

What's Up with Walleye Stocking on McKenzie Lakes? The DNR Breaks it Down

Cabin owners, MLA members and others wonder about the process for stocking the lakes with walleyes. Moreover, it has from time-to-time come into question why MLA's walleye fund just can't be used to stock the lakes. As it turns out, there are restrictions imposed by the DNR as to how associations may use their funds to independently stock their lakes. Also, in MLA's case, donors to the fund specifically want their funds to go toward stocking the lakes – but may be unaware of the rules the DNR imposes at one time or another.

Craig Roberts, DNR senior fisheries biologist for Burnett and Washburn Counties, responded to a Q & A sent to him by MLA member Mike Pederson on behalf of the association.

Q Can the lake association do anything to increase the amount of walleye stocking in the lakes? Rearing ponds, extra stocking, etc.?

A Both lakes* are getting the recommended rate for large fingerling walleye of 10 fish/acre. Stocking more walleye is simply not going to bolster the population further. We have lakes that are receiving 15 fish/acre and 20 fish/acre and see similar or worse catch rates of age-1 stocked walleye. I do not think additional stocking will add to this population. In addition, we have a planned survey of Big McKenzie for 2025. By altering the rates/stockings now, we would make the analysis of the stocking program impossible to analyze. For these reasons, I prefer we stick with the 10 fish/acre that the DNR is stocking.

Q Would it be feasible to put more spawning beds in the lakes?

A I assume you are referring the rock reefs that were installed in the early 2000s. These were not successful. There wasn't any measurable natural reproduction of walleye after those were installed. So I do not think it would necessarily benefit the lake or walleye population.

Q Would it be feasible to put cribs in the lakes? We are already working on the fish sticks project.

A Fish cribs are a possibility, but I would continue to prefer fish sticks. Fish sticks provide shoreline habitat that is going to make the lake more naturally productive. Cribs are deep water cover, but can become fishing spots more than habitat and may not benefit the lake as much in the long run. However, I am open to discussion on fish habitat.

Q There was a discussion from a resort owner. He says his customers say they are using red ear bluegills to eat zebra mussels in the lakes in other states. Have you heard of this? Any input?

A I haven't heard of zebra mussels being controlled by red ear sunfish. I know there are plenty of lakes south of Wisconsin that have red ear sunfish and have zebra mussels still. Also, red ear sunfish are not native to this part of the country, I do not know that they can survive this far

north. We have the northern equivalent which are pumpkinseeds. They also eat snails and mussels, but maybe not to the degree that red ear sunfish do.

Q There was also a discussion on fish size and limits. In particular: Can the walleye have a slot limit? Can the panfish total be lowered?

A Big McKenzie is currently set to be surveyed in 2025. At that time, we will consider changing the walleye or panfish regulations once we survey the data from the lake.

*Refers to Big and Middle McKenzie Lakes. Lower McKenzie Lake is not stocked.