



Proposed Removal of 15-inch Minimum Length Limits for Saugeye



Saugeye Management in Ohio Reservoirs

- Saugeye are a hybrid between male sauger and female walleye.
- The Ohio Department of Natural Resources-Division of Wildlife (ODNR-DOW) produces saugeye at three fish hatcheries and stocks these fish in more than 50 reservoirs each year.
- Saugeye are well-suited to warm, turbid Ohio reservoirs, grow quickly, and produce good fishing.
- An **experimental 15" minimum length limit (MLL)** was implemented in 15 reservoirs in 2011 to increase the **(1) percentage saugeye larger than the MLL; and (2) average length of saugeye harvested.**

Regulation evaluation and outcomes

- Biologists evaluated effectiveness of the MLL by comparing saugeye populations and angler harvest:
 - **Before and after** adding the MLL;
 - **Between groups of reservoirs** where the MLL was added and where it was not added.
- **Outcome:** Adding the MLL **did not** (1) lead to more, larger saugeye or (2) increase the size of saugeye that anglers harvested (Table 1).
- ***The MLL failed to achieve goals; therefore, biologists recommend removing the MLL.***
- No changes are recommended to the statewide, six-fish daily limit on walleye, sauger, and saugeye.

Table 1. Saugeye populations and angler harvest in reservoirs with and without the 15" minimum length limits.

Measurement	Regulation goals	Data source	Reservoirs with MLL	Reservoirs without MLL	Outcome
Percentage of saugeye > 15"	Increase	Gill nets	50%	50%	No increase
Length harvested by anglers	Increase	Creel survey	15.8"	15.4"	No increase

A science-based approach to evaluate the MLL

Biologists used saugeye population data from gill-net surveys and angler harvest data from creel surveys to evaluate the success of the special regulations.



Gill nets are used to sample saugeye populations. The net is set along the bottom of a reservoir and saugeye get tangled as they swim into the net.



Creel surveys are used to measure effort (hours fished), catch, and harvest by anglers. Creel clerks interview anglers and measure harvested fish.

Reasons the MLL did not achieve goals

- **Anglers harvest few small saugeye.** In reservoirs without length limits, about 35% of harvested fish are smaller than 15" and only 20% are smaller than 14"; therefore, even when allowed to keep small saugeye, many anglers do not.
- **Saugeye growth is extremely fast.** Saugeye often reach 15" in 2 years; therefore, the MLL protects saugeye for a short time before they surpass 15".
- **Saugeye have a short life span.** Surveys show only 7% of saugeye are 4 years old or older. Protecting saugeye from harvest has little effect because of high natural mortality.

Why not remove the 15" MLL for reservoirs stocked with walleye? Walleye grow slower and live longer than saugeye. Because of these important differences, the MLL may be more effective for walleye.