

Minnesota Fishing Regulations

Karissa Wehri

Winner of the 2023 Gladys Boen Scholarship

MINNESOTA FISHING REGULATIONS

Effective February 2023

Updated 2.26.2023

MN Department of Natural Resources

TRESPASS LAW

The trespass law applies to all outdoor recreation, including but not limited to: hunting, boating, fishing, trapping, hiking, and camping. When taking part in any outdoor recreation, you may not enter legally posted land or agricultural land without permission.

Landowners, lessees, or authorized managers need only post their land once a year. The signs must be placed at intervals of 1,000 feet (500 feet in wooded areas) or signs may be placed at primary corners and at access points to the property. Signs must state "No Trespassing" or similar words, in 2-inch high letters and have either the signature or name and telephone number of the landowner, lessee, or manager.

There can be civil or criminal penalties for violation of the trespass law with maximum fines up to \$3,000 and license revocation. All conservation officers and peace officers enforce trespass laws.

Before I entered the first grade, my family moved from Grand Forks, North Dakota to a farmland in rural Minnesota. We weren't actually farmers, but my parents wanted to get away from the grayness of town and live the picturesque farmhouse lifestyle--without the actual work of raising chickens or plowing the fields. And it was certainly a picturesque childhood. I have many memories of running across the overgrown fields and climbing the trees that grew alongside the river that wound through our backyard. More than anything, I remember the many times I would fish with my family, the perfect fishing spot just yards from our front door!

Our favorite spot to fish, however, was beyond the field at the limits of our vast "front yard." A stream ran in the ditch that sat parallel to our property, flowing below the hill of our mailbox and NO TRESPASSING sign, and beneath the culvert that allowed us to turn into our driveway. This stream merged into the Middle River, and this juncture marked the spot where my family and I would catch walleye, northern pike, goldeye, catfish, and the occasional bottom feeder. At the very end of the stream's conclusion were a large pile of rocks that were typically visible from the water. We could use them to walk back and forth from either side of the ditch. Sometimes fish even got caught in them, and we would search for these hostages every time we arrived to release them into the river. In honor of this feature, we designated this particular fishing spot as "The Rocks."

As a child, The Rocks was a sacred place I would visit when I felt bored, or frustrated, or generally upset. Sometimes I would cast a line. Other times I would simply sit and listen to the lapping of the stream over the rocks. If the bugs weren't too distracting, I would bring a chair and book and read there for hours, taking occasional breaks to gaze at the scenery: a large tree hung closely over the river, casting its shade over the water. From its branches hung many shiny lures from years of casts that were a little too ambitious. We dubbed it the "Fisherman's Christmas Tree." I asked my dad many times if I could climb the tree to grab some of the lures, and of course he always said no, but I still fantasized about it sometimes. A little ways beyond, an old cement

bridge stretched over the river. Every once in a while, a rusty truck would rush across, kicking up gravel in its wake. Other than those moments, I felt utterly secluded. It was nice. But the greatest times along the river were always ones that were shared with my family.

My dad taught me how to fish. At least, he heavily assisted me with it. He would tie the hook on the line and show me how to properly cast without getting it caught in the grass on the opposite bank or in the Fisherman's Christmas Tree. My twin sister would usually be there, too, and sometimes even our mom would humor us by setting up a chair and watching us catch our "river monsters," a term inspired by our favorite tv show back then. On very rare, but very special occasions, the entire family would sit out there with the truck parked close behind, windows rolled down to provide some music while we laughed and fished the evening away. It was a sacred place, in a sacred time of my life. A place and time that were sheltered from the corruption of the outside world. That is, until the most hated man in town decided to party there one night.

