

Proposed Fishing Regulation Changes – 2014

Note: New language is in italics. Deleted language is indicated by strikethrough.

SEELEY LAKE

- Catch-and-release for bass
- Bass: No daily or possession limit for entire year
- Northern pike: no limit
- Salmon: 5 daily and 10 in possession
- Snagging: open for salmon October 15 through December 31, 20 salmon daily and 40 in possession
- Spearing: open for northern pike

RATIONALE: Smallmouth bass have been discovered in Seeley Lake and reported to FWP in the summer of 2013, apparently the result of an illegal introduction. FWP believes this species has the potential to expand to other waters in the Clearwater drainage and at densities that may impact other managed species, including kokanee, bull trout and cutthroat trout. FWP has recently succeeded in improving and protecting bull trout populations in the drainage through improvements in connectivity and habitat protection. Many of these bull trout use Seeley Lake to grow to maturity after migrating from natal streams and as adults between spawning runs. The consequences of smallmouth bass expansion may be particularly troubling for other waters in the drainage that may have greater habitat suitability for them than Seeley Lake (Bennett and Bennett 1991). FWP staff will continue to track the expansion of this population and remove these bass as they are encountered, but lifting the harvest limit to allow anglers to assist with the effort is consistent with options provided in FWPs *Illegal and Unauthorized Introduction of Aquatic Wildlife Policy*.

Largemouth bass have been in the system for many years. Attempts at enhancing largemouth bass, including stocking and restrictive fishing regulations, have been unsuccessful and the fishery is considered to be marginal and used little by anglers. Grouping this species with smallmouth bass in this new regulation is consistent with *Montana Statewide Fisheries Management Plan (January 2013)* which suggested that future management direction for this water included liberalizing harvest opportunities for largemouth bass.