



IDAHO FISH AND GAME; ATTACHMENT B

May 2025 Commission Meeting

Agenda Item No.: 5/B

Agenda Item: Attachment B: 2025 – 2027 Spearfishing

Seasons & Limits Proposals, Staff Recommendations

Bureau Chief Approval: LH

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2025 – 2027 Spearfishing Seasons and Limits Proposals and Staff Recommendations

Panhandle Region Spearfishing Proposals

1. Allow spearfishing for Walleye (*Seasons/rules pages 15*)

Proposal: Modify the General Fishing Season in the Panhandle Region to allow spearfishing for Walleye in waters open to fishing.

Walleye – Harvest is encouraged. No bag, length, or possession limits, spearfishing allowed.

Rationale: Walleye are classified as incompatible in the Fisheries Management Plan, in all waters where they occur in the Panhandle Region, because they pose a threat to native fish conservation and sustaining popular fisheries. Walleye are currently established in Lake Pend Oreille, as well as the Clark Fork and Pend Oreille rivers. The Department conducts netting to suppress Walleye and incentivizes angling to keep the population at low abundance. There are no bag, length, or possession limits on Walleye in the Panhandle Region. Allowing spearfishing for Walleye addresses the public request and adds another method of harvest to help maximize mortality.

Total web survey responses: 232, Support = 185 (80%), Do not support = 47 (20%)

Online respondents also provided 83 additional written comments. Of the 47 comments in opposition, 9 cited their desire to manage in favor of walleye, 4 expressed that spearfishing is unsportsmanlike, 4 were concerned about conflict with traditional anglers, and 2 thought it would cause safety issues.

Staff recommendation: Adopt as proposed, effective July 1, 2025.

2. Allow spearfishing for Lake Trout (*Seasons/rules pages 16-17*)

Proposal: Modify the special rules in Lake Pend Oreille and Upper Priest Lake to allow spearfishing for Lake Trout.



Panhandle Region Spearfishing Proposals (continued)

Lake Pend Oreille:

- Lake Trout – Harvest is encouraged. No bag, length, or possession limits, spearfishing allowed.

Upper Priest Lake:

- Lake Trout – Harvest is encouraged. No bag, length, or possession limits, spearfishing allowed.

Rationale: In Lake Pend Oreille and Upper Priest Lake, Lake Trout are classified as incompatible in the Fisheries Management Plan. This species poses a threat to native fish conservation and sustaining popular fisheries. The Department conducts netting to suppress Lake Trout in Lake Pend Oreille and Upper Priest Lake and incentivizes angler harvest in Lake Pend Oreille to keep these populations at low abundance. There are no bag, length, or possession limits on this species in these waters. Allowing spearfishing for Northern Pike would provide opportunities for spearfishers who want to harvest Lake Trout and adds another method of harvest to maximize mortality on this species.

Total web survey responses: 232, Support = 185 (80%), Do not support = 47 (20%)

Online respondents also provided 66 additional written comments. Of the 24 comments in opposition, 4 expressed that spearfishing is unsportsmanlike, 4 were concerned about misidentification with Bull Trout, 2 thought spearfishing would cause conflict with traditional anglers, 2 would prefer to manage in favor of Lake Trout, and 2 thought spearfishing would be ineffective.

Staff recommendation: Adopt as proposed, effective July 1, 2025.

3. Allow spearfishing for Northern Pike *(Seasons/rules pages 16-17)*

Proposal: Modify the special rules in Lake Pend Oreille, Clark Fork River, Pend Oreille River, and Pack River and Tributaries to allow spearfishing for Northern Pike.

Clark Fork River:

- Northern Pike – Harvest is encouraged. Open all year. No bag, length, or possession limits, spearfishing allowed.

Lake Pend Oreille:



IDAHO FISH AND GAME; ATTACHMENT B

- Northern Pike – Harvest is encouraged. Open all year. No bag, length, or possession limits, spearfishing allowed.

Pack River and Tributaries:

- Northern Pike – Harvest is encouraged. Open all year. No bag, length, or possession limits, spearfishing allowed.

Panhandle Region Spearfishing Proposals (continued)

Pend Oreille River:

- Northern Pike – Harvest is encouraged. Open all year. No bag, length, or possession limits, spearfishing allowed.

