

Attachment A. Recommended 2019 – 2021 Fishing Seasons/Bag Limit Changes for Public Review

The Fisheries Bureau and field staff have evaluated internal and public input (see scoping summary, Attachment B) and recommend the following fishing seasons and bag limit change proposals to be presented for additional public review and comment. Staff will develop final fishing seasons and bag limit proposals for Commission review and approval in November, 2018.

Statewide

1. Proposal: Set Free-Fishing-Day – Set the dates for 2019, 2020, and 2021. This event is always the Saturday of the second full weekend in June (June 8, 2019; June 13, 2020; and June 12, 2021).

Implications: This would set one day of the year where anglers could fish without a fishing license provided they follow bag limits and other restriction set by the Commission. Individuals with their fishing privileges revoked by a court of law are not eligible to participate in Free Fishing Day.

Rationale: This is an annual event used to promote the sport of fishing in Idaho and throughout the United States. The Department will sponsor events promoting the sport of fishing and youth participation.

Panhandle Region

1. Proposal: Change the Burbot limit to 6 fish

Rationale: Hatchery supplementation has allowed for a dramatic increase in burbot abundance in the Kootenai River and tributaries. Research supports that a harvestable surplus exists and that re-opening a burbot fishery is possible. A six fish limit is not anticipated to result in overexploitation. Additionally, burbot stocking in Bonner Lake has occurred over the past several years. Surveys indicate good survival and growth of stocked burbot and anglers have been catching them incidentally. Having a regional bag limit of six burbot will allow for harvest in the mainstem Kootenai River, tributaries to the Kootenai River, and Bonner Lake. This results in increased harvest opportunity in multiple waters without any added Special Rules.

2. Proposal: Add a Clark Fork River boundary description to identify to anglers where the Clark Fork River ends and where Lake Pend Oreille begins. Also, remove the language that states “except for posted area adjacent to the Cabinet Gorge Hatchery.”

Change language to state:

Clark Fork River

Section: Entire river upstream of a straight line extending from the Denton Slough boat ramp to the county boat dock

Rationale: The Boundary between Lake Pend Oreille and Clark Fork River is not currently defined, yet fishing regulations are different between Lake Pend Oreille and the Clark Fork. Fishing activity has increased recently in the Clark Fork delta and anglers have asked where the boundary falls. This proposal will benefit both the Department and the public.

3. Proposal: Remove some of the listed waters for Coeur d’Alene Lake tributaries in the Special Rule Waters Section

Remove “except Benewah and Lake Creeks” from the described open waters. It will now read: **Coeur d’Alene Lake** (includes Benewah and Chatcolet lakes, Coeur d’ Alene River “Chain Lakes” and all tributaries to Coeur d’Alene Lake)

Rationale: Benewah Creek is entirely tribal jurisdiction, so does not need to be included. Also, Lake Creek is almost entirely tribal jurisdiction with only a small portion of headwaters in state jurisdiction. Removing language about Lake Creek results in the small state portion of the stream falling under the special rule for Coeur d’Alene Lake tributaries (no harvest of cutthroat trout). Benewah Creek and Lake Creek would be removed from the Special Rules waters. This simplifies the rules and ensures conservation of native cutthroat trout in state waters.

4. Proposal: Provide a Rainbow Trout catch-and-release fishery from December 1 through the Friday before Memorial Day Weekend on Deep Creek and tributaries

Currently the fishery is closed from December 1 through the Friday before Memorial Day weekend. For the rest of the year the fishery is managed under the General Fishing Season for the Panhandle Region (Trout limit is 6, all species combined). We propose to change the Special Rule Water to read as follows:

Deep Creek and Tributaries

- Rainbow Trout closed to harvest December 1 through Friday before Memorial Day weekend

Rationale: Deep Creek is currently closed to fishing during this time period. We propose to provide year-round fishing on Deep Creek with rainbow trout restricted to catch-and-release only from Dec 1 to the Friday before Memorial weekend. Originally, the fishing closure was established to protect migratory rainbow trout during spawning. Additionally, we allow catch-and-release angling in Lake Pend Oreille tributaries for adfluvial rainbow trout. While this has caused concern among some anglers, we’ve maintained that allowing a winter/spring catch-and-release season is not a biological problem. Applying similar rules to Deep Creek provides a consistent message to anglers. Finally, burbot occupy Deep Creek and the current rule would not allow anglers to fish for them here during winter when Burbot may be most available. The proposed opening of a burbot fishery in the Kootenai River and tributaries is an added reason to open Deep Creek to year-round fishing.

