

2011 Winnebago Lakes Sturgeon Spearing Season – Season Synopsis

Ron Bruch
WI DNR Fisheries Supervisor

The 2011 season went into the books as the 4th 16 day season since we began the harvest cap system in 1999. The others were 2002, 2006, and 2007. Under current rule the season lasts until we hit one of the harvest cap closure triggers or 16 days, whichever comes first. The average season length under the harvest cap system since we went to the 6 hour spearing day (6:30 AM to 12:30 PM) in 2005 is 11 days. The shortest season since 2005 was a 4 day season in 2008.

Our total harvest of 1426 was close to the average annual harvest, since initiating the harvest cap system in 1999, of 1405.

Effort as measured by total spearing license sales was definitely up this year at 12,423 from 10,860 in 2010. Spearers are excited in general about the success of the fishery, and the lure of the increased number of trophies in the harvest also brings some additional people into the fishery. There may also be some demographic changes occurring as the next generation of spearers may be entering the fishery. I'll know more about these trends after we examine the license and harvest data and complete our analysis.

Effort as measured by shanty counts on the lake told the real story of the 2011 season. We started the season on opening day with counts of 4321 on Lake Winnebago and 372 on the Upriver Lakes. Warm weather, snow melt, and deteriorating travel conditions on the ice of the lakes the first week of season forced a majority of spearers to pull their shacks off the lakes dropping the shanty count by the second Saturday of the season 59% on Lake Winnebago and 81% on the Upriver Lakes. The Upriver Lakes usually drops off anyways since, as a lottery fishery, once tags begin to be filled, spearers often pull their shacks off the lakes.

The biggest change we have seen over the last ten years is the percentage of large fish in the harvest. This year the percentage of fish 100 lbs or larger in the harvest was 7.5% on Lake Winnebago and 3.6% on the Upriver Lakes. The percentage of these century mark fish has been steadily increasing over the last 15 years. Spearers ask two questions related to this phenomenon: 1) “Why?”, and 2) “Are we taking too many 100 lbers?”.

“Why?” - When we started down the path of updating regulations to better control the harvest and stabilize the adult spawning stock of sturgeon in the Winnebago System our colloquial goal was “We want to grow more old ladies”. In other words, we saw that our adult female stock was being overharvested primarily due to a high size



Largest lake sturgeon registered in 2011 Winnebago spearing season; 185 lbs, 80.2” speared by Josh Genske of Sheboygan

limit (45”) along with the lack of a safe harvest cap system, and that we needed to reduce that harvest and increase survival of females. All of the new regulations and laws (22 in total) that were implemented since 1993 appear to have done their job quite well. The other part of the success equation was luck – sometimes you just have to get lucky. The timing of implementation of the new regulations and laws could not have been better. As the new regulations began to have an impact on the sturgeon harvest, the size and age structure of the Winnebago sturgeon population was poised to include more older and larger fish with each passing year. This phenomenon was due to the fact that by the mid 1990s we finally were on the back side of a hole in the sturgeon population that had been created by excessive legal and illegal overharvest during the 1930s-1950s. The sturgeon population in numbers and age composition had finally grown past the impact of this overharvest that occurred 50 to 70 years ago.

“Are we taking too many 100 lbers?” – At this point the percentage of 100 pound plus fish in the harvest appears to be truly reflective of what is actually in the population. We have been watching the trend of more trophy size fish growing not only in our harvest, but also in the spawning stock – both females and males – for over 15 years now. I will be looking into this further to see if there is any significant differences in exploitation rate of fish by size, but I will surprised if I find any. Stay tuned. Also – remember 5-6 years ago when our sturgeon were so skinny? In the 2004-2006 time period sturgeon food resources were at a low point. Lakefly larvae were at the lowest point we had ever measured going back to the 1960s, and the gizzard shad hatches in the early 2000s were low as well. Sturgeon depend on these two food resources for 86% of their nutrition. Since 2006 both of these food resources have bounced back to high levels and the condition of the sturgeon also bounced back to the fish “with shoulders” that we see have been seeing the last few years.