Notorious in our small, 600-pop town for peddling drugs and being in a constant cycle of leaving and entering arrest, Jackson so happened to be the grandson of our only neighbor for miles. Our neighbors were decent people that kept to themselves. Jackson, however, was not. It happened sometime after 11 pm, when the sun had set and everyone was in bed. We always cracked our windows to let in the cool night breeze and the sounds of the crickets singing low. The noise of the prairielands could carry through the night from miles around. One night, however, it wasn't the crickets that carried through our windows, but obnoxious music and wailing laughter that sounded alarmingly near.

My parents got up. They were both very concerned, but my dad, as the man of the house, decided to check it out by himself. He got in the truck and headed for The Rocks. Due to the darkness of night, we could only see the bright lights cast by his headlights and the glaring red of his taillights, and then he went down a hill and disappeared beyond the treeline that had been planted in front of the field. We

waited, and hoped he was okay. Jackson and his friends were not good people. To our relief, Dad eventually returned down our driveway and into our garage. He walked in with a sour look on his face. He told us who it was, and that he had confronted them over trespassing and gave them the ultimatum to leave, or else he would call the cops. They did leave, no doubt to protect themselves from being “found out” for other illegal activities.

The next morning I found The Rocks in a state of disrepair. Beer cans, candy wrappers, and tobacco tins littered the ditch and the stream and were wedged within the rocks, softling stirring in the current like they belonged there all along. I remember the unique mix of anger and emptiness, that depressing realization: there was no magical shield separating my place of happiness from the world of druggies and felons and beer cans. We could never be truly secluded, whether we lived in the city or the countryside. While the illusion lasted, however, it was a wonderful time. I look back on those days often, picturing myself along the riverside, safe from so many aspects of the world that I would someday come to realize.

DEFINITIONS

Culling (sorting)

The act of replacing one fish with another fish (See possession information on pages 32-33). See border waters with North Dakota on page 63.

I used to wonder why we couldn't keep every fish. We weren't hurting anybody, we caught them fair-and-square, and the waters of the lake were infinitely deep and the river was infinitely long. The supply of fish was never ending, and it would always be that way. And so the idea that the fish were limited—that we had to let some go, in order for there to be more in the future—sounded utterly ridiculous to me as child. It is still difficult to believe that a body of water, so much greater than any fisherman, could ever be “outfished.” But my dad, holding wisdom I couldn't yet grasp from the Minnesota fishing regulations, guided me in

the ways that I didn't understand. When I reeled in the Northern Pike, thrilled about its size, he informed me that it was more than two inches over 26", and so it had to be released. I would argue with him. Who in the world makes such arbitrary rules! I don't know who makes the rules, he would say. But it is out of our control. It would be okay in the end. We could always replace it with another fish, after all. Sure, I said, but it wouldn't be the same. I would always think back on the one I had to let go.

Immediately released or returned to the water

Immediately released fish are only retained long enough to unhook, measure and photograph. Fish not immediately released are counted as part of an angler's daily and possession limit.

Aspects of life that used to be entirely real now feel like a blur of motion, with scattered one-shots of clarity mixed in between: marching down the road with my sister while she carried the fishing rods and I carried the net with the tacklebox in the mesh; stepping carefully across the Rocks, crouching to get a good look between the crevices; sitting in the dirt beside my mom, who sat on the only chair we carried out so she could watch us fish. "Are you sure you don't want the chair?" "No, I'm comfy like this." Watching the slick black catfish get twisted in the net that my skinny arms could barely hold while my dad laughed and stepped around it in the mud. "See? They always bite when it rains!"

Since I graduated high school and left my family home, I've only fished a few times in the summer, and always alone. My siblings have all moved out as well, and it is on rare occasions that we are able to get time off work to visit home at the same time. Even rarer are one of them in the mood to trudge out and fish alongside me. It has been years since my parents went out with me. Perhaps now that I'm not a little kid any more, humoring me by sitting out by the stinky river with the biting insects pestering them does not outweigh the appeal of remaining in the air-conditioned house, occasionally texting me *Catch anything?* At least I still have photographs from the good old days of fishing in our

river. I wonder what else I was able to keep.