5. Proposal: Remove bag and possession limits on Lake Trout and remove bait and barbless hook restrictions on Upper Priest Lake and tributaries

Currently, Upper Priest Lake has regulations allowing the harvest of 6 Lake Trout and anglers are prohibited from using bait and must use barbless hooks. The proposed regulation change will read as follows:

Upper Priest Lake and tributaries

- Trout limit is 6, no harvest of cutthroat trout
- No limit on Lake Trout
- Kokanee limit is 6

Rationale: The current rule precludes using bait when fishing in Upper Priest Lake for species like kokanee and lake trout. Fishing for both of these species is aided by using bait and is allowed in the main Priest Lake. Additionally, we are encouraging anglers to harvest lake trout to benefit native species management goals. Changing this rule would allow bait and barbed hooks to be used in the Upper Priest River and tributaries to the lake; however, tributary fishing pressure is light and biological impacts are not anticipated. Allowing unlimited Lake Trout harvest by anglers is consistent with the Lake trout suppression netting that occurs annually on Upper Priest Lake to benefit native species.

Clearwater Region

1. Proposal: Modify the General Fishing Season bag limits for Largemouth and Smallmouth Bass to remove bag, size and possession limits on bass in rivers and streams.

Currently the Clearwater Region General daily bag limit on Bass is 6 fish, both species combined. The regulations would now read:

Bass (largemouth and smallmouth)

- In rivers and streams, no bag, size or possession limits
- In lakes and reservoirs, limit is 6, both species combined

Rationale: Anglers support removing the limits on Smallmouth Bass in the Snake River. In addition, one of the most common general comments staff received was to apply this rule (or something similar) in all anadromous waters. In the Clearwater Region, all flowing waters where Smallmouth Bass occur are anadromous except the North Fork Clearwater River upstream of Dworshak Reservoir. Smallmouth Bass are starting to expand up the North Fork Clearwater River based on recent snorkel surveys, and there is a concern that they could influence Cutthroat Trout. We would propose to manage SMB in these systems as high yield (like panfish) rather than trying to protect or improve size structure.

2. Proposal: Change Fish Lake and Lake Creek (Cedars Area) fishing regulations so that General Fishing Season for the Clearwater daily bag limits apply. Remove Lake Creek from the Special Rule Waters.

In both Fish Lake and Lake Creek, fishing is closed from December 1 through July 31. We propose opening these fisheries year-round under the General Fishing Season. Fish Lake (Cedars Area) would still be listed in the Special Rule Waters to maintain the use of no motors. Lake Creek would be removed from the Special Rule Waters for the Clearwater Region.

Rationale: Recent surveys in Fish Lake, a 113 acres high mountain lake in the upper North Fork Clearwater River drainage, found thriving Cutthroat Trout and Bull Trout populations. Annual fishing mortality was estimated to be less than 5%, indicating angler harvest has little influence on this fish population. Current rules do not allow fishing in this lake or its tributary (Lake Creek) until August 1. These rules were created to protect fish that will often spawn as late as July. However, due to difficult access and fishing conditions (snow and blow down) during the spawning period, IDFG no longer believes this closure is necessary to maintain this fishery.

Anglers support removing the closures on Fish Lake and its tributaries and in Lake Creek. These are the only waterbodies in the Region where no fishing is allowed during a portion of the year (except around hatcheries).

