



**Proposed Fishing Regulation Change
Holter Reservoir Yellow Perch and Walleye
December 5, 2019**

Note: New language is indicated in *italics* while deleted language is indicated by ~~strikethrough~~. Page numbers are from the 2019 Fishing Regulations booklet.

Page 66 change:

Holter Reservoir

Up to American Bar Gulch (approximately 4.6 miles downstream from Hauser Dam)

- Catch-and-release for Brown Trout, except anglers 14 years of age or younger may take 1 Brown Trout daily and in possession, any size.
- Walleye: ~~10~~ 5 daily, only 1 over 25 inches. Possession limit is twice the daily limit.
- Combined trout and Kokanee Salmon: 5 Rainbow Trout and Kokanee Salmon daily in any combination and 10 Rainbow Trout and Kokanee Salmon in possession in any combination.
- Yellow Perch: ~~50~~ 25 daily and ~~no~~ in possession.
- Northern Pike: No limit.
- Hook and Line/Setlines: 6 lines with 2 hooks per line through the ice only.

Rationale: Fisheries management for Holter Reservoir is guided by the Upper Missouri River Reservoir Fisheries Management Plan 2010-2019. The plan goal for Yellow Perch is to maintain a three-year average abundance of 6 perch per net and it recommends reducing the perch daily bag limit when three-year average abundance falls below 10 perch per net. Yellow Perch abundance this year was 1.8 perch per net for a three-year average catch of 7.5 perch per net. The department is recommending reducing the daily bag limit from 50 perch daily with no possession limit to 25 perch daily and in possession. The department also recommends implementing this regulation on January 1 to have the more conservative bag limit in place for the winter ice fishing season.

The 2010-2019 management plan goal for Walleye is to maintain a three-year average abundance of 4 Walleye per net and to take additional management action should the three-year average fall below 2 Walleye per net. Walleye abundance this fall was 1.5 Walleye per net for a three-year average abundance of 2.4 Walleye per net (Figure 4). Although relative abundance is above the 2 Walleye per net trigger, the department believes that action is warranted since abundance has remained below management goals since 2016 and average Walleye abundance since 2016 is 2.75 Walleye per net, which is below the management goal. The department is recommending reducing the Walleye daily bag limit from 10 daily, only 1 over 25 inches to 5 Walleye daily, only 1 over 25 inches. Possession limit is twice the daily limit. Implementing a Walleye regulation is not as time sensitive as the perch regulation, since minimal Walleye harvest occurs during the winter ice fishing season. However, adopting a Walleye regulation by December ensures the new regulation would be in the regulation booklet, which is published and implemented by March 1.

Comment Summary: The department received comments from 22 respondents during the Nov. 12 to Nov. 21 open comment period. Nineteen comments were in support of lowering the limits and three where not clear if they supported or did not support the proposed change. Six comments further preferred even lower daily bag limits for perch. Two comments recommended additional restrictions for walleye, such as slot limits and seasonal fishing closures. A sample of edited comments and the department's response to these comments can be found below. Copies of the full unedited comments can be found under a separate cover.

Comment	Response
I believe what we are seeing at Holter right now supports an additional edit to the UMRRMP draft for perch.....when the perch numbers are within goals, a 25 fish limit seems reasonable, howere if perch goals are not being met, a more conservative limit should be considered.	1)
So although I wholeheartedly support a reduction of the 50 daily and no possession limits for perch, I have to really wonder if the proposed reduction to 25 is the solution. Appears to me that the 25 perch limit as we have seen in the past has not done very well and that a further reduction in perch limits is fully justified. Perch are a schooling fish and given today's anglers knowledge, skill, advanced technologies (electronics with side imaging, downscan and GPS), and the information network, continuing with a 25 fish limit will simply continue to suppress the perch numbers below recommended relative abundance goals.	2)
Perch numbers were worse in 1997, 1998, 1999, 2002, 2004, 2007, 2009, and 2010 and I believe that was when they had the 25 daily and possession limit. Doesn't that suggest that 25 fish limit is too high to sustain the perch fishery?	2), 3)
When the perch limits on Canyon Ferry were reduced to try to improve the perch fishery data shows a definite improvement. That suggests that the same thing needs to be considered at Holter.	2)
Frankly, I was on the working group that was making recommendations for the upcoming new UMRRMP but I honestly don't think anyone expected we would ever see the perch numbers get as low as they have gotten at Holter. Maybe that plan should be modified, so that if the perch are within goals, the limit should be the 25 as proposed, but if below goals more conservative limits should be considered.	1)
With numbers as low as they are, wouldn't it make sense to reduce the limit to 10-15 daily with twice the daily for possession? It would seem like this would give the fish that are left a much better chance to bounce back	2)
I agree that the 50 fish limit is high, and fully support lowering the limit to 25 perch. I would like to see the possession limit stay at 50 perch as I travel 3 hours to fish Holter and that would mean I can only fish for one day there. I support the 5 fish limit for walleye and 10 in possession. Thanks for the opportunity to comment.	4)
FWP should only be managing native fish .	5)
I would like to see the Perch limit at 15 with possession at 30. Take the Walleye limit back to where it was 6 per day, with 5 under 20 and 1 over 28. Increase the Trout stocking back to previous year numbers. Your management plan needs to reflect current situation with out waiting 3 years to collect data. Jim Carver Cascade	1), 2), 6)