Rationale: In Lake Pend Oreille and above-listed and connected waters, Northern Pike are listed as incompatible in the Fisheries Management Plan. This species poses a threat to native fish conservation and to sustaining popular fisheries. The Department is removing Northern Pike caught during Lake Trout and Walleye suppression activities on Lake Pend Oreille to keep the population at low abundance. In addition, there are no bag, length, or possession limits on this species in these waters. Allowing spearfishing for Northern Pike would provide opportunities for spearfishers who want to harvest Walleye and adds another method of harvest to maximize mortality on this species.

Total web survey responses: 232, Support = 185 (80%), Do not support = 47 (20%)

Online respondents also provided 81 additional written comments. Of the 24 comments in opposition, 7 expressed that spearfishing is unsportsmanlike, 6 would prefer to manage in favor of Northern Pike, and 2 thought spearfishing would cause conflict with traditional anglers.

Staff recommendation: Adopt as proposed, effective July 1, 2025.



IDAHO FISH AND GAME; ATTACHMENT B

Clearwater Region Proposals

4. Allow spearfishing for bass in rivers/streams (Seasons/rules pages 19)

Proposal: Modify the General Fishing Season in the Clearwater Region to allow spearfishing for bass in rivers and streams that are open to fishing.

Bass (Largemouth and Smallmouth)

- In all rivers and streams, no bag, length, or possession limits, spearfishing allowed.

Rationale: Smallmouth Bass are classified as incompatible in the Fisheries Management Plan in some rivers and streams in the Clearwater Region because they prey upon native species, such as salmon and steelhead. In the Clearwater Region, there are no bag, length, or possession limits for bass in rivers and streams. The proposed season would provide new opportunities for spearfishers to harvest bass - but only in rivers and streams - and potentially increase mortality rates.

Total web survey responses: 118, Support=112 (95%) Do Not Support =6 (5%)

Online respondents provided 40 written comments. Only 2 of the people not in support provided comments. One didn't like that we would be targeting an abundant self-sustaining game species (suggesting there aren't many like this in the region), and the other was worried about conflict between spearfishermen and anglers. Most of these commentators supporting the proposal expressed excitement about a new opportunity and/or thought that efforts to remove non-native species that had the ability to influence important native species was a good thing.

Staff recommendation: Adopt as proposed, effective July 1, 2025.

5. Allow spearfishing for Walleye (Seasons/rules pages 19)

Proposal: Modify the General Fishing Season for Walleye in all waters in the Clearwater Region that are open to fishing.

Walleye

- Harvest is encouraged. No bag, length, or possession limits, spearfishing allowed.

Rationale: Walleye are classified as incompatible in the Fisheries Management Plan, in all waters where they occur in the Clearwater Region, because they prey upon important



IDAHO FISH AND GAME; ATTACHMENT B

native and non-native species. There are no bag, length, or possession limits for Walleye in the Clearwater Region. Allowing spearfishing for Walleye would provide opportunities for spearfishers who want to harvest Walleye and adds another method of harvest to maximize mortality rates.

Total web survey responses: 119, Support=116 (97%) Do Not Support=3 (3%)

Online respondents provided 38 written comments. Of those not supporting the proposal only one written comment was provided. The person liked Walleye and thought it would be a waste of time trying to reduce their numbers. Most of these commentors supporting the proposal expressed excitement about a new opportunity and/or thought that efforts to remove non-native species that had the ability to influence important native species was a good thing.

Staff recommendation: Adopt as proposed, effective July 1, 2025.



IDAHO FISH AND GAME; ATTACHMENT B

Southwest Region Proposals

6. Allow spearfishing for Walleye (Seasons/rules pages 25)

Proposal: Modify the General Fishing Season for Walleye in all waters in the Southwest Region that are open to fishing.

Walleye

- Harvest is encouraged. No bag, length, or possession limits, spearfishing allowed.

Rationale: Walleye are classified as incompatible in the Fisheries Management Plan, in all waters where they occur in the Southwest Region, because they prey upon important native and non-native species. There are no bag, length, or possession limits for Walleye in the Southwest Region. Walleye have been illegally introduced and have become established in several waters including Lake Lowell and the Snake River below Swan Falls Dam. Walleye have been caught at other locations such as Cascade, Lucky Peak, and CJ Strike reservoirs. We propose spearfishing be allowed as an additional method of harvest for walleye in all waters in the Southwest Region. Allowing spearfishing for Walleye would provide opportunities for spearfishers who want to harvest Walleye and adds another method of harvest for this species to maximize mortality rates.