3. Proposal: Eliminate the rule disallowing boats on Mann Lake from October 1 through December 31.

The current regulation states: "October 1 through December 31 - No boats allowed" and this restriction would be removed.

Rationale: Mann Lake is the only lowland lake in the Clearwater Region that has a boat closure. This closure occurs from Oct 1 to Dec 31 and was implemented to protect migrating waterfowl. However, biologists believe this closure is not necessary due to the presence of multiple waterbodies (Clearwater River, Snake River, Lower Granite Pool, Levee Ponds) in the area that migrating waterfowl can also use. Anglers at public meetings support (73%) removing the boating closure on Mann Lake.

4. Proposal: Reduce the Tiger Trout limit and apply a minimum length limit in Deer Creek Reservoir.

Deer Creek Reservoir is managed under the General Fishing Season for the Clearwater Region and the daily bag limit is 6 trout, all species combined. We propose to add Deer Creek Reservoir to Special Rule Waters and propose the following language:

Deer Creek Reservoir

Trout limit is 6, only 2 may be Tiger Trout, no Tiger Trout under 14 inches

Rationale: Tiger Trout were recently stocked into Deer Creek Reservoir, a 75 acres reservoir near Pierce, Idaho. The daily limit for Tiger Trout is 6 fish (general trout rules). Due to the popularity of this new fishery, annual fishing mortality will likely exceed 40%, which will reduce the number of Tiger Trout that reach quality sizes (>16 inches). Based on recent exploitation studies, staff believe restricting harvest of smaller Tiger Trout will allow more of them to reach quality sizes. Additionally, by restricting Tiger Trout harvest we can increase predation on Golden Shiners.

Southwest Region – McCall

1. Proposal: Remove bass bag, size and possession limits on the Salmon River and all Salmon River tributaries

Currently, bass in the Salmon River drainage (including all tributaries) have a daily bag limit of 6 fish (Bass limit is 6, any size may be kept). We propose to add the following language under Salmon River in the Special Rule Waters section:

Salmon River

No bag, size or possession limits on bass

Rationale: Similar to Clearwater Region, Smallmouth Bass are expanding their distribution in anadromous waters of the Salmon River basin. Managing bass as high yield fisheries in these locations is consistent with conservation goals for native trout and salmon. While inclusion of this rule for the Salmon River basin was not scoped during the public input process, staff believe

that this proposal will not affect avid bass anglers and will be supported during the public review and comment period.

Southwest Region – Nampa

1. Proposal: Remove Indian Creek Reservoir from Special Rule Waters and manage under the General Fishing Season for the Southwest Region.

Currently Indian Creek Reservoir is managed as a catch-and-release bass fishery January 1-June 30 and has a bass limit of 2 fish July 1-December 31 with a slot size restriction of no bass between 12 and 16 inches. We propose to remove the special rules and apply the Southwest Region general bass limit (6 bass, none under 12 inches)

Rationale: For nearly the last 20 years this reservoir rarely has sufficient water for consecutive years to allow bass growth into the slot (12-16 inches); therefore, anglers would be better served by the general limit (6 bass, none under 12"). Furthermore, it is likely that the region is going to cease translocating fish into this reservoir unless water levels improve.

2. Proposal: Change all waters within the Wilson Springs Ponds access area to have the same daily bag limits for trout and remove the catch-and-release, no-bait, and barbless hook requirements from The Trophy Pond.

Change to:

Wilson Spring Ponds (Section: All waters within the Wilson Springs Access area, Including Wilson Drain)

- Trout limit is 2

Rationale: Applying a trophy trout regulation in one of the four ponds in the Wilson Springs Access area has never worked well due to the proximity to other waters with different regulations and the unwillingness or inability of anglers to know which water they are fishing. Focused enforcement efforts have not improved compliance to the degree necessary to maintain a quality or trophy trout population. This proposal would simplify the management of the Wilson Ponds Access area and provide one additional water for harvest opportunity in a heavily used community pond complex.

