

2021 WINNEBAGO SYSTEM STURGEON SPEARING REGULATIONS

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Evan and Lucas Muche with sturgeon harvested in February 2020.

Photo courtesy of the Muche family



Andrew Dumask harvested this 78.2 inch, 139.3 lb sturgeon in 2020.

Photo courtesy of the DNR

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WHAT'S NEW?

REGISTRATION STATIONS

DNR registration stations have moved for the 2021 season ([see page 7-8](#) for details). Stations will be operated as drive-thru only. Spearers must remain in their vehicles throughout the registration process.

To help, with this new registration process, the DNR asks that all harvested sturgeon be placed on your tailgate or in an easily accessible location. Please follow the signs and cones at each registration station to ensure a smooth registration.

REGULATION CHANGES

The maximum width of a spear head is restricted to 18 inches or less and tines can only be arranged in a single straight line.

REMINDERS

SIGN UP FOR STURGEON UPDATES

Get daily updates throughout the 2021 spearing season and updates on the Winnebago System fisheries throughout the year by signing up at:

<https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/fishing/sturgeon/WinnSysSturgeonSpear.html>

TAGS, LICENSES AND PERMITS

- Spearers must possess a paper copy of their sturgeon spearing carcass tag at all times while spearing. A receipt of purchase, driver's license or GoWild card does not meet this requirement.
- It is **ILLEGAL** to possess more than one copy of a carcass tag.
- Carcass tags **MUST BE** validated immediately upon harvest by removing the validation stub.
- There is mandatory in-person registration of all harvested fish. Fish must be presented at a registration station by 2 PM of the same day the fish is harvested.

TO REPORT VIOLATIONS

Please call 1-800-TIP-WDNR (1-800-847-9367) or dial #367 from any cell phone.

DNR INFORMATION LINE

DNR call center at 1-888-936-7463

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources provides equal opportunity in its employment, programs, services, and functions under an Affirmative Action Plan. If you have any questions, please write to Equal Opportunity Office, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240. The Department of Natural Resources is committed to serving people with disabilities. If you need this information in an alternative format, please call (608) 267-7498.

This pamphlet is an interpretive summary of Wisconsin's fishing laws and regulations. For complete fishing laws and regulations, including those that are implemented after the publication of this pamphlet, consult the Wisconsin State Statutes Chapter 29 or the Administrative Code of the Department of Natural Resources. Consult the legislative website: <https://docs.legis.wi.gov> for more information. For the most up-to-date version of this pamphlet, go to <https://dnr.wi.gov> and search, "sturgeon spearing regulations."





Sunset over sturgeon shanties on Lake Winnebago.

Photo courtesy of Mary Smedbron

DEAR WINNEBAGO STURGEON SPEARER,

Another sturgeon spearing season is rapidly approaching, getting underway on February 13, 2021. Normally, I would take this opportunity to recap the past sturgeon spearing season and provide a preliminary forecast for the upcoming season. However, 2020 has been anything but normal and the primary objective of this year's letter is to notify spearers of the important changes being implemented to keep spearers and DNR staff safe amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

The overall structure of the fishery will be unchanged from recent seasons, but the registration process will be altered. Public health officials recommend practicing strict social distancing and limiting group gatherings to help reduce the spread of COVID-19. As a result, we will be moving our registration stations away from local businesses for this season and re-positioning them in parking lots located at boat landings, city parks and government buildings.

Each registration station will be set up as a drive-thru system and spearers will be required to stay in the vehicle while waiting to register their fish. DNR staff will remove the fish from the vehicle at the time of registration and place the fish back in the vehicle at the conclusion of the process. Find more details on the changes to the registration stations on [pages 7 and 8](#).

It's important for spearers to understand and respect the registration process being utilized for this season. In-person registration remains essential for effective implementation of the

spear fishery. Fish must be accurately sexed and measured to be assigned to the appropriate harvest caps.

