

“New” Fishing Regulations Update for SECOLA Newsletter – March 2017

After a comprehensive survey of the Spread Eagle Chain of Lakes (SECL) in 2011, recommendations were made to change many of the fishing regulations to benefit the fishery. These regulations were put in place during the spring of 2016, and the effectiveness of these regulations will be assessed through ongoing surveys. During this article I will go over those changes and the rationale used to support those changes.

- 1.) Panfish ***Current “New” Regulation: Daily bag of 5 fish/species, 15 fish total from May 1 to June 30, with a daily bag of 25 fish per angler the rest of the year.***

This regulation was put in place to improve the poor size structure of the SECL panfish populations. There are two general reasons for poor size structure of panfish; poor growth rates, or overharvest of larger panfish by anglers. Growth rates of panfish were determined to be average during the 2011 survey, which led us to believe that overharvest is responsible for poor panfish size structure. The current regulation should reduce harvest during the spawning season (when fish are most vulnerable), allowing more larger panfish to remain and grow which will lead to a better age and size structure.

- 2.) Bass ***Current “New” Regulation: No minimum size limit, however fish from 14 to 18 inches may not be kept, daily bag limit of 5 fish with no more than 1 fish over 18”.***

The overall goal is to reduce the abundance of largemouth bass by allowing the harvest of overabundant small fish. Size structure of the population should also increase under this regulation as quality sized fish will be protected. The 2011 survey estimated the largemouth population to be nearly 7.5 adult largemouth bass per acre in the SECL. This is the 2nd highest abundance of largemouth bass in Florence County. While growth rates were average, size structure was less than desirable. The hope is that under this new regulation the harvest of largemouth bass will increase by focusing harvest on the overabundant small fish. Reducing abundance of largemouth bass may also have positive impacts to other species within the SECL. Anglers are encouraged to harvest largemouth bass less than 14 inches to help accomplish the fish management goals for the SECL.

- 3.) Walleye ***Current “New” Regulation: 18” minimum size limit, 3 fish daily bag limit.***

The goal for this regulation is to increase the adult walleye population in the SECL. Under the previous 15” minimum size limit it appeared that the harvest of female walleye was significantly higher than the harvest of male walleye, creating an adult population that was 10% female and 90% male. The new regulation will protect female walleye until maturity, allowing them a chance to spawn before they are able to be harvested. This regulation along with a change in the stocking program, which has allowed the stocking of large fingerling walleye instead of small fingerling walleye, will hopefully increase adult abundance to an all-time high in the SECL, which may result in increased natural reproduction of walleye.