3. Proposal: Reduce kokanee limits on Deadwood Reservoir from 25 to 15 per day.

Rationale: Deadwood Reservoir has served as the state's primary source of early-run kokanee eggs for many years. Staff has observed that when kokanee numbers in Deadwood are depressed, kokanee sizes and angler interest increase substantially. Increased fishing effort in years when kokanee abundance is already low may reduce numbers of adults ascending the river and available for egg collection. This occurred during 2016 and staff believes it is likely to occur in 2018. Reducing bag limits would help ensure egg take in years when kokanee abundance is low. High demand for kokanee fingerlings for many statewide waters should lead us to be relatively conservative on kokanee harvest at Deadwood. This regulation may not be ideal during all years; however, staff believes maximizing egg take in low escapement years is more important than maximizing harvest in all years.

4. Proposal: Reduce bag and possession limits on steelhead in the Boise River

Segregate the Boise River out as its own waterbody within the Steelhead and Salmon Rules and Information section (page 39-43) and change language to read:

Boise River from its mouth upstream to Barber Dam.

Bag limit is 2 per day and 6 in possession.

Rationale: Generally, approximately 300-1,000 steelhead are transported from Hells Canyon to the Boise River annually. Very high levels of effort are generated, and harvest of available fish is relatively rapid. Due to these factors, a reduced bag would serve to spread harvest to more anglers and extend the number of days with decent catch rates.

Magic Valley Region

1. Proposal: Change the General Rules on bass in the Big Wood River to a bass limit of 6 and any size may be kept

Currently, bass in the Big Wood River below Magic Reservoir are managed under the Magic Valley Region general rules (6 bass, none under 12 inches). New language would be:

Big Wood River

Section: From Richfield Canal Diversion upstream to Magic Dam

- Bass limit is 6, any size may be kept

Rationale: Magic Reservoir and the tailwater downstream to the Richfield diversion are managed primarily for trout. Smallmouth bass first appeared in Magic Reservoir over 20 years ago, the result of an unauthorized introduction. Bass limits in the reservoir are 6 fish of any size. Bass are now occurring more frequently in the tailwater reach downstream to the Richfield diversion, where they fall under the regional general rules (6 bass, none under 12 inches). This has resulted in some confusion (and warnings), and there is no need to afford protection to this bass population. Relatively few anglers would be impacted, and the rule would be consistent with the reservoir fishery directly upstream.

2. Proposal: Remove restrictive trout limit and bait restrictions on the 1.5 mile section of Billingsley Creek from the old railroad grade upstream to Tupper Grade

Currently, this section of Billingsley Creek is managed with a 2 trout limit, none less than 20 inches and no bait allowed. The proposal would place this section of Billingsley Creek under general bag limits for trout in the Magic Valley Region (6 fish, no size restrictions; only 2 of the 6 trout can be cutthroat in rivers and streams).

Rationale: This regulation was implemented over 10 years ago when the owners operating the private trout hatchery near Tupper Grade had extensive entrainment from their facility. In addition, public access was available when the property was privately owned, and after Idaho State Parks took ownership. Entrained Brown and Rainbow trout were concentrated in one location near the hatchery outlet. These fish grew to large sizes and provided a trophy trout fishing opportunity. Since then, public access has been restricted and hatchery supplementation has ceased in response to the lost public access. Based on current circumstances, having trophy trout regulations in place is confusing to anglers who attempt to fish this reach, but can't gain

access. We propose to remove trophy trout regulations and revert to general rules in this reach until public access can be improved and hatchery supplementation restored.

3. Proposal: Lengthen the catch-and-release season on three sections of Silver Creek (from Highway 93 upstream to the road right-of-way fence on the west side of Kilpatrick Bridge) to December 1 through March 31. The proposed fishing closure for all sections would be April 1 through the Friday before Memorial Day Weekend.

Currently, two of these sections of Silver Creek (below hwy 20) have a catch-and-release season from December 1 through the last day of February and are closed to fishing from March 1 through the Friday before Memorial Day weekend. The third (hwy 20 upstream to Kilpatrick) is currently closed to fishing December 1 through the Friday before Memorial Day weekend.