The changes made to the registration process during the upcoming season will allow DNR staff to collect the necessary data to manage the fishery, while keeping spearers and staff safe. The DNR is committed to returning to traditional registration station locations for future spearing seasons, but for now we must all do our part to protect the people within our community.

It's too early to tell what conditions will be like for the 2021 spearing season, but hopefully this season will deviate from the recent trend of dirty water. Water clarity is the ultimate predictor of sturgeon spearing success. Typically, an average clarity of 12' or greater on Lake Winnebago results in a shortened season as the harvest caps are reached prior to the maximum 16 days. We haven't had water clarity above that threshold since the 2015 season. Hopefully, Mother Nature will bless us with stable, cold weather between now and February to facilitate safe ice formation and clearer water.

The 2021 spearing season will be a little different than normal, but the season will provide spearers the unique opportunity to harvest a lake sturgeon with a hand-thrown spear. Despite the challenges, I'm very much looking forward to the 2021 spearing season. Let's all work together to make the 2021 season SAFE and successful!

Ryan Koenigs
Winnebago Sturgeon Biologist



SEASONS

HOURS

7:00 AM to 1:00 PM

LAKE WINNEBAGO

February 13, 2021 through February 28, 2021 on Lake Winnebago, or until any of the pre-set harvest caps for Lake Winnebago are reached or any of the pre-set Winnebago system-wide harvest caps are reached, whichever comes first (as per trigger closure rules).

UPRIVER LAKES (LAKE BUTTE DES MORTS, WINNECONNE AND POYGAN)

February 13, 2021 through February 28, 2021 on the Upriver Lakes, or until any of the pre-set harvest caps for the Upriver Lakes are reached or any of the pre-set Winnebago system-wide harvest caps are reached, whichever comes first (as per trigger closure rules).

A limited drawing spear fishery was implemented on the Upriver Lakes in 2007. Spearers can either apply for an Upriver Lakes sturgeon tag or purchase a preference point (thus not included in the drawing for that season) by August 1. Applicants are notified by October 1 of whether they were successful in receiving authorization to purchase an Upriver Lakes sturgeon spearing license. Group drawing applications of up to four persons are accepted and the group will carry the preference points of the group member with the fewest points.

Spearers not drawn for an Upriver Lakes license receive a preference point and can purchase a Lake Winnebago spearing license. Applicants drawn for an Upriver Lakes permit will lose their accumulated preference points regardless of whether they purchase their tag.

Spearers can only buy a license for either Lake Winnebago or the Upriver Lakes but they cannot buy one for both. License sales for the Lake Winnebago season ends October 31. The Upriver Lakes sturgeon drawing fishery limits participation to 500 tags in 2021 and will have an allotment of the overall sturgeon harvest caps. Upriver Lakes tags can be transferred to a youth (age 12-17) or a person holding a valid Class A, B, C or D disabled permit.

Ron Goldapske harvested this 73 inch, 119.5 lb sturgeon in 2020.

Photo courtesy of the DNR

LICENSE REQUIREMENTS

To spear sturgeon, residents must purchase a sturgeon spearing license for \$20.00 and nonresidents must purchase a sturgeon spearing license for \$65.00

Only persons 12 years of age and older are eligible to spear sturgeon. No sturgeon spearing license may be issued or purchased after October 31, 2020 except for:

1. Wisconsin residents that turn 12 between November 1, 2020 and the last day of the 2021 spearing season; or
2. Wisconsin residents serving in the Armed Forces that are home on leave during the 2021 spearing season.

The sturgeon spearing license must be carried by the licensee at all times while fishing for sturgeon with a spear and no person may use or carry the license of another person. Lake Winnebago licenses are non-transferable, but Upriver Lakes licenses can be transferred to youth (age 12-17) or a person holding a valid Class A, B, C or D disabled permit.

TAGGING YOUR STURGEON

WHEN AND HOW TO VALIDATE TAG

Upon harvest, the carcass tag must be immediately validated by removing the validation stub of the carcass tag below the dotted line.

WHEN TO ATTACH TAG

The validated tag must stay with the sturgeon until presented at a DNR operated registration station. The tag does not need to be attached to the sturgeon unless the license holder leaves the fish.