GENERAL REGULATIONS

How many lines can I fish with?

- You may use only one line during the open water season.
- You may use two lines through the ice except on designated trout lakes and streams.
- On designated trout lakes and streams, only one line is allowed at any time.
- More than one line may be allowed on border waters (page 58) and Lake Superior (page 26).

I don't get to fish with my dad nearly as often as I used to, but this year in January I finally convinced him to take me, my twin sister and my brother ice fishing! He reminded us many times to buy our fishing permit for 2023. I half-jokingly said that there was no point to it, since we had never encountered a DNR officer in all our years of fishing the lakes. Yes, he said, but the time we decide to bypass the law would be the time that one comes knocking at our cabin. I'm not entirely sure it could've been called a "cabin." Though advertised as such, it was a tiny, windowless building with a few public school-type chairs with no padding. Luckily the furnace was hot, so I could put my jacket over the back of the chair and make it a little more comfortable. It did have the luxury to be furnished with a few hooks, where we hung up our Hugo's bags full of sandwiches and chips. We didn't bring any hand sanitizer, but it didn't matter to us. I handled the minnows and grub with my bare hands and somehow felt completely unfazed in eating Cheetos puffs shortly after. In no other situation would I feel comfortable doing that, but I am just in a completely different mindset when I am fishing in an ice house.

After several hours of eating chips and drinking pop, my sister and I could no longer hold it in. We did not share the same privilege of our dad and brother of merely walking outside, though the nearest bathrooms were a ten minute drive across the ice. Our brother was kind

enough to offer to drive us back to the lodge, since we didn't know the directions on the confusing ice road. We left our lines in the water and made the trip to the lodge and back. Shortly after we got back, wouldn't you know it, a DNR officer came knocking at the door. He stepped into our cabin with a colloquial smile, his hands on his hips while he looked at us like an old family friend stopping by to say hello. As if we didn't know the purpose of his visit, he asked us if we had caught any fish. He nodded distantly to our report of five perch, then immediately perked when we said we had a pike in the cooler. I could read his mind. Got 'em, he thought!

After checking our licenses, he put a ruler on the snow and measured the pike. It was just below twenty-five inches, which made it legal for us to keep. He politely wished us luck in our catch and bid us farewell. As we listened to his truck back up and drive away, Dad breathed a sigh of relief. Good thing we brought our licenses! I said. That's not what I'm relieved about, he said. It turned out, my siblings and I were supposed to reel in our lines before heading to the lodge. A lone person can only have two lines in the ice at once, and so Dad would've received a sizeable fine had the DNR man arrived before we did!

NEW REGULATIONS FOR 2023

Sunfish and crappie possession limit adjustments

In 2022, daily limits for sunfish and/or crappie were reduced (to either 5 or 10) on nearly 100 lakes during the first year of the Quality Sunfish Initiative but possession limits remained the same (20 sunfish and 10 crappie). However, daily **and** possession limits were reduced on 70 lakes and connected waters prior to 2022--creating confusing inconsistencies between nearly identical regulations. For 2023, the possession limits on these 70 lakes were increased to statewide level (but daily limits remain reduced to either 5 or 10).

Experimental and special regulation reviews

- An experimental 17" minimum length for walleye on Clear Lake (Washington

County) was removed because management objectives were not achieved.

The statewide regulation now applies and is expected to be performed equally as well.

- Special sunfish regulations were reviewed on Ox Yoke and Sanborn (Cass) lakes and converted to a 5 fish daily limit after the 10 fish limit failed to meet management objectives.