This proposed season change would occur on the following sections of Silver Creek:

Section: From Highway 93 upstream to the County Road Bridge north of Picabo;

- December 1 through March 31 – trout limit is 0, catch-and-release
- April 1 through Friday before Memorial Day weekend – closed to fishing
- Saturday of Memorial Day weekend through November 30 – trout limit is 6

Section: From the County Road Bridge north of Picabo upstream to the bridge near milepost 187.2 on Highway 20 west of Picabo;

- December 1 through March 31 – trout limit is 0, catch-and-release
- April 1 through Friday before Memorial Day weekend – closed to fishing
- Saturday of Memorial Day weekend through November 30 – trout limit is 2, none between 12 and 16 inches

Section: From the bridge near milepost 187.2 on Highway 20 west of Picabo upstream to the road right-of-way fence on the west side of Kilpatrick Bridge

- No fishing from rafts or boats; float tubes are allowed
- April 1 through Friday before Memorial Day weekend – closed to fishing
- Saturday of Memorial Day weekend through March 31 – trout limit is 0, catch-and-release, fly fishing only, no bait allowed, one barbless hook per fly.

Rationale: Some anglers requested an extension to the winter catch and release season on Silver Creek. During public scoping, these anglers asked for additional early spring opportunity citing a March hatch that is always missed. Including the section from highway 20 upstream to Kilpatrick expands winter fishing opportunity and would standardize seasons for much of Silver Creek while still protecting trout from harvest in winter. Additionally, pelican predation impacts on Silver Creek's trout population have been a public and IDFG concern for approximately five years. IDFG has actively hazed pelicans for three years generally from late March through mid-July to disrupt pelican feeding and reduce predation impacts. Allowing more spring angling opportunity may help dissuade pelicans from using Silver Creek.

Southeast Region

1. Proposal: Change trout harvest on the Snake River from American Falls Reservoir upstream to Gem Lake Dam to a 2 trout limit.

Currently the regulations allow a daily bag limit of 6 Trout, only 2 may be cutthroat trout.

Proposed language is:

Snake River

Section: From American Falls Reservoir upstream to Gem Lake dam

- Trout limit is 2

Rationale: Reducing the bag limit on the Snake River to two trout is a proposal brought to staff by anglers during public scoping. Angler use above American Falls Reservoir has increased in the last several years. Drift boats are increasing and the access parking lots are filling to capacity during peak angling periods. Reducing the bag limit may have some impact on angling success. The limited sampling data we have suggests trout densities are lower in this reach than in the Snake River below the reservoir.

2. Proposal: Remove the existing restrictive harvest rules for bass on Weston Reservoir and manage under general fishing season rules for the Southeast Region.

The current regulations are: From January 1 through June 30 - bass limit is 0, catch-and-release. From July 1 through December 31 – bass limit is 2, none between 12 and 16 inches. The proposal is to apply the Southeast Region general rules for bass (6 bass, none under 14 inches). Weston Reservoir would still be listed under the Special Rule Waters with the regulation of “No fishing from boats or rafts, float tubes allowed.”

Rationale: The existing bass harvest rule is contributing to a declining perch fishery. The general bass rule for the Southeast Region would help restore a balance between bass and perch. Staff may also mechanically reduce bass to accelerate perch recovery.

3. Proposal: Open the bass harvest in Deep Creek Reservoir with no size, bag or possession limits.

Currently bass are managed under the General Fishing Season (bass limit is 6, none under 14 inches). The proposed language under the Special Rule Water will read as follows:

Deep Creek Reservoir

- Trout limit is 6, only 2 may be cutthroat trout
- No size, bag or possession limit on bass

Rationale: Bass have been recently found in Deep Creek Reservoir as a result of an unauthorized introduction; it is our desire to maintain bass at low levels in order to maintain the trout population.