PROTECT TAG

It is the responsibility of the spearer to keep the tag protected and legible. Consider enclosing the tag in a sealed plastic bag.

REGISTER

Any harvested sturgeon must be presented by the spearer at an official registration station by 2:00 PM of the same day it was speared. Call in or online registration is NOT available for registering harvested lake sturgeon.

Group bagging is not legal and occurs whenever the person who tags the sturgeon is different from the person who speared the fish.



Diana Sanders harvested this 72.8 inch, 111.5 lb sturgeon in 2020 from the Upriver Lakes.

Photo courtesy of the DNR



Brandi Lefeber with her 71.7 inch, 91.7 lb sturgeon harvested in 2020.

Photo courtesy of the DNR

HARVEST CAPS

Total harvest of sturgeon will be limited through pre-set harvest caps. Harvest caps for the 2021 Winnebago system spearing season are 430 juvenile females, 950 adult females and 1200 males. Portions of the system-wide harvest caps have been allocated to the fisheries on Lake Winnebago and the Upriver Lakes as shown below:

2021 SPEARING SEASON HARVEST CAPS			
Waterbody	Juvenile Females	Adult Females	Males
Lake Winnebago	344	855	960
Upriver Lakes	86	95	240
<u>Winnebago System</u>	<u>430</u>	<u>950</u>	<u>1200</u>

The DNR will close the sturgeon spearing season on Lake Winnebago before the maximum 16 day season when any of the following conditions occur:

- At the end of a spearing day in which 100% of any one of the three Lake Winnebago harvest caps is reached or exceeded; or
- 24 hours from the end of a spearing day which concludes with a harvest of 90 to 99% of any one of the three Lake Winnebago harvest caps being reached.

The DNR will close the sturgeon spearing season on the Upriver Lakes before the maximum 16 day season when any of the following conditions occur:

- At the end a spearing day in which 100% of any one of the three Upriver Lakes harvest caps is reached or exceeded; or
- 24 hours from the end of a spearing day which concludes with a harvest of 90 to 99% of any one of the three Upriver Lakes harvest caps being reached.

The DNR will close the sturgeon spearing season on all waters of the Winnebago system before the maximum 16 day season when any of the following conditions occur:

- At the end of a spearing day in which 100% of any one of the three Winnebago system-wide harvest caps is reached or exceeded; or
- 24 hours from the end of a spearing day which concludes with a harvest of 90 to 99% of any one of the three Winnebago system-wide harvest caps being reached.

REGISTRATION STATIONS

A person who spears a sturgeon must accompany the fish to an official sturgeon registration station. Phone-in or online harvest registration is NOT available for sturgeon registration.

Any fish harvested from Lake Winnebago must be registered at one of the registration stations on Lake Winnebago. Any fish harvested from Lakes Butte des Morts, Winneconne or Poygan (the Upriver Lakes) must be registered at one of the registration stations on the Upriver Lakes.

All DNR registration stations will be drive-thru only. Spearers must remain in their vehicles throughout the registration process. To help with this new registration process, the DNR asks that all harvested sturgeon be placed on tailgate or in an easily accessible location. Please follow the signs and cones at each registration station to ensure a smooth registration.

Stations are operated daily throughout the season by DNR fisheries staff. The registration process allows for collection of important biological information on the size, sex and tagging history of your fish. A metal registration tag will be attached to your fish during the registration process to signify to law enforcement staff that your fish has been properly registered. The registration tag must be retained until the carcass is consumed.

To avoid the “end of the day” rush, please bring your fish in as soon as possible after spearing it. You must be at the registration station and in-line to register your fish by 2:00 PM on the day it was speared.

Some registration stations may be closed prior to the end of the season depending on spearing activity and volume of sturgeon registrations. Any early closures will be posted at registration stations and included in daily harvest reports sent via GovDelivery.