Total web survey responses: 114, Support = 104 (91%), Do not support = 10 (9%)

Online respondents provided 39 written comments. Of the 6 comments opposing the walleye proposal, 3 were concerned about misidentification and harvest of other gamefish, some suggested opening fishing during the walleye spawn, while 3 comments expressed support for protecting and promoting walleye as sportfish in the region. Comments expressing support were excited about the new opportunity, and supported suppression of walleye.

Staff recommendation: Adopt as proposed, effective July 1, 2025.

7. Allow spearfishing for bass in selected waters (Seasons/rules pages 27, 29)

Proposal: Modify special rules waters bag limits for bass in the Salmon River and tributaries in the Southwest Region to allow spearfishing.

Salmon River

- No bag, length, or possession limits, spearfishing allowed.

Salmon River, Little

- Bass – No bag, length, or possession limits, spearfishing allowed.



Southwest Region Proposals (continued)

Salmon River tributaries

- Bass – No bag, length, or possession limits, spearfishing allowed.

Salmon River, South Fork and tributaries

- Bass – No bag, length, or possession limits, spearfishing allowed.

Salmon River, Middle Fork and tributaries

- Bass – No bag, length, or possession limits, spearfishing allowed.

Rationale: Smallmouth Bass are listed as incompatible in the Salmon River and tributaries because they prey upon important native and non-native species. Smallmouth Bass have no size restrictions, bag limits, or possession limits in the Salmon River and its tributaries. The proposed season would provide new opportunities for spearfishers to harvest bass in the designated rivers and streams and potentially increase mortality rates. This would also provide anglers a consistency in the Salmon River and tributaries across bordering regions in the Clearwater and Salmon regions.

Total web survey responses: 111, Support = 99 (89%), Do not support = 12 (11%)

Of the 4 comments received from anglers opposed to the bass proposal, 2 were concerned about misidentification and harvest of other gamefish, and 2 were outright opposed to spearfishing as a method of take for bass. Several anglers in support of both proposals requested that bowfishing also be allowed as method of take.

Staff recommendation: Adopt as proposed, effective July 1, 2025.

Magic Valley Region Proposals

8. Allow spearfishing for bass in Magic Reservoir (Seasons/rules pages 31)

Proposal: Modify special rules for Magic Reservoir for bass to allow spearfishing.

Magic Reservoir

- Bass – No bag, length, or possession limits, spearfishing allowed.



IDAHO FISH AND GAME; ATTACHMENT B

Rationale: Smallmouth Bass were illegally introduced to Magic Reservoir. Smallmouth Bass are classified as incompatible in the current Fish Management Plan because this water is managed primarily for trout and perch and increased predation may reduce the abundance of these preferred species. There are no bag, length, or possessions limits on bass in Magic Reservoir. The proposed season would allow spearfishing opportunities for bass in Magic Reservoir providing new opportunities for spearfishers to harvest bass and potentially increase mortality rates.

Total web survey responses: 61, Support = 59 (97%), Do not support = 2 (3%)

Of the comments received from anglers, three anglers were interested in allowing bowfishing opportunity in addition to the spearfishing proposal and the remaining comments were very much in favor of the proposal, identifying reasons as to why this was a great idea. One comment suggested allowing spearfishing for Smallmouth Bass throughout the entire Snake River.

Staff recommendation: Adopt as proposed, effective July 1, 2025.



IDAHO FISH AND GAME; ATTACHMENT B

Southeast Region Proposals

9. Allow spearfishing for bass in Blackfoot Reservoir (Seasons/rules pages 38)

Proposal: Modify special rules for Blackfoot Reservoir to allow spearfishing for bass.

Blackfoot Reservoir

- Bass – No bag, length, or possession limits, spearfishing allowed.