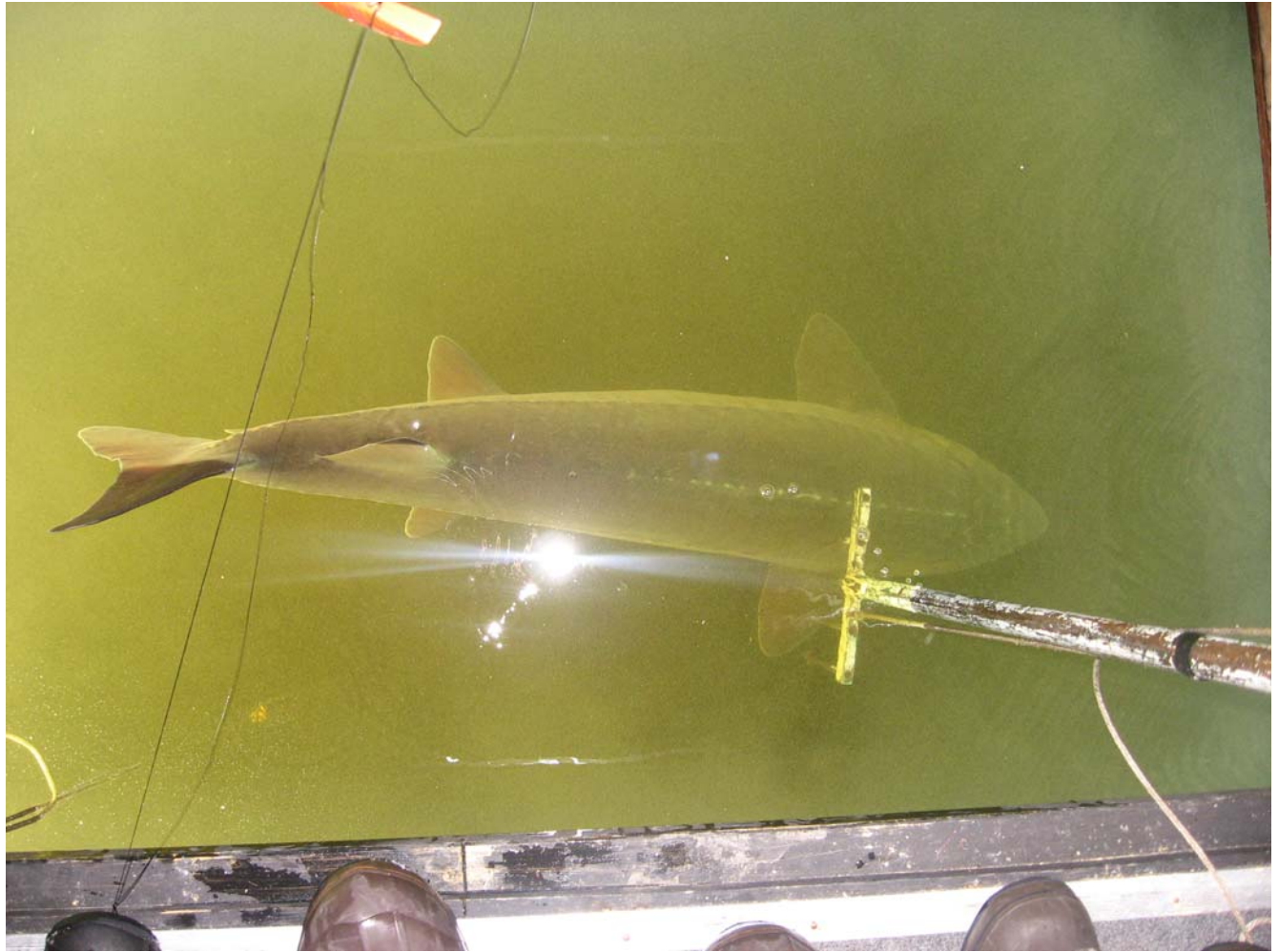
The main issues that came in after the season were comments about sturgeon holes not being adequately marked, allowing sturgeon spearers to cut in earlier than the Thursday before the season, and changing spearing hours to 7 AM to 1 PM. We will discuss these issues at our Sturgeon Advisory Committee meeting this summer and if any changes are recommended I will schedule a public meeting to discuss these things further.