HARVEST PHOTOS

Photos are a great way to capture special moments and the DNR is looking for spearers to submit photos that help tell a story through a [photo submission form](#). Photos could be of spearers with their catch, cutting in, shanty life, scenic views observed during the season or anything else that captures the spearing tradition.

Please be sure to include a brief description of each image. By submitting photos, the DNR is granted a non-exclusive license to use and reproduce the submitted photos for any purposes the DNR may deem appropriate, including in future DNR outreach efforts.



Brian Koplitz harvested this 77.9 inch, 116.6 lb sturgeon during the 2020 season.

Photo courtesy of the DNR

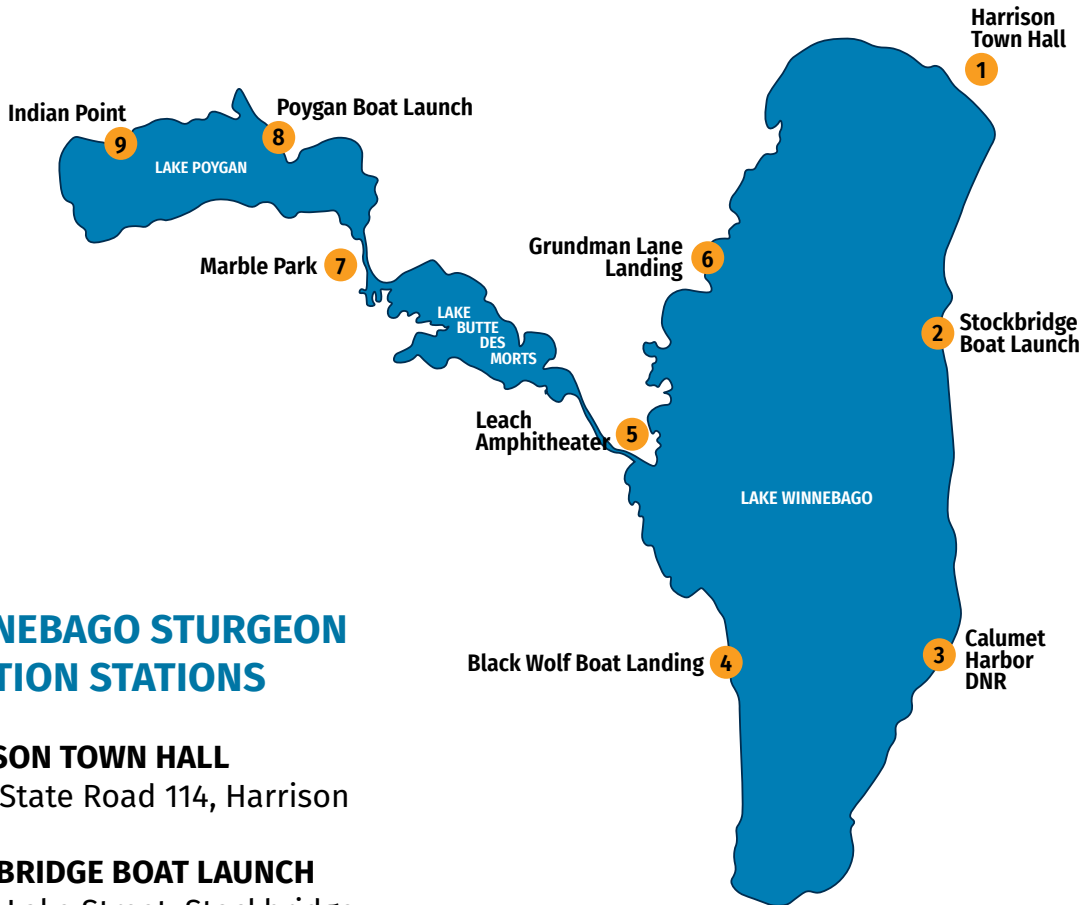


Tonya Winkelman with a 69.6 inch, 105.8 lb sturgeon that she harvested in 2020.

Photo courtesy of the DNR

REGISTRATION STATION LOCATIONS

Drive-thru registration stations only.