Our freedoms perpetually change from year to year, and it gets to be tedious. Not a decade ago I could sit down and fish and have absolutely nothing on my mind for hours at a time. I had no responsibilities other than cleaning up the kitchen (Claire did it yesterday) and finishing up my assignments for class, if I wasn't already off for summer break. Nowadays, with work and capstone projects and rent and electricity bills and credit scores, I can hardly cast my hook without thinking of the ones that ensnare me. Of course, most responsibilities bring with them new freedoms. I have to worry about car payments, sure, but I can also travel to whatever lake I want without having to beg my dad for a week in advance. I sometimes think back to the days when I completely relied on other people to drive me places, and I wonder how I could have possibly survived. That is one good thing about change. We adjust to it, and we often find ourselves in a better place than where we were before.

It is a little like deep water ice fishing, I suppose. My dad and sister and I learned the hard way last weekend that if we want to catch perch in Devils Lake, we have to be able to move around and find where the schools are. If we stay fixed in one place...such as from having rented an icehouse instead of bringing our own supplies...we can spend all day without anything more than a nibble. If we had taken the responsibility to bring our own supplies instead of relying on a resort, we could have moved from our utterly luckless spot. So, yes, the ability to change is necessary. But must everything have to change? Sometimes I wonder if the higher power up there isn't purposefully trying to make things difficult. Do all those faceless scientists and DNR people just change the rules so that we must buy a new manual each year? Some things,

I would argue, are better left alone. Let me keep my thirty-inch pike. I could've kept it last year! And let me sit down and fish without worry, like I always could before.

FISHING LICENSES

- Any combination (married couple) type license will now require each spouse to have a complete customer record on file. MN residents without a complete customer record should visit a license agent or call our license center to verify their residency.
- Resident youth under 16 do not need a fishing license.
- Purchase online at: mndnr.gov/buyalicense
- A fishing license continues to be valid for the balance of the license period if the licensee's age, residency, or student qualification status changes.

According to my Minnesota fishing license, I am currently five foot four and ninety pounds. I keep on telling myself that I am going to update it, but every year I forget. The only thing I have updated since childhood is my place of residence. I won't need to update my hair color for a very long while. It is still BRO [brown]. Hopefully it will stay that way for quite a few decades. And hopefully my eyes will always be BLU. I am currently five foot seven. In the future, I may lose an inch or two. My weight is currently one-thirty-five. It will probably increase, but I wouldn't entirely mind. I'm skinny enough as it is! My place of residence will undoubtedly change, so long as I don't fall through the ice one day or get capsized in stormy weather or something along those lines. My license used to say Minnesota, but now I am a North Dakota resident. Maybe one day it will say South Carolina, or Maine, or maybe Minnesota again.

Ninety pounds, though. How did I ever used to be so small? I wonder how old I was when I measured that weight. I wonder what I happened to catch that year, who I caught it with and where. Forty-five pounds and three inches later, what else have I gained in life? I like to think that I've gained much more than I've lost. Maturity, I'm sure. Wisdom, I hope. Memories, I'm certain. This is good to remember, since

it is easy to be spiteful at the passage of time, especially when my hair color will someday say WHI. If I reach that age, and if I am still fishing by that time. I'm sure I will be. For as long as I happen to live, I will always think back on the things that were, and wonder at the things that will be. What time is going to bring, and what time is going to take. I am glad to have grown a few inches. But what has been shortened in the years in between? Not even names are constant. Maybe one day, my license won't be for a Wehri. This is something I consider with excitement.

The passage of time is like buying a new license. It can make us feel resentful (another year over! And we never fished the limit) or it can make us feel hopeful (2023, another year of fishing! We might even fish our limit this time). But what gives me most comfort is what remains constant. No matter how many years pass, I will always experience that thrill of excitement to feel that hit on the end of my line. I will always remember with fondness those memories I have with my family. And I will always abide by the fishing regulations, no matter how arbitrary they seem. I will keep some fish, and I will have to release others. But so long as I continue casting my line, there will always be more to come.

Karissa Wehri is an undergrad at the University of North Dakota. She was raised in rural Minnesota and currently resides in Grand Forks, North Dakota, as she studies for her BA in English. With additional interests in culture and psychology, she attends anthropology and psych classes and includes these humanist themes in her stories.