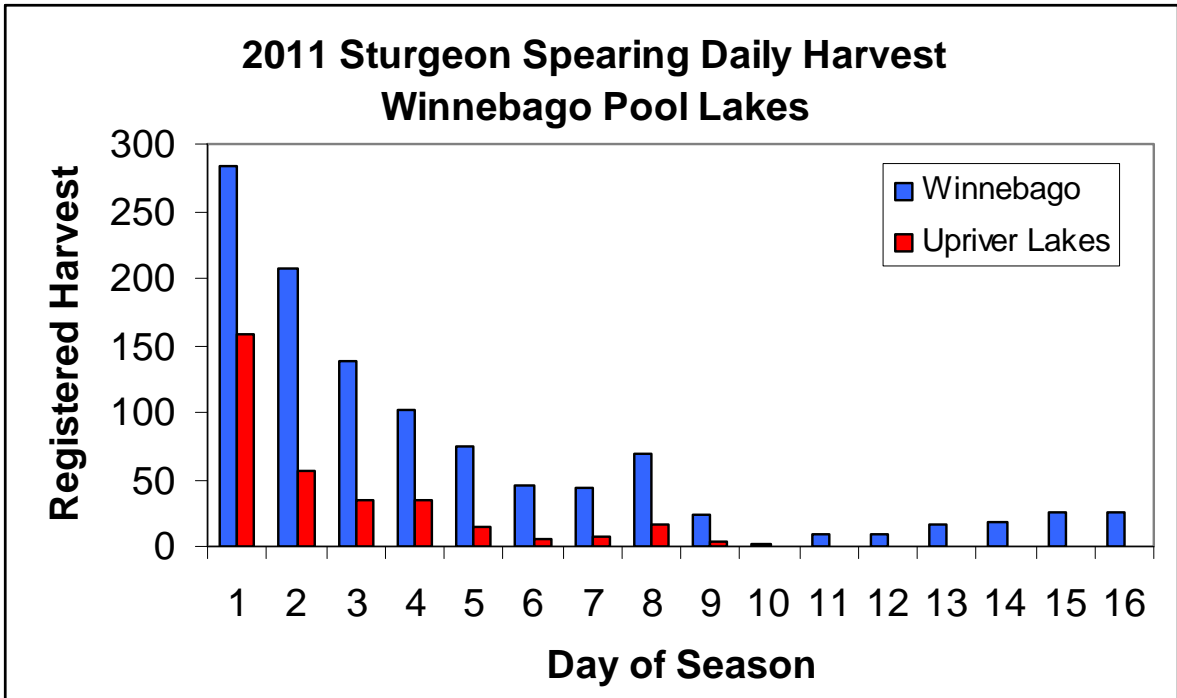
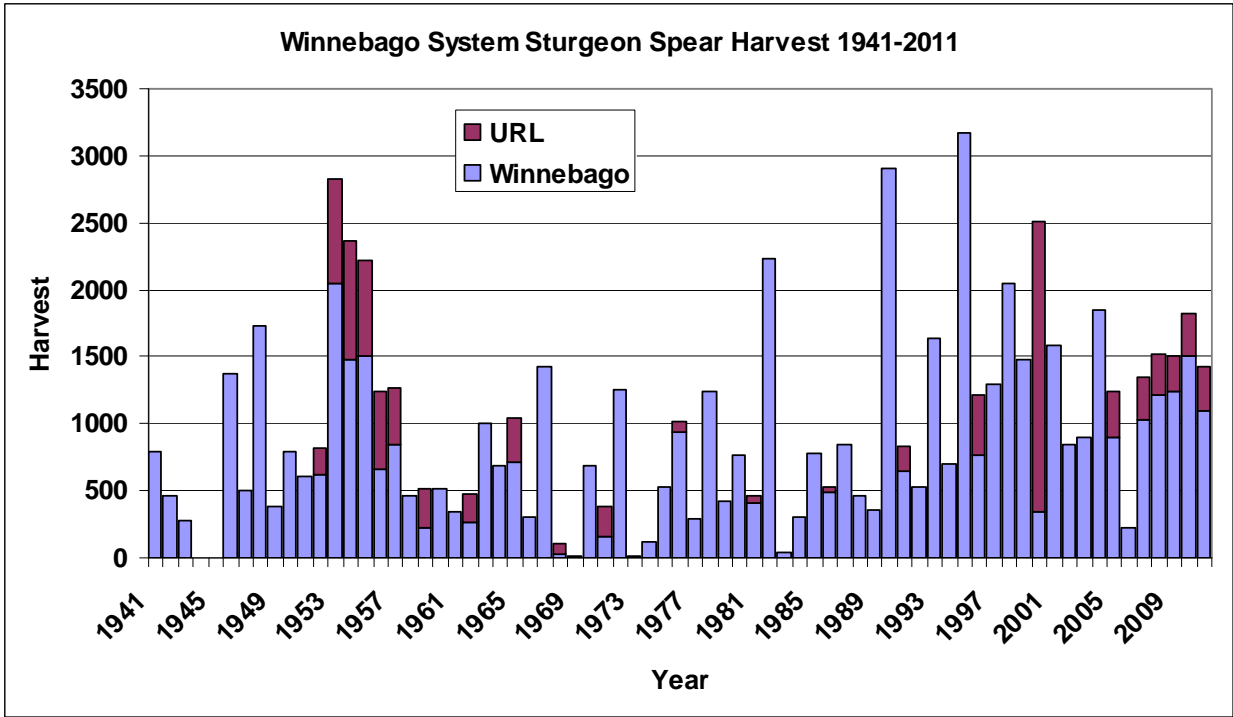
Thanks again to all for a great season.

