

SOUTH DAKOTA GAME, FISH & PARKS STAFF/ COMMISSIONERS
20641 SD HWY 1806
FT. PIERRE, SD 57532

29 November 2016

Greetings,

I have reviewed the Missouri River Fisheries Management Plan and would like to make the following comments. I am going to address my comments predominately to Oahe Reservoir.

Management of Lake Oahe

As I reviewed previous management plans it appears we have the same goals and objectives we are currently presenting now. We know our walleye fishery is a challenge and to return that population to its potential it has many obstacles to overcome. We have addressed various issues and studies, but fall short on identify immediate proposals that may make the difference. We are past the time to talk and study the Oahe walleye issue, we need to take positive action now.

Issue – Cold water forage

Problem is the deep cold water forage has become home to our walleye population during the warm water period usually from late July on. Releasing walleyes caught at those depths of 50-60 feet may question their survival. We are killing the walleyes we chose to keep and may very well, be killing some of the walleye we release.

As angler's we need information on deep water walleye releases, or should we avoid catching walleyes deep. We also need to educate angler release methods such as bending the barbs on our hooks, and fizzing methods. We should also prohibit any walleye tournaments on Oahe after 31 July. We need to make some changes that may help our walleye population rebound. I feel our walleye population on Oahe is in trouble and we need to start making changes to turn it around.

We also don't know what impact the herring population will have on our smelt recovering. Will they co-habitat or not. Will they have a negative impact on walleye fry? We need research projects to monitor prey populations and what impacts they may have on Oahe fisheries.

Issue – Warm water forage

I fully support any effort to create warm water sanctuaries to help gizzard shad survive our winters. This will be a challenge and will take some time to achieve that goal if possible. Until that time we need to have a comprehensive gizzard shad stocking program that includes funding and manpower support. We need to stock gizzard shad every year in as many areas as possible. We cannot go on the premise that we will stock when we have lengthy periods of ice cover. Water temperature, turn over, ice cover may all be a contributing factor to shad die-offs. Many reservoirs have shad die-offs that do not freeze. Gizzard shad are a critical warm water forage for Oahe. We need that smaller forage for our 1-3-year class walleye and we also need the shad to provide a plentiful warm water forage in the upper water column of Oahe.

Issue - Walleye stocking

This fisheries management plan identifies walleye stocking in the lower part of Oahe from 1983-1988. It was considered unsuccessful and discontinued. I don't know the data that supports discontinuing the stocking, but from past experience the lower third of Oahe offered great opportunity's to walleye anglers. Our Oahe walleye population is at desperate levels and I believe we need to do everything we can, to try and get our walleye population over the hump, to provide a self- supporting walleye population. We cannot wait for mother nature to turn this around. The flood created a hardship on Oahe fisheries, and mother nature changed the complexity of our fish populations, unfortunately it didn't include our walleye or smelt populations. We need to stock, and regulate at every angle to return walleye populations to past levels.

Issue – Salmon stocking

Salmon stocking is a critical component to utilize the high population of cold water forage in Oahe. Every effort should continue to procure reliable, disease free salmon eggs. The success of our salmon fishery can return anglers to Oahe as a fishing destination in great numbers. Years ago, our goal was to stock 500,00 annually. We haven't met that goal in years. We recently passed a salmon snagging regulation to provide opportunity to harvest salmon coming into the bays to spawn. These spawning bays are also utilized by our fisheries staff to try and collect salmon eggs when procuring salmon eggs is difficult. This was a poor time to pass such a regulation when we are struggling to get salmon eggs. It also complicates the group conflicts that exist on Oahe.

Issue – Predation

At present Oahe has a strong population of northern pike and catfish in the 3-6 lb. range. This population of fish may create predation issues for young walleye. This may prolong the chance for our walleye recovery on Oahe. At a time when predation would be useful on the herring population, should we promote opportunities to harvest the predators? Should we reduce the prey or increase the predator. These are tough choices, but are topics of interest that need to be researched and considered in our 5 year strategic plan.

Issue – Smallmouth Bass

At present the smallmouth bass population is the bright spot on Oahe. It has flourished and created an outstanding bass fishery since introduction. Bass fishing is becoming more popular and filling a void for Oahe anglers. Bass anglers practice catch and release and other anglers practice harvest. Smallmouth bass, are territorial, very aggressive and vulnerable to overharvest.

