

**Testimony of the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation on the Bass
Tournament Culling Rule----FH-55-04**

Thank you very much for the opportunity for the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation to testify on the proposed DNR regulations governing the culling of fish by bass tournaments in the state of Wisconsin. The Federation is the state's largest conservation organization representing ninety-one hunting, fishing and trapping groups in the state.

The Federation understands that this Department of Natural Resources public hearing relates to the development of rules implementing Wisconsin Act 249 which directed DNR to establish a pilot program authorizing bass tournaments to allow the culling of bass by tournament participants. However the Federation would first like to indicate the opposition of the Federation and the great majority of Wisconsin anglers to the allowance of culling by tournament fishermen. This great opposition is illustrated by a strong Conservation Congress vote against this practice. In addition, a poll undertaken this summer by the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation also shows strong average angler opposition to the practice.

The Federation asked this question in the poll:

“Wisconsin law now requires all anglers to decide AT THE TIME of catch whether to keep the catch or return the catch. Now, supporters of some fishing tournaments have asked the Legislature to allow exceptions for anglers in those tournaments to wait until AFTER THE TIME of catch to decide which catch to keep and which to return.

Do you favor or oppose allowing exceptions for anglers in some fishing tournaments to wait to decide which catch to keep and which to return?

Do you strongly (favor/oppose) this or just somewhat (favor/oppose) it?

18% Strongly favor
15% Somewhat favor
16% Somewhat oppose
45% Strongly oppose
7% Don't know/Refuse”

61% Oppose---33% Favor

The average Wisconsin angler disapproves of the practice of culling and believes that it is unfair for one group of anglers to be allowed to have special fishing regulations.

Now as to the specifics of the proposed rule, Bob Miller, Chair of the WWF Fisheries Committee, has served on the Department's advisory committee that has worked on the development of the rule. The Federation seeks one proposed change in the Department's rule. The rule as currently drafted requires that tournament boats have a live well capacity of 25 gallons in order to allow the practice of culling. Experts believe that there needs to be one gallon of water for each pound of fish in the live well. According to the DNR, the average bass tournament catch is approximately 25 pounds. Based on this analysis the

live well standard should be increased to 30 gallons in order to protect above average catches of bass.

The Wisconsin Wildlife Federation agrees with the Department that a biological, economic and sociological study needs to be undertaken of the pilot bass tournament program, however the cost of the great majority of the study should not be paid for by the average angler through the fish and wildlife account. The Department should require that bass tournaments and those organizations supporting the practice of culling fish in tournaments pay for the great majority of the cost of this study. The study should determine the potential adverse impact of culling on the health of the fish released back into rivers and streams. In addition, the study should look at whether there is any greater difference economically to the hosting communities and sponsors when bass culling is allowed in contrast to when it is not allowed. The sociological portion of the study should look at angler acceptance of allowing tournament culling of bass and at the question of the acceptability of two different standards of culling regulation between bass tournament participants and the remaining of the angling public.

The Wisconsin Wildlife Federation greatly appreciates the opportunity to comment on the rule.

Submitted on behalf of the Federation by George Meyer, Executive Director