

These are notes from our informal meeting with WDNR Fisheries Biologist Zach Lawson on Tuesday, October 23 at Beaver's. Present were Zach, Jan and Tom Tesch, Arch Johnson, Tom Ziegler, Mike and Cindy Moriarity, Bill Dalpiaz, and Kathy and Jim Hannemann.

We started with Dave Sino's question about changing the catch limit to 10" and 10 fish. Zach's reply was about the crappies in First Black Lake. He said that it's been so warm lately that the dark water in First Black picks up the heat and warms up so that the fish just don't move, and feed at night or not at all. See the graph re: First Black crappies. It shows that there are some good fish in there but the number drops off after 10". This needs further study. He wants to look at the ages of the fish caught (by looking at their vertebrae). They can live up to 17-18 years. If he finds a slow growth rate among the little fish, then reducing the catch limit won't improve the number of larger fish, because that would result in too many little, slow-growing fish competing with each other for limited food resources. This would result in slow growth and no larger fish in the long term.

First Black is not a good lake for walleye; if we stock it with walleye they will all swim into LOTF where there are better spawning areas.

Panfish research projects were started in 2015 (maybe 16) and are expected to last for 5 years. Until that research is complete it is unlikely that there could be any changes in any regulations. The DNR is working with various bag limits statewide, and it takes 3 years to change a catch limit.

Bill asked: is it worth it for anglers to email photos of their catches to Zach? Zach replied, any information like this would be helpful. The DNR samples adult fish only every 6 years. He suggests that anglers could keep a log of their catches. We had the idea that Zach and Bill could come up with a simple form for LOFA members to use to inform him of what they're catching.

The conversation turned to walleyes in LOTF. Zach's data tells him that the fish we stock into our lake are leaving the lake. He found one north of Pike Lake that he had tagged in LOTF the previous year! He suspects that it may be because of the amount of flow in the lake. Fish follow temperature, food and reproduction, and the habitat may be better upstream. Others speculated that they may also be going over the spillway, but Zach didn't think that was a significant factor.

Zach often gets the question, are the muskies eating the walleye? The lake has a lot of other species of fish that they can eat, too, so it's probable that they're

eating some, but that's not why the Walleye aren't staying. The last time the lake was stocked with muskies was 1992.

In general, Zach believes that LOTF has "pretty marginal walleye habitat." We have to have some present to keep the other species populations in balance, as fewer walleyes would probably mean smaller panfish, over time. Zach was asked if we could improve the habitat for walleye by adding more cribs and tree drops. Zach replied that the research about this is inconclusive, but that it wouldn't hurt anything; cribs require a DNR permit. He said he'd be willing to help with the permit process if that's what LOFA would like to do. He also commented that the high number of walleyes in the lake many years ago may have been an anomaly rather than the normal situation and that in the long term we may want to look at stocking something else. The next survey will be in 2021, and the DNR will decide after that if all the stocking was worth it.

Another idea was to stock Pike Lake and wait for the walleye to swim down to LOTF.

Tom said that, at Beaver's, guests come to fish for a wide variety of fish – panfish, bass, crappie, all kinds of stuff, not just walleye or muskie.

Finally we talked about the quality of the lake and the presence of more plants in the water than previously. This affects the fish habitat. The more plants in the water, the fewer walleye. Removing the plants would be ineffective because they would just grow back. The best method of controlling this includes buffer strips and shoreline maintenance to control water runoff into the lake and limit the nitrogen input from fertilizer. This would help reduce the vegetation in the water. Iron County has a good program to help landowners develop shoreline buffers to enhance the health of the lake.

Zach had to leave at about 11:20. Everyone agreed that we'd had a very good meeting and we'd like to do it again. We invited him to speak at next year's annual meeting.