



Missouri River – Toston Dam to Canyon Ferry Reservoir

Walleye movement into the Missouri River from Canyon Ferry Reservoir recently provides additional fishing opportunity beyond the traditional brown and rainbow trout angling in this reach of river. The current walleye harvest regulation for both Canyon Ferry and the Missouri River upstream of the Reservoir is 20 walleye daily, only 1 over 20 inches in length.

The department is proposing a walleye regulation change in Canyon Ferry Reservoir to address poor walleye size structure in relation to management goals. Concurrently, the department is evaluating three alternatives to address walleye management in the river. The primary goal for this section of river in the Upper Missouri River Reservoir Fisheries Management Plan is to emphasize management of wild trout while recognizing the importance of walleye.

Alternative 1: Reduce the daily bag limit to 10 fish daily, only 1 fish over 20 inches, possession is twice the daily limit.

This alternative would reduce the daily bag limit in the river to match the bag limit in the reservoir but would not have the same length restriction as the reservoir. Population monitoring in the river indicates that mostly adult walleye are found in the river relative to the reservoir and implementing a 15-inch length restriction would unnecessarily limit fishing opportunity. Maintaining a length restriction of only 1 fish over 20 inches would still allow harvest of large fish while still allowing opportunity to harvest fish in desirable size ranges. Management goals relating to walleye size are not established for this river section but monitoring data show higher relative abundance of older, more desirable sized walleye in the river than in the reservoir (see Figures 1 and 2). Angler creel data is lacking for this river section, and the department is implementing a creel survey for the 2021 fishing season to assess whether additional management changes are warranted for the section.

This alternative is expected to maintain management goals outlined in the Upper Missouri River Reservoirs Fisheries Management Plan to manage for wild brown trout and rely on migratory walleye to supplement the fishery while minimizing impacts on wild trout and forage species.

Alternative 2: Reduce the daily bag limit to 10 fish daily, only 1 fish over 15 inches, possession is twice the daily limit.

This regulation would match the walleye regulation change proposed for Canyon Ferry. The proposed change for Canyon Ferry is intended to focus angler harvest on overabundant, smaller-sized fish; a problem that is not currently present in the river (Figures 1 and 2). This alternative could simplify enforcement of the regulations with the same bag limit and length restrictions in place from Toston Dam to Canyon Ferry Dam. It could compromise the accuracy of a creel survey by under-estimating harvest of fish between 15 and 20 inches. It is unknown if this alternative would negatively impact the management goal of maintaining walleye as a supplement to the river fishery, however, there is

potential to impact the management goal of wild trout and forage management if the length restriction were to effectively increase the number of large walleye in the river.

Alternative 3: Reduce the daily bag limit to the Central District standard regulation for walleye: 5 fish daily, 10 in possession.

This alternative would simplify fishing regulations by removing the walleye exception for this river stretch from the regulations book. The daily bag limit or length restrictions would not match those proposed for Canyon Ferry. There would be no length restrictions in place, which could allow a thorough evaluation of size of fish harvested in a creel survey. This approach has the potential to be too conservative to meet management goals to minimize impacts to wild trout and forage species by walleye.

Figure 1. Electrofishing trend for Walleye in the Missouri River upstream of Canyon Ferry Reservoir.

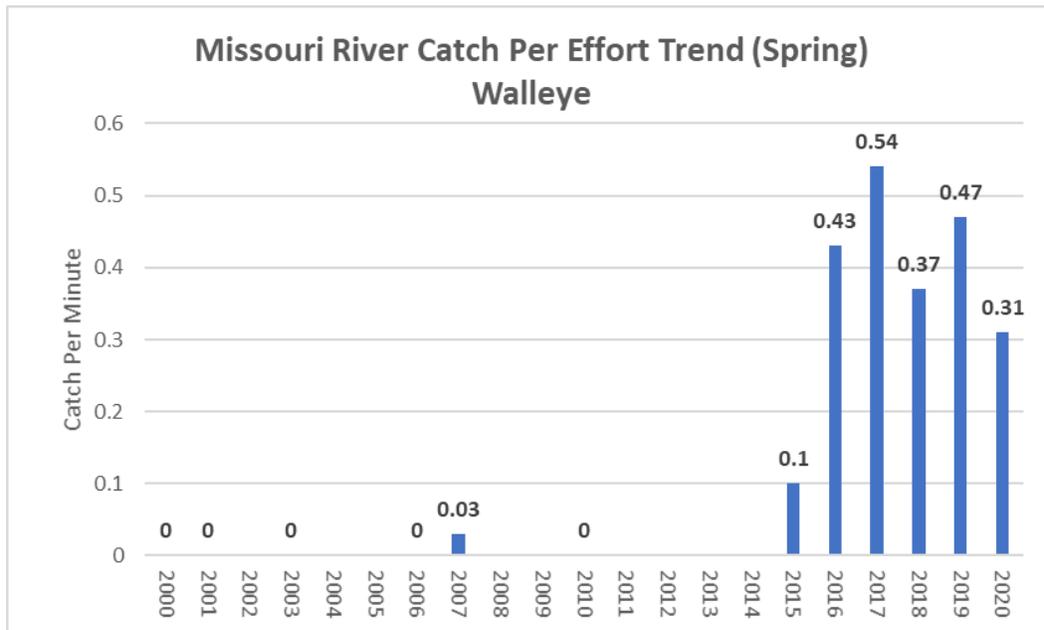


Figure 2. Length Frequency of Walleye in the Missouri River upstream of Canyon Ferry Reservoir during spring electrofishing (2015-2020).