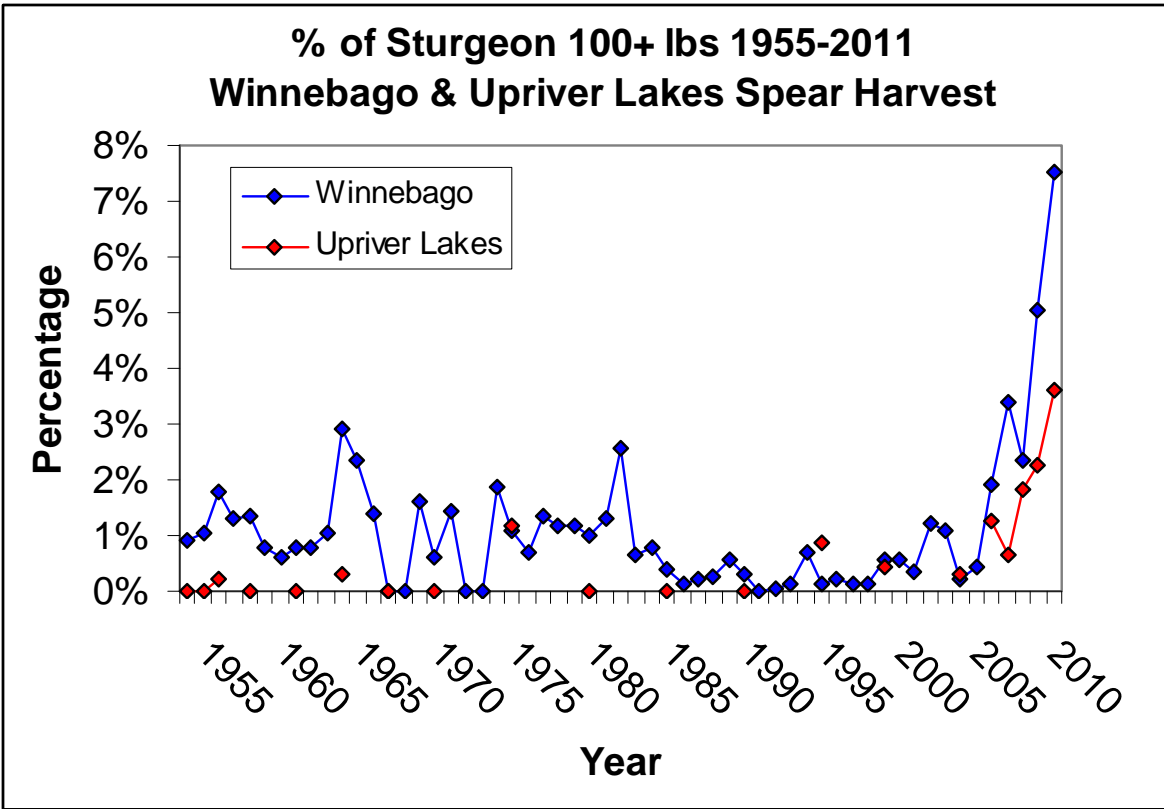
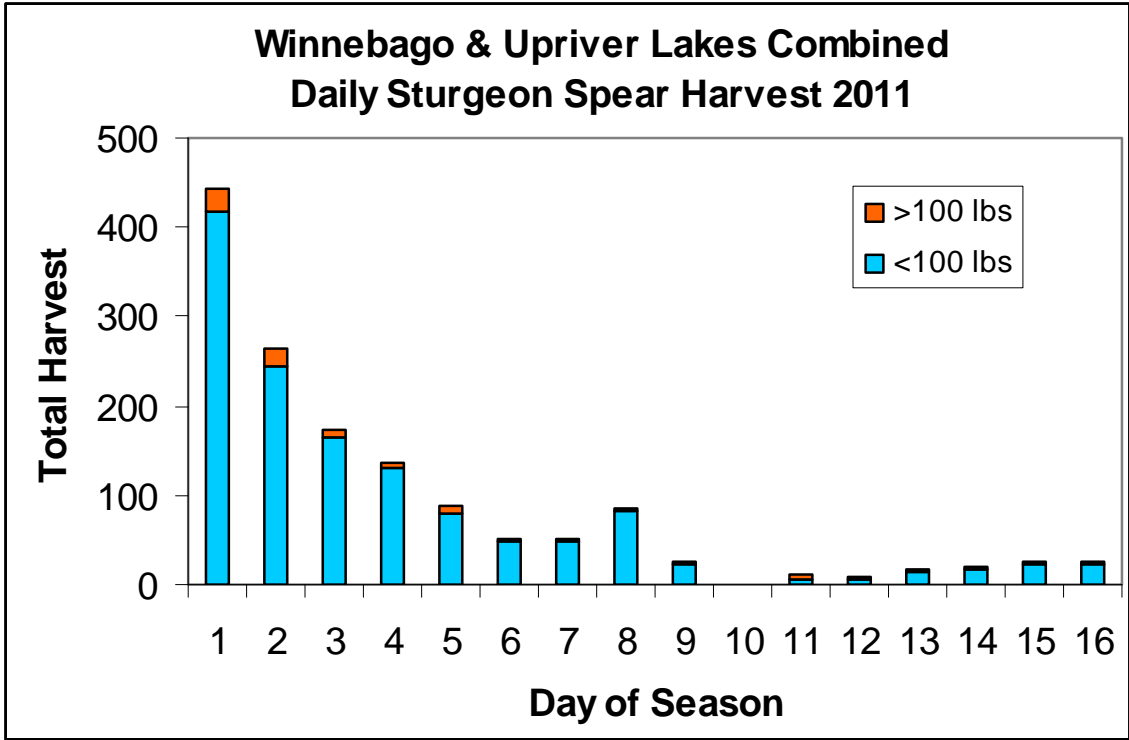
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