We need to adopt regulations that will both help conserve the smallmouth bass and walleye populations. Its more, hard choices, but we need to adopt an aggregate limit that includes, a conservative combination 5 fish limit of walleye and smallmouth. We also need to prohibit the spearing of bass on the Missouri River and all of South Dakota. Bass are much too valuable to use as a target.

Issue - Boat Ramps

I support expanding more boat ramps. I do believe we need to address the possibility to develop a route, and a boat ramp, for western South Dakota anglers to access the Cheyenne River arm. It may be time to look at the possibility of extending 1806 to Hwy 63 and open up a southern access along the Cheyenne River arm.

I would also recommend we popularize Foster Bay as kayak port. It's become very popular and could provide an excellent opportunity for kayakers to utilize the Cheyenne River and upper end of the Cheyenne River arm.

In the past I, have commented on boat ramp issues and will provide those same comments I gave some 10+ years ago. Think Big! Build a super ramp that will accommodate at least 8 launch sites and build it where it will be serviceable during high and low water periods. In addition, we need to provide courtesy docks at our boat ramps. Courtesy docks will reduce congestion by 50%.

Issue -Cold water discharge

It's been said by many folks, time and time again, we need to finish Oahe dam and provide a warm water discharge. This strategic 5 year-plan, addresses this issue and mentions modifying the stilling basin outlet structure. This could help depending on the modification and what siphoning effect it may create. We have the emergency spillway structure that recently received upgrades to improve the use of that structure. We need to provide warm water discharge and build the infrastructure to provide the flow of water back into the Missouri River. Its time our political leadership and the Corp Of Engineers get together and make this project happen.

Issue – Regulations

The Oahe management plan identifies the roller coaster harvest regulations we implemented the last 16 years. We implemented regulations to reduce our walleye populations to match the devastated smelt population. Well, it worked, our smelt population has not rebounded as hoped, and our walleye population is in trouble. We need regulations on Oahe that will protect our spawning age (3-5) walleyes. This is critical to protect as many spawning walleyes as possible.

From a comment made at the September commission meeting that he would be back in two years with more spearing regulations, I wondered why he wasn't coming back next year. I learned the staff is adopting a two-year interval on fishing regulation changes. I find it difficult to understand how you can manage and make regulation changes in a timely matter with a two-year program. We manage our big game with annual data and make changes to best serve game populations while best serving our hunters. This strategic 5-year plan, would mean we will have 2 opportunities to make regulation changes in the next 5 years. Our fisheries serve anglers year around and requires timely management, utilizing our regulation process on an annual basis. Oahe reservoir fisheries are going thru many changes and requires proactive annual regulation review and changes. Now is not the time to adopt this change.

Lake Sharpe

Issue – I support additional boat ramps, fishing piers and Hipple Lake channel and dredging projects.

Additional Comments

User group conflicts – As I reviewed previous management plans the same issue appears, nearly word for word. In a recent commission meeting we changed rules such as spearing and snagging that can only lead to additional conflict between user groups. It's confusing to me how you identify a conflict and then pass regulations that will create additional conflict.

Issue – Lack of public and government interactions

As we identify information dissemination and feedback from anglers across a wide geographic area as difficult we forego the opportunity to utilize our Outdoor Campus's, fishing organizations, and open house style public meetings to disseminate information and receive feedback from South Dakota anglers. It's difficult to identify with anglers if you don't take the time to talk to them and hear their concerns and share yours.

In Conclusion

The G.F.&P fisheries staff has a lot hurdles and lot of exciting challenges ahead. I appreciate all the work our fisheries do and always interested in what they have to say. From an anglers view, I see issues from on the water experience. In some cases, it is a different view point, but it's a view point on what I see and what I believe, like many other anglers. Everybody is interested in what's going to happen on Oahe, and what is the plan. Good luck and thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Missouri River Strategic Plan.

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THE IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE OF AMERICA

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Re: Missouri River Fisheries Management Plans

December 5, 2016

The South Dakota Division of the Izaak Walton League of America (Division) thanks you for this opportunity to provide comments on the Draft Fishery Management Plan for the Missouri River.

