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# **Regulatory Guidelines for Managing the Yellow Perch Sport Fishery in Ontario**

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Fish and Wildlife Branch  
Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources**

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**NOTE: Since the approval of this document in 2004, MNR has launched the New Ecological Framework for Recreational Fisheries Management. A key component of this new framework is the establishment of Fisheries Management Zones (FMZs) which will replace fishing divisions as the unit for managing recreational fisheries (Appendix I). The recommendations for the application of the regulatory options given herein have been updated to be consistent with the new FMZs.**

This report describes the regulatory options for the management of yellow perch (*Perca flavescens*) fisheries in Ontario. The goal is to ensure that regulations can be rationalized to achieve resource sustainability, while at the same time, streamlining and simplifying Ontario's fishing regulations and providing additional angling opportunities.

Although yellow perch have traditionally not been overexploited by sport fishing in most parts of Ontario, province-wide catch limits will be implemented to place a value on the resource and to prevent overexploitation where necessary. Moreover, many areas in Ontario have variable catch and possession limits to prevent overexploitation and more areas are examining the possibility of establishing catch limits. These are being applied in an inconsistent manner, adding to the complexity of the fishing regulations.

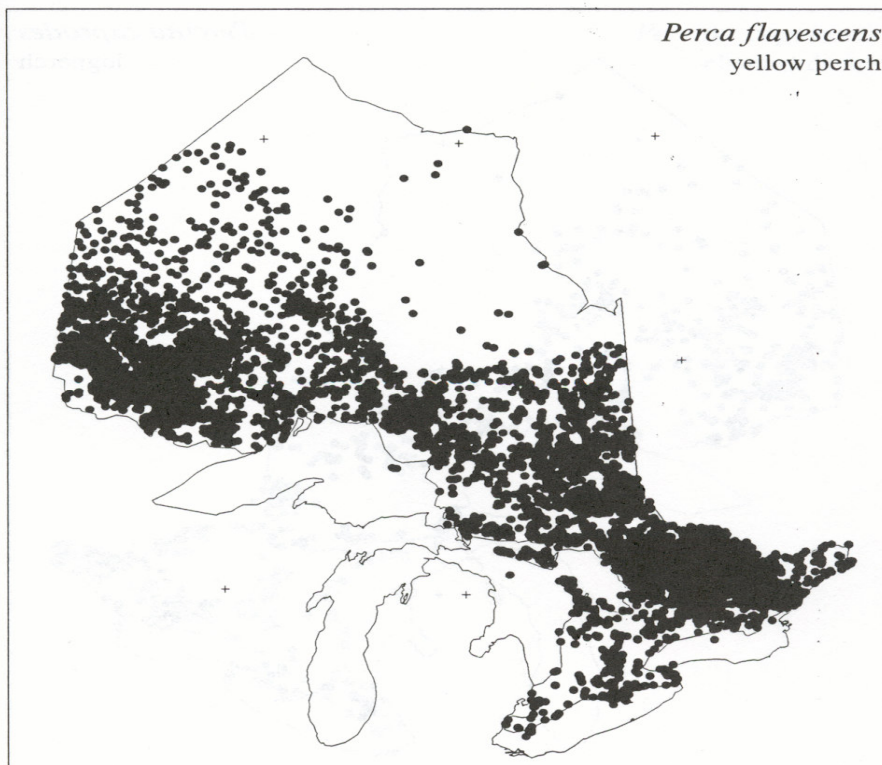
In order to provide consistency for the management of yellow perch in Ontario, the regulatory options contained herein are the recommended options to be used in the development of any new sport fish regulations for yellow perch. In cases where the existing regulations do not conform to the approach in this report, they should be analyzed using the criteria set out in the Provincial Approvals in Principle process and modified or removed as appropriate.

### Introduction

Yellow perch occur across nearly all of Ontario, with the exception of a few tributaries of the Hudson Bay lowlands (see Figure 1). All of Ontario's yellow perch fisheries are based on naturally reproducing stocks.

Yellow perch are the third most preferred species by Ontario anglers and are the fourth most frequently caught fish by anglers (Department of Fisheries and Oceans 2003). Many anglers do not target yellow perch due to their relatively small size across much of their range across Ontario. They are often caught "incidentally" while angling for more preferred species such as walleye, bass or crappie. Because of their willingness to bite a baited hook, yellow perch are a perennial favourite of young anglers.

Locally important recreational fisheries for yellow perch occur seasonally in scattered locations around the province such as Lake Couchiching, Lake St. Francis, Lake St. Clair, Lake Erie, Manitoulin Island, and several northwestern Ontario lakes. Ice fishing for yellow perch is a



major attraction on waters such as Lakes Simcoe, Couchiching, and Nipissing, and Long Point Bay of Lake Erie.