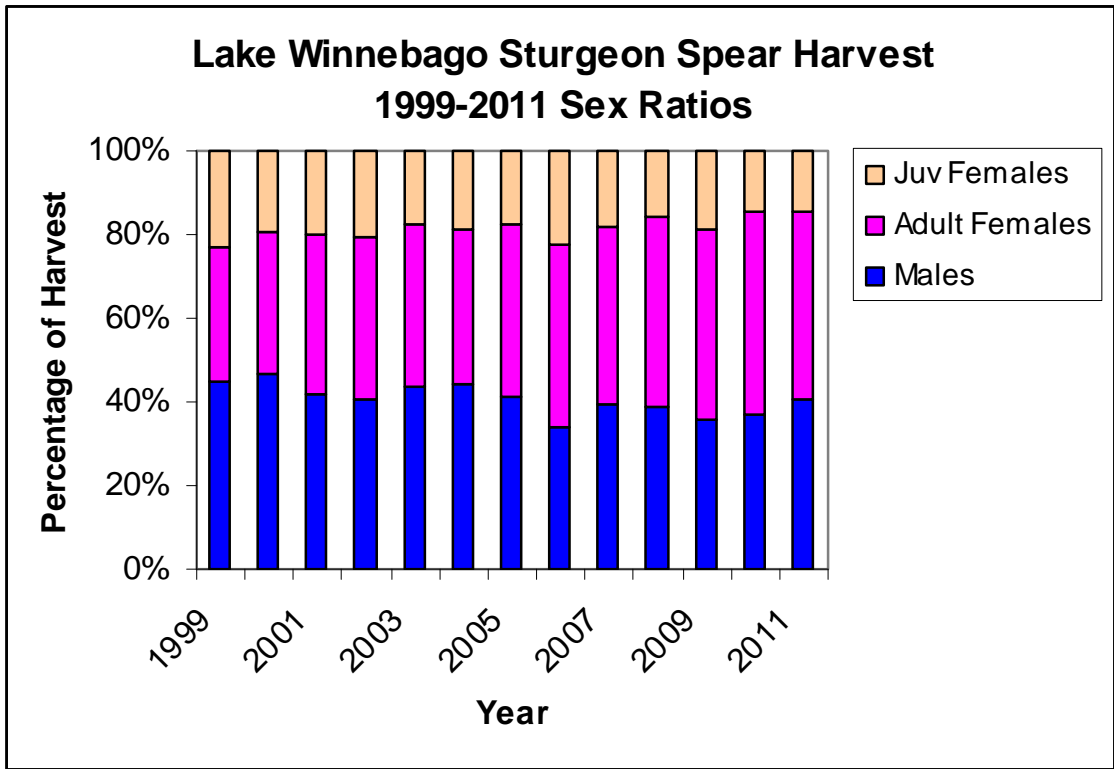
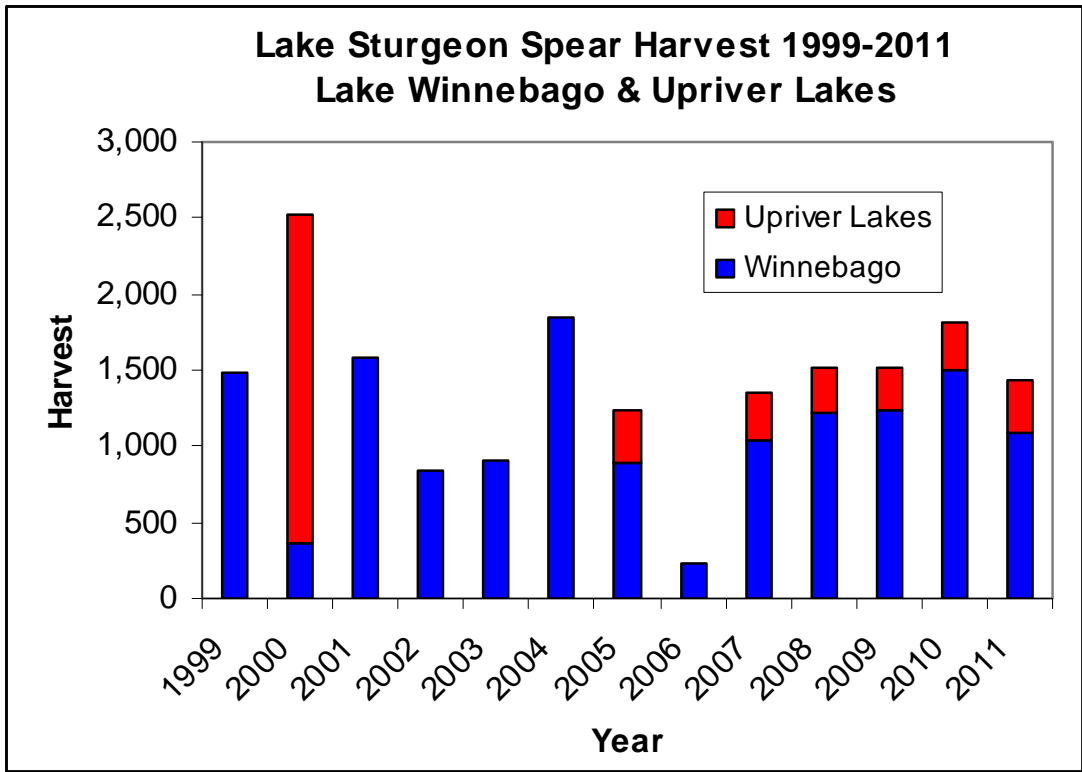
I’ve attached a couple of photos from this season for your enjoyment, and a series of data charts for your information.