Rationale: Smallmouth Bass were illegally introduced to Blackfoot Reservoir. They are classified as incompatible in the current Fish Management Plan because they represent a source of predation to stocked Rainbow Trout and native Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout. Recovering the native Yellowstone Cutthroat population is a priority in the drainage. Creel surveys at Blackfoot Reservoir in 2022 estimated that the majority of anglers were targeting trout. There are no bag, length, or possessions limits for bass in Blackfoot Reservoir. The proposed season would allow spearfishing opportunities for bass in Blackfoot Reservoir providing new opportunities for spearfishers to harvest bass and potentially increase mortality rates.

Total web survey responses: 76, Support = 64 (84%); Do not support = 12 (16%)

2 phone calls (both not supportive)

1 in-person meeting with the Southeast Idaho Bass Club (not supportive)

Online comments included 16 written comments. Written comments from anglers who did not support this proposal ranged widely, but generally seemed to identify a preference for bass and other warmwater opportunities, and expressed concern that spearfishing would negatively affect the bass fishing quality. They also expressed a negative bias for native fish conservation and trout management.

Staff recommendation: Adopt as proposed, effective July 1, 2025.



Upper Snake Region Proposals

10. Allow spearfishing for Walleye in Ririe Reservoir (Seasons/rules pages 44)

Proposal: Establish a special rule for Walleye specifically in Ririe Reservoir to allow spearfishing, with no bag, length, or possession limits.

Ririe Reservoir

- Walleye – Harvest is encouraged. No bag, length, or possession limits, spearfishing allowed.

Rationale: Walleye were illegally introduced to Ririe Reservoir. Walleye are classified as incompatible in the Fisheries Management Plan because they are a threat to the trout and kokanee populations. There are no bag, length or possession limits on Walleye in the Upper Snake Region. The proposed season would add another method of harvest to help maximize mortality and would promote consistency in management of incompatible walleye populations across regions.

Total web survey responses: 87, Support = 76 (87%); Do not support = 11 (13%)

Website respondents included 33 written comments. Most of these written comments were provided by people who were in favor of spearfishing opportunity for Walleye in Ririe Reservoir and expanded spearfishing opportunity in general.

The six comments that were not in support of the proposal had a theme of angler preference for Walleye, with one stating the likelihood of taking Walleye with spearfishing techniques in Ririe Reservoir is low.

Staff recommendation: Adopt as proposed, effective July 1, 2025.





IDAHO FISH AND GAME; ATTACHMENT B

Salmon Region Proposals

11. Allow spearfishing for bass in rivers and streams (Seasons/rules pages 47)

Proposal: In the Salmon Region, modify general seasons and bag limits to allow spearfishing for bass in rivers and streams.

Bass (*Largemouth and Smallmouth*)

- No bag, length, or possession limits, spearfishing allowed in rivers and streams.

Rationale: Smallmouth Bass are classified as incompatible in the Fisheries Management Plan for most rivers and streams in the Salmon Region as they are known to prey upon important native species, such as juvenile salmon. There are no bag, length, or possession limits for bass in this region. The proposed season would provide new opportunities for spearfishers to harvest bass in the designated rivers and streams and potentially increase mortality rates. This would also provide anglers consistency across the Salmon River and tributaries and across bordering regions in the Clearwater and Southwest regions.

Total web survey responses: 65, Support = 62 (95%), Do not support = (5%)

Online respondents included 16 additional written comments. One of the comments was not supportive and suggested this proposal would set a bad precedent.

Staff recommendation: Adopt as proposed, effective July 1, 2025.

12. Allow spearfishing for Walleye (Seasons/rules pages 47)

Proposal: In the Salmon Region, modify the general fishing season to allow spearfishing for Walleye in all waters open to fishing.

Walleye

- Harvest is encouraged. No bag, length, or possession limits, spearfishing allowed.

Rationale: Walleye have not been documented in the Salmon Region yet, but have been increasing in abundance and spreading upstream within the portions of the Salmon River located in the Clearwater Region. Allowing spearfishing on Walleye will increase harvest opportunities on this incompatible species and provide another method of detection, if and when they colonize this portion of the Salmon River or tributaries.

Total web survey responses: 65, Support = 62 (95%), Do not support = 3 (5%)



IDAHO FISH AND GAME; ATTACHMENT B

Online respondents also included an additional 13 written comments, all of which were supportive of the proposal.

Staff recommendation: Adopt as proposed, effective July 1, 2025.