Comment	Response
<p>I agree with reducing the daily bag limits on both perch and walleye. I disagree the proposed numbers. Since perch are such an important forage fish within the compound of Holter the numbers for limits should be reduced significantly to ensure a fighting chance of bouncing back. I believe the netting data suggests a serious depletion of this resource. A schooling fish such as this could be further damaged by fishing, especially ice fishing. A limit of 10 would be a better fit in my book and you could even have a possession of double the limit. At least if someone wanted to fish for a weekend, they could, but they would have to limit both days to max out the perch.</p>	2)
<p>I am not a big believer in slot limits, however I think they do have some limited uses. Holter walleye would be one of those few occurrences that I would like to see the slot limit used. The netting data is showing such drastically reduced numbers that something drastic must be done to preserve this once great multi species fishery. I think a limit of 5 is a good move, however I also feel it should be partnered with a slot limit. 19 to 28 inch walleye are going to be mega important for the next few years and should be protected. With the reactive measures in the new management plan a slot limit could be reviewed every year to two years and put in place or removed as seen fit for proper management. End result, my opinion is a 5 walleye limit, with 19 inch and under size limit, only one over 28 to protect the trophy fishery this has become in the past.</p>	6)
<p>I would also float the idea of restricting fishing for walleye from March 15th to the first Saturday in May in an attempt to protect the big spawning females from getting stressed out and not producing as they could. I'm no biologist, but it seems that certain places are getting so popular for catching big pre-spawn walleyes that it's time to be pro active and prevent this activity. Upper Holter is one of those places that is becoming so popular that it could be having an adverse effect on the walleye fishery. Seems no one can explain why the walleye fishery is failing.....maybe this would be another temporary action such as a slot limit that could be looked at.</p>	7)
<p>I am all in favor of reducing the limit of perch on Holter to 25 daily and frankly I would like to see it reduced further to 15 daily. I have asked the about the 50 daily with no possession limit and its destruction of the perch fishery on Holter. I was told that it would never happen, well with flushing and an individuals ability with the technology available today to harvest fish it most certinally has. I agree with the statment of it would be impossible to completly eliminate the reservoir of perch. That being said to not continue to promote and protect the perch fishery at Holter while maintaing some type a winter time fishery seems rediculous.. Teach people to be glutons and it will carry on to other bodys of water...</p>	2)
<p>I really like that there will be action taken as a result of this new information. I feel that the perch population has crashed to the point that the proposed 25 fish limit is still to high. 10, or even 15 would be a much better option. I would like to see the walleye regulations changed to a slot limit with 4 fish under 18 inches and 1 over 28 inches to help bolster the true trophy potential that Holter has.</p>	2), 6)

Comment	Response
<p>The FWP only manages the problem that they created. The perch collapsed in Canyon Ferry then in Hauser and they blamed it on the walleye. Canyon Ferry they were pulling out the 5-gallon buckets full of perch. Now Holter is collapsed. No possession limit and 50 per day. It should of been changed years ago. Some of us also remember the collapse of the Tongue River Reservoir. The crappie fishing was 60 per day and 120 in possession. The FWP needs to look at a state wide regulation on pan fish to where this does not happen else where</p>	8)
<p>Trout numbers are down to 1.8/net, perch are down to 1.8/net, and walleye are down to 1.5/net. There is not a single year in history where all of the numbers have been so low. In fact walleye have only been worse twice, in 1988 and 1995. Perch have been worse in 8 of the past 34 years....interestingly, when they had the 25 daily and possession limits that are currently proposed.</p>	3), 9)
<p>I wholeheartedly support a reduction to the walleye limit as well. However, I really have to wonder why the Department is not going back and implementing limits that historically had worked exceptionally well. The 6 fish limit with 5 under 20 and 1 over 28"? This limit was in effect for a whole lot of years and we used to have an outstanding trout and walleye fishery.</p>	6)
<p>It is worth noting as well?.that the reason the trout numbers are so low is not because there are too many walleye?..it is because of the reduced stocking. (Cut to about 50% the last two years by FWP)</p>	10)
<p>It is also worth noting that the reason the perch numbers are so low is NOT because there are too many walleye.</p>	11)
<p>This change should've happened sooner. Ice fishing was a blast 3 years ago, but it was very clear that many fisherman were abusing the limit of 50 perch. At that number it was quite obvious that not everyone was counting. There were many people at least measuring by the five gallon bucket, as it was pretty close to 50. I fished like crazy but only kept what I needed. I would frequently see many of the same guys day after day with piles of bodies on the ice. At that point it is damn near impossible for them to eat or even clean that amount. Especially when they were going way over the way to generous limit. It was no surprise to me that ice fishing sucked the last 2 years. Now the food supply for the walleyes is limited as well. I believe the limit should be 10 daily and in possession for perch.</p>	2)
<p>I support reducing the bag limits on perch and walleye. I am sure FWP is studying possible causes of the decline in fish numbers. Once any conclusions are reached, I also presume any additional steps would be taken to manage the fishery beyond reducing bag limits, such as increasing or decreasing water releases from Hauser and/or Holter, timing of releases, mitigating agricultural runoff of fertilizer, animal waste, over grazing causing erosion, etc.</p>	4), 12)
<p>I support implementing more conservative e regulations for both perch and walleye. But, I wonder what is happening with the trout populations and how it is related to the walleye and perch populations? It seems that the populations would be connected.</p>	10)
<p>Twice the daily limit! Why. Just doesn?t make sense with low netting. (Walleye) FWP need to act sooner. 21 century there are more people fishing which can causes faster changes need to respond fast to the pressure. 4 years ago perch fishing was poor. Thanks</p>	1)