LAKE WINNEBAGO STURGEON REGISTRATION STATIONS

- 1 HARRISON TOWN HALL**
W5298 State Road 114, Harrison
- 2 STOCKBRIDGE BOAT LAUNCH**
1903 W Lake Street, Stockbridge
- 3 CALUMET HARBOR DNR PROPERTY**
N10339 Calumet Harbor Road, Malone
- 4 BLACK WOLF BOAT LANDING**
6850 Fond du Lac Road, Oshkosh
- 5 LEACH AMPHITHEATER**
303 Ceape Avenue, Oshkosh
- 6 GRUNDMAN LANE LANDING**
1801 Grundman Lane, Oshkosh

UPRIVER LAKES STURGEON REGISTRATION STATIONS

- 7 MARBLE PARK**
200 South 6th Street, Winneconne
- 8 POYGAN BOAT LAUNCH**
7499 Richter Lane, Larson
- 9 INDIAN POINT**
Cty Trk H, 0.5 mi east of Tustin



REGULATIONS

LIMITS

BAG LIMIT: One (1) lake sturgeon per licensee

MINIMUM LENGTH: 36 inches

POSSESSION AND USE OF A SPEAR

No person may have under his or her control any spear or similar device in any enclosure on the ice or waters of the Winnebago system except when authorized during established sturgeon spearing seasons during open spearing hours and while in possession of a valid sturgeon spearing license and unfilled carcass tag.

No person may take, capture, kill or attempt to kill sturgeon on the Winnebago system by any means other than spearing with a spear thrown by hand from inside a fishing shelter placed on the ice during the open spearing season.

It is illegal to spear a sturgeon and then release it back into the water.

SPEARING OF ROUGH FISH

Spearing of any species of fish other than sturgeon from the Winnebago system is prohibited during the sturgeon spearing season.

FISHING EQUIPMENT OR GEAR

It is unlawful to possess a fishing pole, hook and line angling equipment or other similar devices that could be used to catch fish in an ice fishing tent, shanty or ice fishing enclosure with ice holes larger than 12 inches in diameter or square.

The maximum width of a spear head is restricted to 18 inches or less and tines can only be arranged in a single straight line.

LIGHTS, UNDERWATER CAMERAS, DEPTH LOCATORS

The use of artificial lights as an aid during spearing is prohibited during sturgeon spearing. This prohibition begins 48 hours prior to the season opener and runs the duration of the season. Underwater cameras and other forms of technology may be used, but any lights on the camera must be disabled (turned off, taped over or non-illuminating).

Cutting into the ice on Lake Winnebago.

Photo courtesy of the Muche family

ICE HOLE RESTRICTIONS

No person may cut, use or maintain an ice hole larger than 12 inches in diameter or square for the taking of fish in any manner through the ice except spearing sturgeon on the Winnebago system during the open season. The total area of a sturgeon spearing hole or combination of holes may not exceed a total of 48 square feet, measured at the surface of the ice. Ice holes larger than 12 inches cut, used or maintained for spearing may not be covered by a shelter, shanty or similar device, except during the period from 48 hours before and continuing through the open sturgeon spearing season.

ICE HOLE MARKING

Sturgeon spearing ice holes must be marked with at least 2 strips of wood that extend a minimum of 3 feet above the ice. The wood strips must not exceed 1.5 inches in width and .25 inches in thickness (wood lathe meets the requirement).

When you first set your shanty, cut a hole and freeze the lathe into the ice for better marking of sturgeon holes. Lathe markers stuck in snow banks are NOT adequate because the lathe no longer marks holes when warm weather conditions melt snow.

ICE SHANTIES AND SHELTERS

The door of any occupied shanty/shelter shall be such that the door can be readily opened from the outside. All shanties/shelters must have the name and residential address or DNR customer ID number of the person owning or using the shanty. The name and address or DNR customer ID number must be painted or otherwise affixed on the outside with a minimum of 1" lettering. All shanties/shelters must be completely removed from the ice (for all inland waters south of Hwy 64) by the first Sunday following March 1.

