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Ministry ponders ways to preserve angling future

You will get few arguments from anglers who would object with the Ministry of Natural Resources intentions on enhancing this province's sport

fishery through the numerous fish stocking programs.

But when the ministry has tried to attain that same goal in recent years through the implementation of a slot size limit or a reduction in possession limits, particularly on sought-after delectable species like walleyes and lake trout, anglers give it a rather lukewarm response.

After all, who wants to keep fish that they might normally return to the lake because they are too small or are too big and are not known for their edibility quality?

And who wants to be denied of an opportunity to keep fewer fish after having spent their hard-earned greenbacks on purchasing an angling licence?

That seems to be the school of thought at the outset.

The ministry though, insists these two measures are introduced to create a viable long-term sport fishery.

Slot sizes were introduced to specific bodies of water to protect the population of fish that have the ability to reproduce but were denied of an opportunity to at least spawn a couple of times in their life cycle.

On Lake Nipissing, slot sizes are implemented on walleyes between 15 inches in length and 23 inches. Thus, any walleye measuring within that specified length must be released and only those smaller than 15 inches or bigger than 23 inches can be kept.

In some instances, an angler becomes frustrated because the designated size of fish that fall in the slot limit might be the only ones they catch all day.

While frustrating a regulation this might be, the ministry are quick to point out it may not be a permanent fixture to a specific body of water.

"Slot sizes can be a tough sell," acknowledged Wil Wegman, a spokesman at the ministry district office in Aurora. "But they don't necessary have to be a full-time solution. It could be in place for four or five years. It's there to increase the population of the endangered species."



Mike Hayakawa

A reduction in possession limits has the appearance of being the lesser of the two evils and is imposed on some bodies of water to protect potential breeders. The Bay of Quinte and Lake Erie, for example, impose a possession limit of four walleyes instead of the traditional six that can be found in other areas of the province.

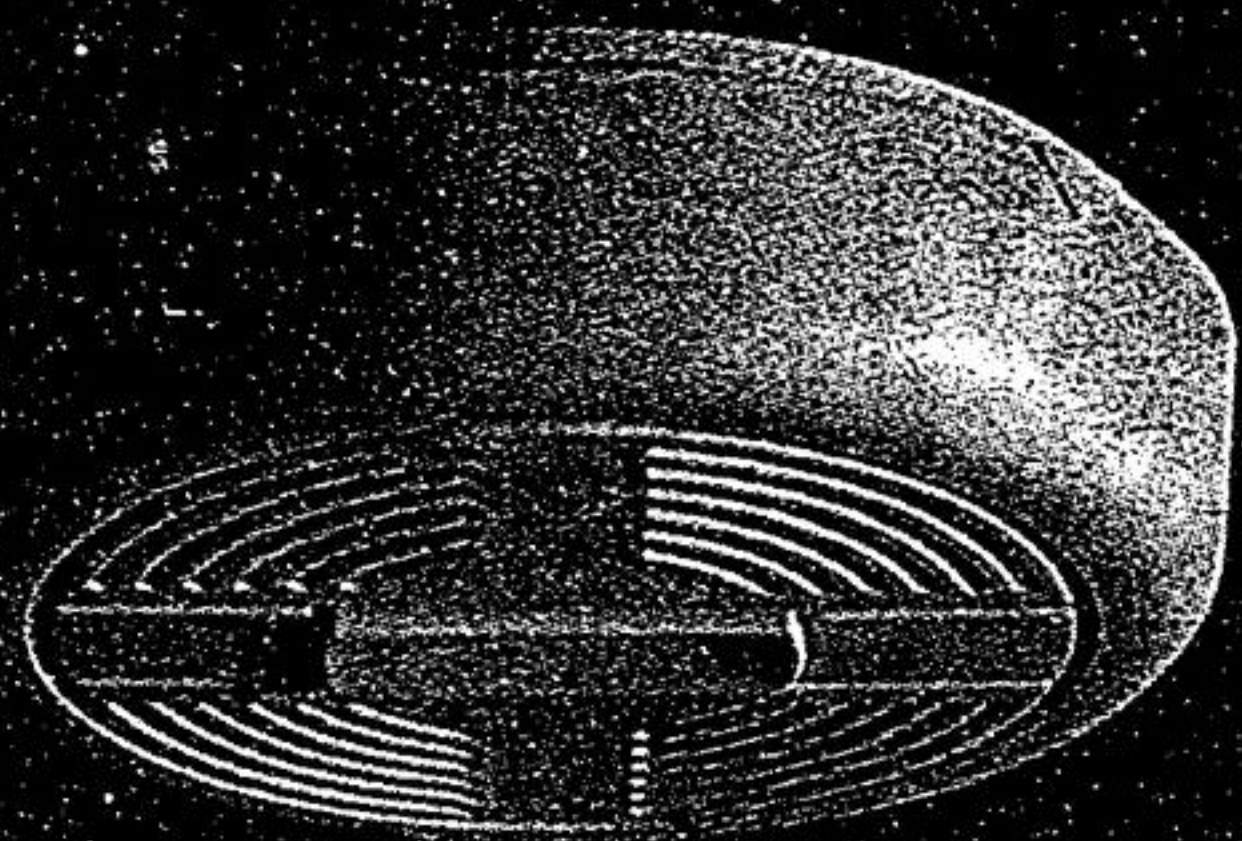
While slot sizes and possession limit reductions have for the most part, been employed in other parts of the province, they could hit close to home.

A study by the Kawartha Fisheries Association and ministry revealed the walleye populations on nearby Balsam Lake and adjacent Mitchell Lake over the last few years are in jeopardy because these fish generally spawn later than in other lakes in the Kawarthas.

The association recommended the introduction of a slot size to protect walleyes between 14 inches and 22 inches in length. As well, a possession limit reduction was suggested.

Given the choice of these two measures, anglers could live with a reduction in possession limits. It seems a growing segment of the angling public are buying the idea of selective harvesting. This can be attributed to the increasing number of live-release tournaments combined with the message that outdoor television shows and magazines attempt to deliver.

While slot sizes give an ominous connotation that fish of a specific size can be retained and a reduction in numbers kept deprives anglers of a few fish, the current regulations allowing for some fish to be kept is far better than none at all.



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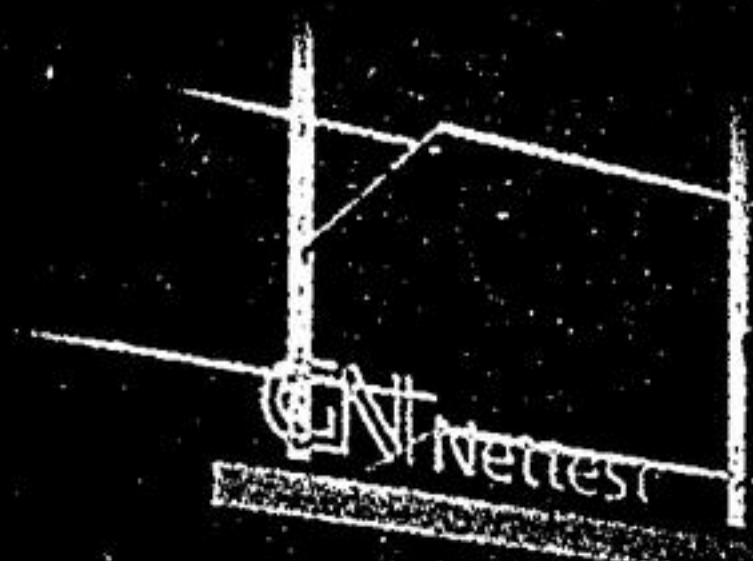
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