Response to Comments

Number	Response
1)	The 2020-2019 management plan allows additional flexibility in management strategies as fish populations fluctuate. If further restrictions are appropriate the department can work through a Citizen Advisory Committee and the Fish & Wildlife Commission to implement more restrictive management strategies.
2)	Perch are most vulnerable to angling during the winter (ice) fishing season and most perch harvest on Holter, Hauser, and Canyon Ferry occurs in the winter. Due to variable ice conditions, only a small portion of surface acreage is accessible to fishing on Holter and many preferred perch habitats are not accessible to angling. On Canyon Ferry and Hauser, preferred winter perch habitats are accessible by anglers so lower bag limits can have population scale impacts. Based on the information available, the department feels a Holter perch limit less than 25 daily would limit angler opportunity while providing minimal improvement to perch abundance.
3)	There were no bag limits on Holter yellow perch until 2000. From 2000 to 2010, the perch bag limit was 50 daily with no possession limit. From 2011 to 2014 the bag limit was 25 with no possession limit. From 2015 to present the bag limit was 50 daily with no possession limit. For each of the years listed in the comment the perch bag limit was 50 daily or there was no bag limit. Additionally, 6 of those 8 years saw walleye abundance above the long-term average. Four of those 8 years saw an increase in perch abundance the next year despite angler bag limits of 50 or no limit. Three of those 8 years were further impacted by high magnitude and long duration flushing in previous years. Factors such as flushing, spawning and rearing habitat, and predation are likely bigger limiting factors to the Holter perch population than angler harvest. The department believes the current population is resilient enough to sustain with the proposed daily bag limit.
4)	The department will continue annual population monitoring and if population abundance and quality improve additional regulation changes will be evaluated to maximize fishing opportunity.
5)	Native fish management is a high priority for the department, but the department is also obligated to manage quality sport fisheries. Public scoping and input for the Upper Missouri River Reservoir Fisheries Management Plan indicate a high desire by the angling public to manage Holter as a sport fishery comprised primarily of non-native rainbow trout, yellow perch, and walleye.
6)	Previous length restrictions (slot limits) were changed on Holter because walleye growth rates had declined to the point where fish were vulnerable to additional years of angling before growing into the protective slot. Population monitoring will continue, and additional length restrictions will be implemented if appropriate.
7)	There is no indication that angler harvest during the walleye spawning period is limiting spawning activity.
8)	This comment is irrelevant to the proposed perch and walleye regulation change.
9)	Prior to expansion of the walleye population in Canyon Ferry in 1996 average Holter walleye abundance was 2.6 walleye per net. After walleye expansion, average Holter walleye abundance (1996-2019) was 4.7 walleye per net, or an 80.8% increase from pre- to post-walleye expansion. The years mentioned in the comment were from pre-Canyon Ferry walleye expansion.

Number	Response
10)	Current low trout abundance in monitoring surveys is largely attributable to reduced rates of stocking over the previous two years. The department takes population abundance of multiple species into account when making fisheries management decisions.
11)	This decline in perch abundance is attributable to senescence of a very large cohort of fish produced in the early 2010s. This type of decline is not unusual in self-sustaining fish populations and the decline in population abundance in this circumstance was likely driven by limited recruitment of younger cohorts of perch.
12)	The department will continue working with agency partners to coordinate water management and dam operations as well as monitoring water quality.