The members of the Division recognize the tremendous economic value and social importance the river has to residents and non-residents and what the fishery means to the quality of life for the people of the state. The Division commends the authors for their work on the management plans and for what they continue to do for our natural resources.

As outlined in the four plans the Division shares concerns of the impact of sediment and siltation and what it is doing to fish reproduction and recruitment.

The Division comments on the four plans also include:

Lake Oahe

Access – We support the exploration of additional boat and shore fishing access areas, including the Department working with private landowners for access to possible new locations.

Habitat - We support looking into habitat modifications that may increase fish populations and angling opportunities.

Increase Gizzard Shad Production – How do you know this proposal would work? How expensive would this be? Is there scientific data to support the proposal? We would like to see more information.

Knowledge gaps – We support the expansion of studies and research to increase understanding of recruitment and mortality of prey and sport fish. We also encourage a collaborative effort on Lake Oahe with North Dakota.

Cold Water Fishery – We encourage the Department to look at improving the cold water fishery in Oahe that could provide increased angling opportunities.

Water Management – We support the State taking a much stronger position in the Army Corps' operation of the system. We believe it is in South Dakota's best interest to protect and enhance the Missouri River.

User Group Conflicts – We support utilizing all available methods across the state to ease or eliminate conflicts between the different user groups of the Missouri River.

AIS – We agree that prevention of the spread of AIS must happen in the state. Education, awareness and enforcement of rules and regulations needs to be done. We encourage the use of mainstream and social media to get the message out to boaters and anglers and a high level of public engagement needs to be done to assure the prevention message is received and followed by people using the river.

Public and Government Interaction – More communication must be done with the public, other agencies and tribal governments on Missouri River management.

Lake Sharpe

Access – We support looking into additional sites and locations to increase and/or improve access for both boat and shore anglers. We encourage looking into reconnecting Hipple Lake to the main channel.

Habitat – We applaud the Department for the habitat enhancement project on Lake Sharpe that was installed last April. We encourage additional habitat enhancement efforts in the future. We also support exploring reconnecting Hipple Lake to the main channel of the river.

Knowledge gaps – We support increased research and studies to learn more about prey and sportfish species.

User conflicts – (Same as Oahe comment)

AIS – (Same as Oahe comment)

Interactions – (Same as Oahe comment)

Lake Francis Case

Access – We support looking into new areas that increase boat and shore access.

Habitat – We support efforts that would improve or increase habitat for prey and sport fish. We also support a study on the impacts of the winter drawdown of Francis Case on prey and sport fish.

Knowledge gaps – (Same as Lake Sharpe comment)

User conflicts – (Same as earlier comment)

AIS – We have great concerns for Francis Case with the rapidly reproducing population of zebra mussels in Lewis and Clark Lake. Education, awareness and enforcement of rules and regulations must be done to keep AIS out of Francis Case.

Interactions – (Same as above comment)

Additional comment – there is a numbering error on the Objectives and Strategies for Lake Francis Case. User Conflicts and AIS are both listed as #4. We suggest a correction and an adjustment in the subsequent Objectives to reflect the change.

Lewis and Clark Lake

Access – We support exploration of additional access sites in all areas listed in the Lewis and Clark reach.

Habitat – We encourage research on additional locations for habitat enhancement including the reconnection of backwater areas in the riverine reaches. We also support more research on the impacts of hydropeaking out of Fort Randall on sport and prey fish and aquatic invertebrates.

Knowledge gaps – (Same as earlier comments)

AIS – Again the Division has great concern in this area of the Missouri River with the rapidly growing population of Zebra Mussels in Lewis and Clark Lake and in the river below Gavins Point Dam. We are also very concerned with the high population of Asian Carp below Gavins Point Dam and in the tributaries of the Missouri River. We strongly encourage strict enforcement of rules and regulations and a high level of education and awareness to keep these AIS populations from spreading to other waters in the state.

Interactions – (Same as earlier comments).

The South Dakota Division of the Izaak Walton League of America thanks you for this opportunity to provide comments on the Missouri River Fisheries Plans. We look at the Missouri River as a true national treasure, one the state is very fortunate to have.

We thank the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Department for your past management efforts on the river and we look forward to working with you in the future and ask you please keep us informed as this process moves forward.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



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