MDNR Fisheries Chief Randy Claramunt and MDNR Wildlife Chief Sarah Thompson

 It was nice to get a copy of the proposed license increase document. We appreciate that several of our concerns made it onto the list of items to be addressed with the license increase. As we have stated in the past, the Upper Peninsula Sportsmen’s Alliance (UPSA) needs to see deliverables before we can support any license fee increase. Listed below are our concerns and recommendations to insure a more equitable playing field for residents of the Upper Peninsula.

**UPSA understands all costs have increased and there maybe a need to have an increase to some extent, but we have been left out in the past and now we need to see results.**

After reviewing the license fee increases, it looks like you are putting the major cost on the backs of the seniors. UPSA understand the law stated that the General Fund should re-imburse the DNR for the difference between the regular price and the reduced senior license. This is an issue between departments, the Treasurer, Governor and other departments. The Departments/Branches of Government should be able to work this out at the state level. The License holder should not have to shoulder the cost for the lack of Government following the law creating the Senior Status.

1. Increased staffing – Although we would all like to see increased staffing levels. The U.P. has seen our fisheries staffing levels significantly reduced lower than the rest of the state. The Baraga office has one biologist. The technicians are spread thin, they are on a roving crew, they need to pull them in from all locations to complete a lake survey. They spend way too much time of their day just traveling. It is hard to get work done if you spend half your day getting to and from the lakes. We need to see the same staffing levels for the U.P. as throughout the other management units. It does us little good to see increased license fees and all the jobs going down state. The U.P has 4300 inland Lakes and a large part of the Great Lakes Shoreline, these require a greater amount of manpower to properly manage, than is currently being set forth. Adequate staffing levels for the U.P. is a must.
2. Fish Production Increases
3. Increase walleye production – This is a broad subject with hardly any well-defined deliverables. Bringing some ponds back into production does not quantify as to where the ponds are located, the anticipated increase on fingerlings, or where the fingerlings will be stocked. Although it is nice to see an increase in fall fingerling production, spring fingerlings are needed to provide stocking for most of the DNR’s effort. Fall fingerlings are cost prohibitive in most cases and should only be used as a last resort if other methods fail to restore walleyes.

In the upper Peninsula the Inland walleye fishery has been grossly mis-managed. It had almost all its stocking diverted to Lake Michigan for several years. This was done supposedly for a management study. Since then, stocking has been restored to some inland lakes but at a much lower stocking level. This has greatly hurt the inland fishery. All indications lead us to believe, the DNR can no longer rear spring fingering as was done in the past, or they just want to abandon the once popular inland walleye fishery of the U.P.

 The DNR fisheries needs to increase spring walleye fingerling production for the inland waters of the Upper Peninsula. An increase in stocking is needed restore the U.P. inland lakes walleye fishery to its former self and return the U.P to the fishing destination it once was.

1. Grayling has always been a passion for many fisheries biologist and could be a nice addition to Michigan, but at what cost? We understand from the past that we have tried and failed. We now are in the middle of another experiment. How much of our resource will we continue to commit to this program including time, personnel and hatchery space?
2. Many local clubs have raised walleye in the past. Many of the clubs have restrictions on the money spent be spent locally and would require the walleye raised be placed in County funding was from. In the past, the DNR did not have enough to fill their “other lake” prescriptions and took the walleye to “other lakes.” This is the reason to engage Wisconsin to stock boundary waters. See the news article that follows <https://www.ironmountaindailynews.com/news/local-news/2023/10/bringing-walleye-back-to-area/> The increase proposed in advanced fall fingerlings is insignificant. Following is a quote from a WUPCAC member “2. Fish production increases.  Getting more ponds in operation for fish rearing is a great benefit and outcome! I think we can all support that.  However, I am caution in thinking that a 100% increase in fall fingerlings would be a listed benefit/outcome.  Looking at the 2024 walleye stocking data for MDNR (Darren if I am off, on my numbers, please correct me), about 17,000 fall fingerlings were stocked statewide, where about 9,500 came from direct State plants.  *In my opinion,*  going from 9,500 to 19,000 or 17,000 to 34,000 doesn't seem that noteworthy in the proposed increase summary as written and is pretty modest compared to current levels that surrounding states are stocking fall fingerlings.  I would suggest outcomes include what total production may look like with putting more ponds in production.  E.g. For every pond we can put back into production may lead to a XX% increase in stocking numbers etc....”
3. In looking to our neighbors MN and WI on the same latitude, many of the same lake structures and about the same weather, folks look to them for walleye, northern pike and musky. Our resource use to compete for the fishing tourist dollar.
4. UPSA has present at meetings between Wildlife and FRD staff, UP Habitat Workgroup, WUPCAC, UP CWD Task Force and DMI (Deer Management Initive). Working for several years with UP wildlife and FRD to work on whitetail deer habitat. UPSA has challenged the treatment on several parcels to protect wildlife. The more wildlife habitat we cut is the less is available to sustain wildlife which is an important part of our landscape. UPSA believes more emphasis has to be given to wildlife versus profit from treatment.

UPSA understands that planting a tree is like planting a garden. There is a time that the tree has to be harvested. We also understand if we do not manage the forest properly, wildlife will suffer. At worst God will manage the forest, as he does out west, but he uses a scorched earth policy.

As I worked with the DMI, John Ozoga, retired Whitetail Deer Researcher at Cousineau made the statement that after 70 years of deer management we have less deer now than when he started with the DNR. We have estimates by 2 other past UP Wildlife Supervisors that we have less deer now than we had since the timber cuts in the early 1900’s.

We the sportsmen of the UP are exasperated.

We are privileged to live in a water resource rich environment. Not all folks live close enough or can afford the equipment to fish the Great Lakes.

We appreciated the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed license increase. Please contact us to help resolve any clarifications, issues, or concerns. We hope these are issues are just in need of more details and we can all move forward to help improve fishing for the men and women of Michigan.

Your Partner’s in Conservation

David Johnson/ President Upper Peninsula Sportsmen Alliance