4. Proposal: Change the daily bag limit for trout on Bannock Reservoir (Wellness Complex) to 2 trout

Current regulations allow for the harvest of 2 fish of any species. We propose to only allow the harvest of 2 trout and all other species will be managed under General Fishing regulations. We propose the following change:

Bannock Reservoir

- Trout limit is two

Rationale: Because of several unauthorized species introductions into Bannock Reservoir we want to encourage anglers to keep more than two fish of undesirable species (e.g. koi and bluegill, both which were recently introduced).

Upper Snake Region

1. Proposal: Remove Palisades Lakes (alpine lakes in the Palisades Creek Drainage) from the Special Rule Waters and manage under the General Fishing Season for the Upper Snake Region.

The existing regulation has a 2 trout limit. Under the General Fishing Season regulations Palisades Lakes will have a 6 fish limit for trout. Staff proposes that Palisades Lakes will be removed from the Special Rule Waters for the Upper Snake Region.

Rationale: Exploitation studies show that anglers harvest less than 1% of the population in these lakes, so increasing the bag limit isn't likely to increase harvest to a level of concern. Additional harvest opportunity may benefit the few anglers that choose to harvest fish in these remote lakes.

2. Proposal: Remove the size restriction on Brown Trout in the South Fork Snake River.

Currently the Brown Trout limit is 2 fish, none less than 16 inches. We propose to remove the size limit so that any size brown trout can be harvested.

Rationale: Brown trout abundance is increasing in the South Fork. The current rule is designed to allow brown trout at least one or two years of spawning before they are available for harvest. Recruitment isn't limited on the South Fork, which makes the need for a protective regulation on brown trout unnecessary. Additionally, the current harvest rule places all harvest pressure on the larger fish in the population. Allowing harvest of any size fish may increase overall harvest while reducing pressure on the larger fish.

3. Proposal: Remove the ice fishing restricted area on Ririe Reservoir

Currently, ice fishing is restricted to the area from the dam to the posted boundary about 1 mile upstream. We propose to remove this restriction and open the entire reservoir to ice fishing. Ririe Reservoir would be removed from the Special Rule Waters for the Upper Snake Region.

Rationale: This regulation was put in place as a protection measure for wintering wildlife. The fishery in Ririe Reservoir can sustain ice fishing in areas outside of the one-mile boundary. The rule is also inconsistent in that if the lake isn't frozen, anglers can boat from one end to the other

and fish the entire reservoir. Discussions with wildlife staff have suggested that if a closure is necessary to protect wintering big game, an alternate and more appropriate rule can be developed to achieve this goal without focusing on ice fishermen.

4. Proposal: Remove Swauger Lake (an alpine lake in Custer County) and Fishpole Lake (an alpine lake in Custer County) from the Special Rule waters and manage under the General Fishing Season for the Upper Snake Region.

Currently, both of these alpine lakes have a 2 trout limit with a minimum size limit of 20 inches. We propose that Swauger and Fishpole Lakes to be removed from the Special Rule Waters for the Upper Snake Region.

Rationale: These rules were put in place to grow trophy trout, and thereby offer a diverse angling experience for mountain lake anglers. After several years, population monitoring shows that the size structure of trout populations has not responded as intended, and as such, the rules are unnecessary.

Salmon Region

1. Proposal: Remove bass size, bag and possession limits under the General Fishing Season for the Salmon Region

Currently, there is a limit of 6 bass, both species combined. We propose the following language for the General Fishing Season and Daily Bag Limits for the Salmon Region:

Bass (*largemouth and smallmouth*)

- no bag, size or possession limits

Rationale: Similar to Clearwater Region, Smallmouth Bass are expanding their distribution in anadromous waters of the Salmon River basin. Managing bass as high yield fisheries in these locations is consistent with conservation goals for native trout and salmon. While inclusion of this rule for the Salmon River basin was not scoped during the public input process, staff believe that this proposal will not affect avid bass anglers and will be supported during the public review and comment period.