvest of 90 to 99% of any one of the three Winnebago System-wide harvest caps being 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, 2018 except for: 1) Wisconsin residents that turn 12 between November 1, 2018 and the last day of the 2019 spearing season, or 2) Wisconsin residents serving in the Armed Forces that are home on leave during the 2019 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) or a person holding a valid Class A, B, C or D disabled permit

TAGGING REQUIREMENT

Upon harvest, the carcass tag must be immediately validated by removing the validation stub of the tag below the dotted line. 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. Any harvested sturgeon must be presented by the spearer at a registration station by 2:00 PM of the same day it was speared. 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 fish to an official sturgeon registration station. Phone-in or online harvest registration is **NOT** available for sturgeon registration. 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. The registration process allows for collection of important biological information on the size, sex and age of your fish. A metal registration tag will be attached to your fish during the registration process to signify to Law Enforcement staff that your fish has been properly registered. The registration tag must be retained until the carcass is consumed. Some 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.

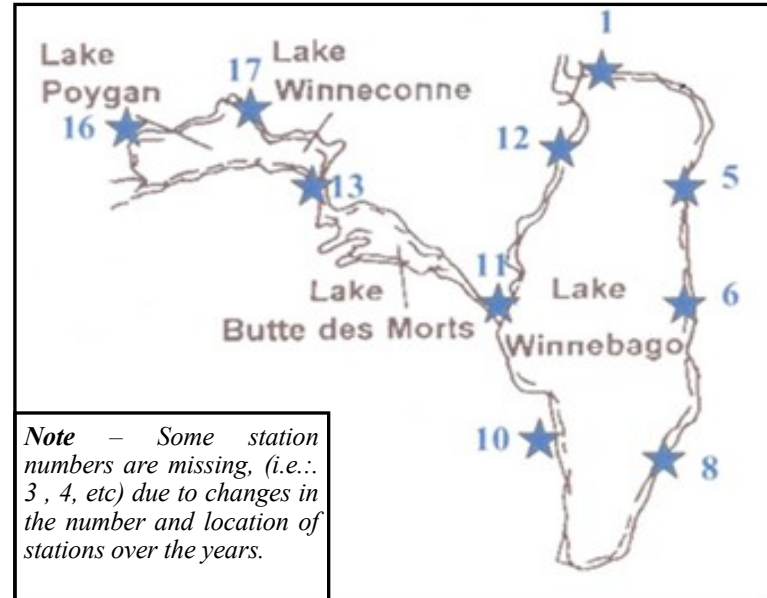
Winnebago System Sturgeon Registration Stations: Station No. and Location

Lake Winnebago

- 1 Waverly Beach Resort
N8770 Fire Lane 1, Menasha
- 5 Stockbridge Harbor Bar
1919 W Lake St., Chilton
- 6 Quinney Quencher
W5626 Quinney Rd., Chilton
- 8 Jim and Linda's Supper Club
W3496 county Rd. W, Malone
- 10 Wendt's on the Lake & Harbor
N9699 Lake Shore Dr., Van Dyne
- 11 Jerry's Tavern
1210 Ceape St., Oshkosh
- 12 Payne's Point Bar and Grill,
1557 Payne's Point Rd., Neenah

Upriver Lakes

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



LIGHTS, UNDERWATER CAMERAS, DEPTH LOCATORS

The use of artificial lights of any kind is prohibited while spearing 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.



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

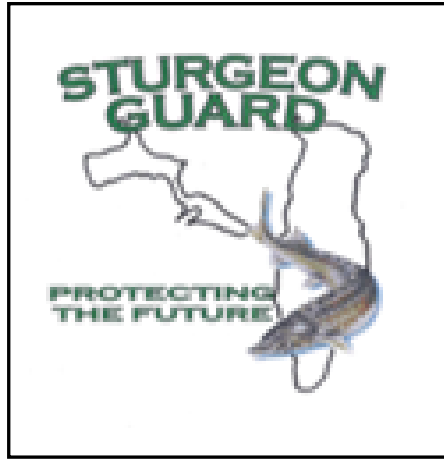
The door of any occupied shanty/shelter shall be such that the door can be readily opened from the outside. All shanties/shelters must have the name and residential address of the person owning or using the shanty. The name and address must be painted or permanently affixed on the outside with a minimum 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.

GUIDING

No person may engage or be employed for any compensation or reward to guide, direct or assist any other person in sturgeon spearing/fishing unless the person is issued a guide license by the Wisconsin DNR. Guiding includes receiving compensation of any kind, [monetary, gratuity, physical items, etc.], for services rendered. Some examples of guiding would include providing a shanty with the ice hole already cut, placing out bait or decoys, providing/renting equipment, or other activities that assist the angler/spearer to locate, attract and/or harvest fish. If you should have questions, please contact your local Conservation Warden.

STURGEON GUARD VOLUNTEERS NEEDED IN SPRING

Each spring dozens of volunteers have an opportunity to educate the public about sturgeon while protecting the fish from poaching and harassment at their spawning sites on the Wolf, Embarrass, and Little Wolf rivers. Sturgeon are very susceptible to illegal harvest and harassment when they are spawning along the river's rocky shorelines. "Sturgeon Guard" volunteers monitor the vulnerable fish throughout the spawning season. The program is coordinated and directed by DNR Law Enforcement staff, and funded by Sturgeon for Tomorrow and sturgeon spearing license fees.



Once spawning begins, pairs of sturgeon guards are assigned to sites where the fish are active. Prior to assignment, guards check in at "Sturgeon Camp," just north of Shiocton, where they partake in a continental breakfast, and receive a generous sack lunch, an identification hat (that they get to keep), and a map that directs them to their site.

Guards also receive educational information about sturgeon and the spawning process, including a list of Frequently Asked Questions. Several spawning sites are on public property and attract large crowds. Guards are encouraged to answer questions and help educate the public about this ancient fish.

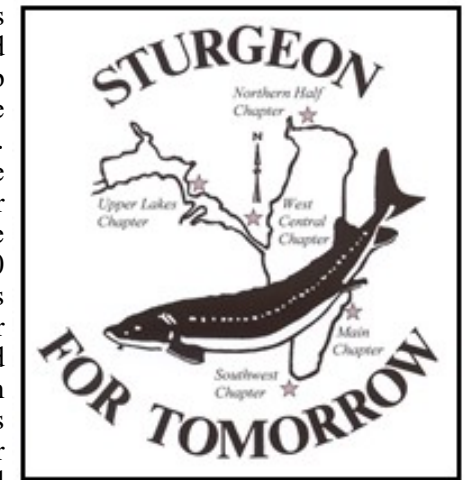
At the end of their shift, guards return to camp for a hearty meal before they make their way home.

Guards for 2019 will be scheduled from April 15th 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.

More information about the 2019 Sturgeon Guard program is available on the Wisconsin DNR website. Search "Sturgeon Guard." Online registration for interested volunteers is available at <http://dnr.wi.gov/SGsignUp/> beginning in early March. Interested volunteers also may register by contacting the DNR call center at 1-888-936-7463 or contacting the Sturgeon Guard coordinator at 920-420-1140.

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 over \$1 Million 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	Southwest Chapter President January 12, 2019 in Fond du Lac	920-922-7136
Dan Groeschel	SFT Main Chapter President January 26, 2019 in Kiel	920-923-1077
Wayne Hoelzel	Northern Half Chapter President February 2, 2019 in Darboy	920-725-1206
Pat Braasch	West Central Chapter March 16, 2019 in Oshkosh	920-231-4708
Sally Gilson	Upper Lakes Chapter President September 7, 2019 in Orihula	920-573-6975