Figure 1. Distribution of yellow perch in Ontario (reproduced from Mandrak and Crossman (1992) with permission of the Royal Ontario Museum).

In addition to its value to the recreational fishery, yellow perch is an important component of the commercial fishery, particularly in the lower Great Lakes.

Commercial sale of angler-caught yellow perch is prohibited for all waters except Lake St. Francis, in southeastern Ontario. On Lake St. Francis, there is a history of selling locally angled yellow perch to supply the traditional “Lancaster yellow perch dinners” at restaurants and charity events.

Through much of the last century, yellow perch was considered unworthy of regulatory protection. Commercial quotas were introduced in the early 1980s in response to concerns over heavy fishing pressure and fluctuating yellow perch stocks on the Great Lakes. Until the 1990s, angling harvest of yellow perch was virtually unregulated in most areas of the province, with no closed seasons and no daily catch or possession limits. While a few areas, such as Manitoulin Island, introduced catch limits prior to 1990, it was not until the last decade that angling regulations were more widely applied for this species. Today, several areas of the province have implemented catch limits to control the harvest of yellow perch. The catch and possession limits vary considerably across the province, and more requests for new and variable limits are under review.

This document has been assembled to identify a provincial approach that will provide additional angling opportunities for yellow perch, consistent with principles of sustainability, while simplifying the range of regulatory options in place across Ontario.

## Open/Closed Seasons

Fishing seasons have not generally been applied to control angling harvest of yellow perch in Ontario. Closed periods for angling yellow perch are usually in place as a result of broad division-wide or lake-specific closures for all angling, to protect other more preferred species. For example, closed periods in the Kawartha Lakes (Division 6) and Algonquin Park (Division 13) are a result of a total prohibition of all winter angling and Division 27 is closed to all angling to protect walleye during certain times of the year.

There were nine different open seasons for yellow perch in the province of Ontario in 2002 (Table 1).

Table 1. Open seasons for yellow perch in Ontario (based on the 2002 Recreational Fishing Regulations Summary).

Open Season	Division(s)
Open all year	1,3,4,5,7,8,9,10,11,12,29,28,14,18,26
Open all year except December 24	2,15,16,17,19,25,20,21,22,23,24,30,31,32,33,34
January 1-March 31 & May 11 (last Saturday)-December 31	12A (Lake St. Francis)
January 1-March 15 & May 18 (Saturday before Victoria Day)-December 31	Lake Nosbonsing*
January 1-March 7 & May 18 (Saturday before Victoria Day)-October 15	27 (Lake Nipissing)*
April 27 (last Saturday)-November 30	13 (Algonquin Park)*
April 27 (last Saturday)-November 15	6 (Kawartha Lakes)*
Closed from April 1-May 10 (Friday before second Saturday)	Part of Division 9*

\* Closed season in place for all species.

The spring closure of the yellow perch season on Lake St. Francis (Division 12A) was first implemented in 1998 to protect spawning concentrations of yellow perch, where local yellow perch populations were subject to intense fishing pressure. In order to address declining stocks, a closed season and catch and possession limits were introduced after consultation with local stakeholders.

### Recommended Season Dates:

**The following yellow perch seasons are recommended:**

Open all year across the province except for the FMZs that have winter closures for all species (including yellow perch). It is important to note that this applies only to sport fishing regulations. Seasons for commercial perch fisheries may vary in accordance with management needs.

## Catch and Possession Limits

Catch limit is defined as the number of fish an angler is allowed to catch and keep in one day. Fish, which are caught and eaten that day, are counted as part of the daily catch limit. The possession limit is the number of fish an angler is allowed to legally possess at any time whether on-hand, in cold storage or in transit.

In many parts of the province, there are presently no catch or possession limits for yellow perch. The angling fraternity has shown an increasing interest in “panfish” species in recent years. Increased fishing pressure, harvest, and social issues related to yellow perch stocks in some of the more popular yellow perch angling waters have led to the introduction of catch and possession limits in several divisions. Limits have usually been decided upon through a consultative process with resource users and stakeholders.

There has been little effort to coordinate catch and possession limit regulations provincially. There were seven different combinations of catch and possession limits applied to both regular sport fishing and conservation fishing licenses across Ontario in 2002. (Table 2).

Table 2. Catch and possession limits for yellow perch in Ontario (based on the 2002 Recreational Fishing Regulations Summary).

