

## **OSHKOSH....Winnebago Fisheries Focus of Public Meetings January 24 & 25**

The Department of Natural Resources will be conducting two public meetings in late January to review and discuss the status of the major fisheries in the Winnebago System. The recreational fisheries of the Winnebago lakes and the Wolf and upper Fox Rivers have an annual economic impact of \$240 million in the region driven primarily by the nationally known walleye fishery. Also known internationally is the unique winter spear fishery for lake sturgeon. The Winnebago System is home to the largest lake sturgeon population in North America and one of the longest running active sturgeon management programs in the world. Major issues to be discussed at the meetings include status of and trends in the Winnebago walleye and sturgeon populations and fisheries, new information on perch, sauger, and other important species, and the efforts to restore spawning lake sturgeon to historic grounds on the Wolf River in the Menominee Indian Reservation.

Meetings will be held beginning at 7 PM on:

Tuesday January 24, 2012 at the Fin n' Feather Restaurant, Winneconne  
*22 W Main St, Winneconne*

Wednesday January 25, 2012 at the Fisherman's Rd Fishing Club Headquarters, Fond du Lac  
*About 6 miles north of Fond du Lac on Hwy 151, west on Fisherman's Road to Lake Winnebago*

"We have seen some trends in recent years in the exploitation of walleye in the Winnebago System that we need to discuss with anglers," said Kendall Kamke, Winnebago System Senior Fisheries Biologist. "Walleye are the bread and butter species of the system. We need to stay on top of things and keep the public engaged to effectively manage the fishery and keep the Winnebago walleye management program on course," he added.

Another important issue within the Winnebago sturgeon program, in addition to maintaining a healthy sturgeon stock and a viable recreational spear fishery, is the department's efforts with the Menominee Tribe to restore sturgeon to lakes and streams on the Menominee reservation. The Department of Natural Resources has been working with the Menominee Tribe since 1993 to restore lake sturgeon to the Wolf River and other waters within the Menominee Reservation north of Shawano. To date, a fishable population of lake sturgeon has been created through stocking in the Legend Lake complex on the reservation, and a small number of river resident fish have also been established in the main Wolf River below Keshena Falls. The department captured and transferred adult sturgeon in the river every fall from 1995 through 2006, but discontinued live fish transfers after viral hemorrhagic septicemia, or VHS virus, was found in Lake Winnebago in 2007. In 2010, sturgeon were found to be not susceptible to VHS virus which allowed the department to reinstate sturgeon capture and transfer operations designed to increase the numbers of resident fish in the Wolf River near Keshena, and increase the number of migrant adults spawning below Keshena Falls on the river. Tribal law prohibits any person, tribal or non-tribal, from harvesting lake sturgeon from the Wolf River within the reservation. The Menominee tribe is interested in increasing lake sturgeon spawning activity near Keshena Falls, historically the furthest upstream spawning grounds on the Wolf River and a spiritually important site for the Menominee tribe. "What we have jointly accomplished to this point moves

us significantly towards addressing tribal sturgeon needs without any risk of potential negative impact on the sturgeon population nor the winter spearing harvest caps” said Ron Bruch, Upper Fox-Wolf Fisheries Supervisor, Oshkosh. This past fall in 2011 Bruch brought the Winnebago Citizens Sturgeon Advisory Committee into the discussion with the tribe to help forge a long term decision on how best to meet tribal sturgeon needs without negatively affecting the Winnebago population or spear fishery. The January meetings will provide the public an opportunity to be introduced to this issue and to discuss the public process to be implemented for developing a long term agreement with the tribe.

Other issues to be discussed at the meetings include the joint efforts during the past 15 years with Walleyes for Tomorrow, Otter Street Fishing Club, and the Department of Natural Resources to restore a fishable sauger population in Lake Winnebago; and new surveys department fisheries staff have initiated on yellow perch which are designed to provide important insight into the dynamics of that fishery, a species the department has not actively worked on in the Winnebago lakes for more than 30 years.

For further information contact:

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*Photo by Pat Durkin*



*Photo by Bob Rashid*