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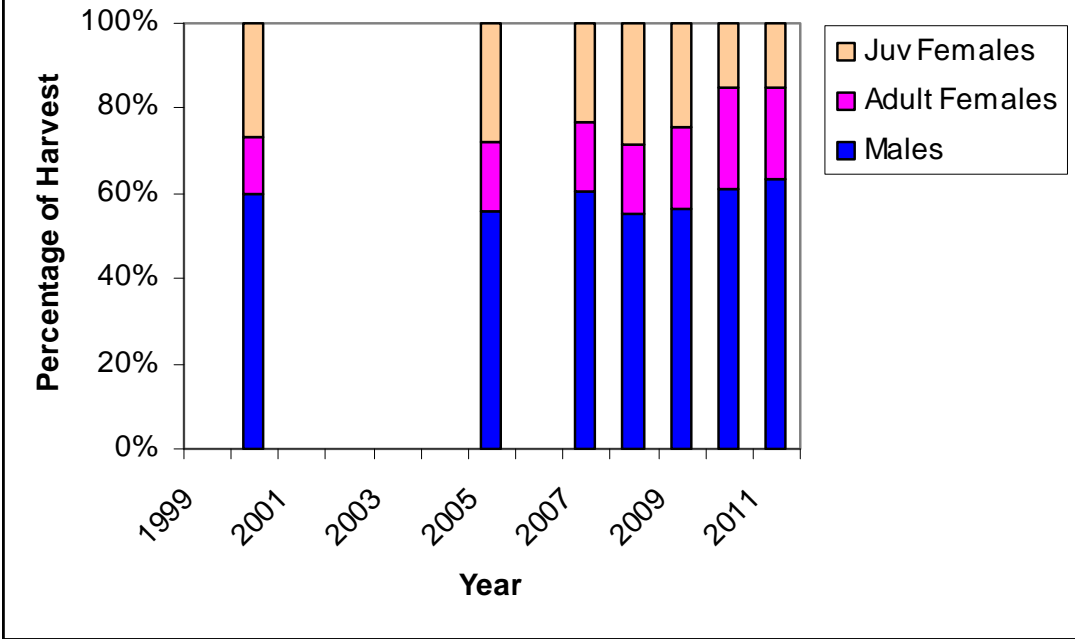








