

# Improving Fishing for Panfish in Wisconsin

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### **Crappie Biology and Management**

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Black crappies *Pomoxis nigromaculatus* and white crappies *P. annularis* collectively support one of the most popular sport fisheries in North America, but these species can be difficult to manage. Management problems most commonly associated with crappies stem from erratic recruit-

Fish and Wildlife Service identified 11.7 million anglers as crappie fishermen and estimated annual crappie fishing pressure at 229.8 million angler-days. With the recent advent of "crappie clubs" and large-scale organized fishing tournaments, the popularity of crappie fishing has increased to an





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## Effects of Angling on Bluegill Populations: Management Implications

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**Abstract.**—Angling would affect a fish population if it increased the total mortality rate, reduced numbers or biomass, or reduced the average size of fish in a population by removing the larger ones. Data from the literature indicate that angling commonly affects populations of bluegills *Lepomis macrochirus*. Substantial exploitation rates (mean = 27%) are not unusual; exploitation is





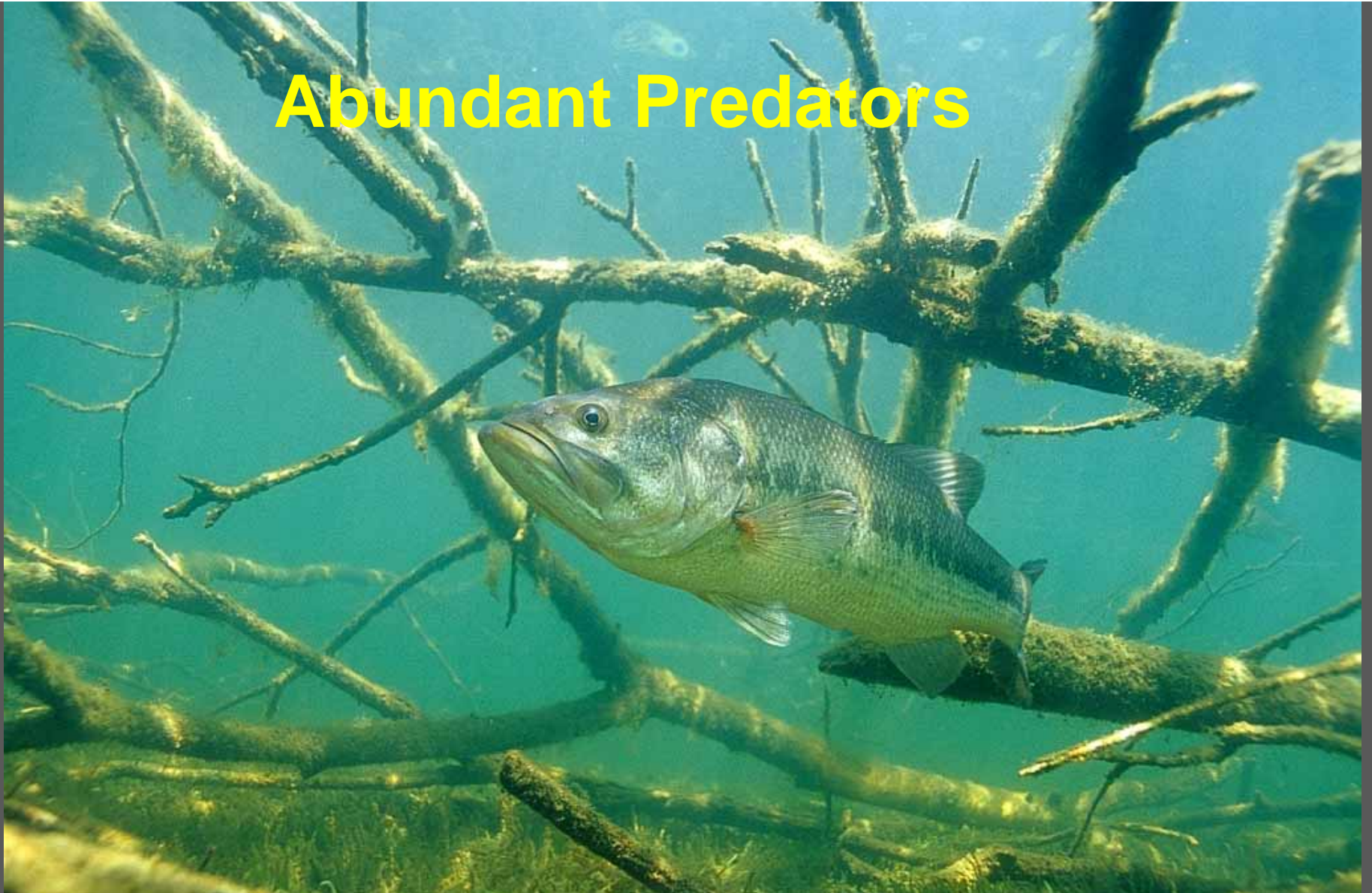
**Quality panfish:**  
**Good Growth**  
**Abundant predators**  
**Moderate harvest**