LITTER

It is illegal to place or deposit any materials (including fish, fish parts or other biodegradables) on the ice or lake bed that cannot be retrieved. Any material used in a sturgeon spearing hole must be removed by the sturgeon spearer when the hole is abandoned or if requested by a warden. Any material that is left on or frozen in the ice or waters is the responsibility of the person who left the material (including tar paper, wood, cardboard or any other litter used adjacent to shanties).

TRANSPORTATION

It is unlawful for any person to transport an unregistered sturgeon in or on any motor driven vehicle unless the sturgeon is openly exposed. "Openly exposed" means open to view by a person in a passing vehicle.



William Thern harvested this 80 inch, 142.3 lb sturgeon during the 2020 season.

Photo courtesy of the DNR



Ice shanties on Lake Winnebago.

Photo courtesy of Bob Rashid

It is illegal to possess an unregistered sturgeon speared from Lake Winnebago outside the highway boundary area delineated as follows: from the intersection of highways 10 and 114 in Menasha, east on Highway 114 to Highway 55; south on Highway 55 to U.S. Highway 151; south on U.S. Highway 151 to Winnebago Drive in Fond du Lac; west on Winnebago Drive to Scott Street; west on Scott Street to Highway 45; north on Highway 45 to Main Street in Oshkosh; north on Main Street to Waugoo Avenue; east on Waugoo Avenue to Bowen Street; north on Bowen Street to County Highway A; north on County Highway A to Highway 114 in Neenah; east on Highway 114 to the intersection of Highways 10 and 114 in Menasha.

It is illegal to possess an unregistered sturgeon speared from Lakes Butte des Morts, Winneconne or Poygan outside the highway boundary area delineated as follows: from the intersection of Highways 45 and 21 in Oshkosh west on Highway 21 to Highway 116; north on Highway 116 to County Highway B; west on County Highway B to County Highway D; west on County Highway D to Highway 49; north on Highway 49 to County Highway H; east on county Highway H to Highway 110; east on Highway 110 to County Highway II; south on County Highway II to County Highway M; south on County Highway M to Highway 116; east on Highway 116 to Highway 45; south on Highway 45 to Highway 21.

STURGEON EGGS AND MEAT

It is illegal to sell, purchase, barter or trade sturgeon eggs/roe/caviar/meat at any time.

Bartering is the exchange of goods or services for other goods or services without using money. This also means it is illegal to give, keep or accept any portion of lake sturgeon, including but not limited to eggs/roe/caviar/meat, as payment.

GUIDING

No person may engage or be employed for any compensation or reward to guide, direct or assist any other person in sturgeon spearing/fishing unless the person is issued a guide license by the DNR.

Guiding includes receiving compensation of any kind (monetary, gratuity, physical items, etc.) for services rendered. Some examples of guiding would include providing a shanty with the ice hole already cut, placing out bait or decoys, providing/renting equipment or other activities that assist the angler/spearer to locate, attract and/or harvest fish. Please contact your local [Conservation Warden](#) with any questions.

STURGEON GUARD

Each spring, volunteers have an opportunity to educate the public about sturgeon while protecting the fish from poaching and harassment at their spawning sites on the Wolf, Embarrass and Little Wolf rivers.

Sturgeon are very susceptible to illegal harvest and harassment when they are spawning along the river's rocky shorelines. Sturgeon Guard volunteers monitor the vulnerable fish throughout the spawning season. The program is coordinated and directed by DNR law enforcement staff and funded by Sturgeon for Tomorrow and sturgeon spearing license fees.

More information about the 2021 Sturgeon Guard program is available on the DNR website at <https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Fishing/sturgeon/SturgeonGuard.html>. Online registration will begin in early March. Interested volunteers also may register by contacting the DNR call center at 1-888-936-7463 or contacting the Sturgeon Guard coordinator at 920-420-1140.

STURGEON GUARD



Every spring, lake sturgeon spawn close to shore where they are vulnerable to poaching.

Photo courtesy of Bob Rashid