Division(s)	Catch Limit by Licence		Possession Limit by Licence	
	Type	Type	Type	Type
	Sport	Conservation	Sport	Conservation
1,2,3,4,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,18,19,23,25,26,29, 35	No limit	No limit	No limit	No limit
17 (North Channel)	50	25	100	25
27 (Lake Nipissing)	25	25	50	50
28 (Manitoulin Is.)	25	25	50	25
12A (L. St. Francis)	100	50	200	100
5 (Lake Simcoe) & Lake Couchiching	50	25	100	50
20,21,22,22A,24,30,31,32,33,34 and Lake St. Clair	50	25	50	25
20 (Annis Lake)	25	25	25	25

The conservation licence was not originally intended for those anglers who wish to *harvest* large quantities of fish flesh, but rather to encourage angling *activity* with a minimal impact on the resource. Nevertheless, in many divisions there are no limits on yellow perch for conservation fishing licence holders.

Based on results of the 2000 Survey of Ontario Anglers, 93.7% of respondents (374,799 of 399,831 respondents) support the designation of a catch limit for yellow perch (Department of Fisheries and Oceans 2003).

## Recommended Catch and Possession Limits:

Implement province-wide catch and possession limits (see table below) except in those areas where other catch limits are already in place.

FMZs	<u>Catch Limit by Licence</u>		<u>Possession Limit by Licence</u>	
	Sport	<u>Type</u> Conservation	Sport	<u>Type</u> Conservation
1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12, 13,14,15,16,18,19,20	50	25	50	25
2 (Annis Lake), 11 (Lake Nipissing), 10 (Manitoulin Is.)	25	25	25	25

- Where a more conservative limit is required for sustainability purposes, a limit of 15 for holders of a sport fish licence and 10 for holders of a conservation licence should be applied.
- Existing exceptions could remain or be changed to the provincial standard pending review (e.g., Lake Simcoe, FMZ 17, etc.).
- The possession limit for yellow perch should be the same as one day's catch limit in order to be consistent with other fish species in Ontario.

## Other Regulations

Special regulations such as size limits and bait and gear restrictions have not been used in Ontario to regulate the angling of yellow perch. Biologists believe that these restrictions would not be practical to regulate yellow perch sport fisheries, although they are used extensively for commercial fisheries for yellow perch in Ontario.

In the past, there have been very few instances of sanctuary designation specifically to protect yellow perch, although yellow perch have been afforded some protection in spring sanctuaries designed to protect other species such as walleye. Where there is a desire to protect local concentrations of yellow perch during the spring spawning period, a sanctuary could be designated as an alternative to a season closure for a larger area or fishing division. Season dates for yellow perch sanctuaries need to be determined.

## Sale of Angler Caught Yellow Perch in Division 12A:

Other than Division 12A, no where else in the province is the sale of angler caught sport fish allowed. As this regulation (exception) has been in place for several years, it would be beneficial to undertake a review of the sale of angler caught yellow perch in Division 12A at a time convenient for both the Ministry of Natural Resources and stakeholders.

## **Use of Yellow Perch as Bait:**

Yellow perch can be used as bait in the Great Lakes, the St. Clair, Detroit, Niagara, St. Lawrence and St. Mary's Rivers, Lake George, Lake St. Francis and Munuscong Lake. They cannot be used as bait anywhere else in the province. Yellow perch cannot be sold as bait under the authority of a commercial bait licence, yet anglers can use yellow perch as bait in these areas if they catch it themselves.

- **Due to the increasing importance of the yellow perch fishery, and the potential for yellow perch to be spread to new waters, the use of yellow perch as bait will be rescinded in 2007.**

## **Sale of Angler Caught Yellow Perch:**

In the past, the sale of angler caught yellow perch was permitted only in Lake St. Francis.

- **Due to complications with enforcement of such localized regulations the sale of angler caught yellow perch is now prohibited throughout the province.**

## **Special Regulations**

The use of "special" or experimental angling regulations for yellow perch (e.g., size limits) will be discouraged except where they are implemented on an experimental basis with plans for a thorough assessment of their relative effectiveness.

## **References**

Department of Fisheries and Oceans. 2003. 2000 Recreational angler survey (preliminary survey results). Ottawa, Canada.

Mandrak, N.E and E.J. Crossman. 1992. A checklist of Ontario Freshwater Fishes. Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto. 176 p.

## **Additional References**

Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. 2002. 2002 Recreational Fishing Regulations Summary. Queen's Printer for Ontario. 96 p.

McShane, L. and J. Bowman. 2003. A literature review of yellow perch regulations in North America. Fish and Wildlife Branch, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. Peterborough, Ontario. 8 p. + appendices.



**Appendix I New Fisheries Management Zones for Ontario's Sport Fisheries**