Upriver Lakes Sturgeon Spear Harvest 1999-2011 Sex Ratios



STURGEON SPEAR HARVEST - WINNEBAGO LAKES 1999-2011

Harvest Cap System implemented in 1999

Upriver Lakes Lottery started in 2007

LAKE WINNEBAGO														
Registrati on Station	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	TOTAL
Waverly	118	22	100	143	59	30	106	4	117	159	99	200	51	1208
Harrison											122	188	52	362
Fishtale	203	27	144	235	1	29	40	1						680
Stockbridge	149	20	127	95	42	67	211	16	197	219	470	405	366	2384
Quinney	209	30	110	115	8	118	87	1	99	139	201	221	87	1425
Brotherton	197	35	69	33	2	180	38	3						557
Jim & Linda's/Calumet Hbr.	367	90	168	30	244	442	181	67	253	192	126	118	70	2348
Wendt's	115	97	711	30	386	748	159	116	266	364	71	98	208	3369
Taycheedah							15							15
Jerry's	40	35	51	33	39	183	21	11	61	54	22	79	88	717
Payne's	86	8	110	133	121	57	36	6	47	86	124	199	171	1184
Winnebago Totals:	1484	364	1590	847	902	1854	894	225	1040	1213	1235	1508	1093	14249
Winnebago Season Length (Days)	3	2	2	16	10	2	12	16	16	4	8	6	16	

UPRIVER LAKES														
Registrati on Station	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	TOTAL
Winneconne		351					122		24	99	70	126	141	666
Poygan South (Cty Lndg)		590					79		117					786
Captain's Cove							7							7
Indian Pt.		665					64		99	132	152	116	131	1112
Boom Bay		548					72		67	69	53	70	61	809
Upriver Lakes Totals:		2154					345		313	300	275	312	333	3380
Upriver Lakes Season Length (Days)		2					1		6	4	5	6	10	

Year	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	TOTAL
System-Wide Harvest Totals:	1484	2518	1590	847	902	1854	1239	225	1353	1513	1510	1820	1426	17629

System-Wide Harvest Caps	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Juvenile Females	400	400	400	400	400	425	500	500	556	556	350	350	395
Adult Females	400	400	400	400	400	425	500	500	556	556	630	740	790
Males	2150	2150	2150	2150	2150	1300	2000	2000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1200

Winnebago	Year	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
	Harvest	Juvenile Females	345	70	317	176	157	349	159	50	189	193	231	223
Adult Females		469	126	608	327	350	684	368	99	439	548	562	726	493
Males		670	169	665	344	395	821	367	76	412	472	442	559	442
Total		1484	364	1590	847	902	1854	894	225	1040	1213	1235	1508	1093

Upriver Lakes	Year	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
	Harvest	Juvenile Females		576					97		72	85	67	47
Adult Females			294					55		51	50	53	75	71
Males			1295					193		190	165	155	190	211
Total		0	2165	0	0	0	0	345	0	313	300	275	312	333

TOTAL Harvest 1999-2011	Year	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
	Juvenile Females	345	646	317	176	157	349	256	50	261	278	298	270	209
	Adult Females	469	420	608	327	350	684	423	99	490	598	615	801	564
	Males	670	1464	665	344	395	821	560	76	602	637	597	749	653
	Total	1484	2529	1590	847	902	1854	1239	225	1353	1513	1510	1820	1426