**Good Growth**





# Abundant Predators





# Moderate Harvest







# A Plan for Panfish



A management plan for  
Wisconsin's most popular fish

WDNR- Panfish Team



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# Why do we need a panfish plan?

- Despite popularity, no existing management plan for panfish!
- Anglers have concerns
- 10 year plan provides direction, strategies, and **actions** for effective panfish management in WI



## Who developed this plan?

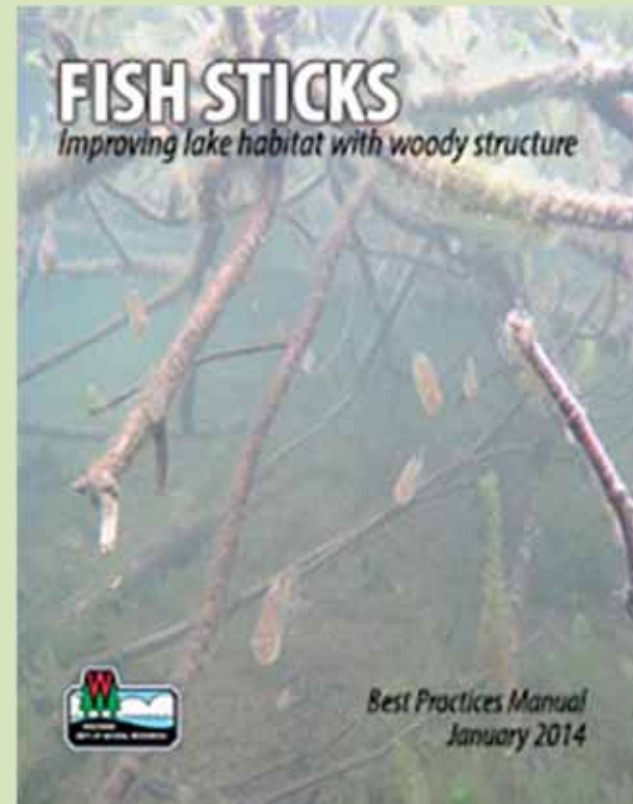
- **WDNR Panfish Team**- biologists and researchers from all over the state
- **WI Conservation Congress** members (citizens)
- **The public**- many aspects based on feedback from surveys, public meetings, and Conservation Congress proposals.





## Layout of the plan

- Goal
  - Objective
  - Strategy
  - ACTION!**



# Management Plan Goals

More than just fishing regulations...

## Goals:

1. Use an integrated ecosystem approach to protect, restore, and sustainably enhance panfish populations and habitat
2. Provide a variety of panfishing opportunities for diverse sustenance and recreational fisheries-based activities
3. Engage new and existing panfish anglers and partners
4. Base panfish management decisions on best available data and science, while incorporating social and economic perspectives

# How we plan to meet these goals

## 7 Objectives

1. Habitat
2. Angling regulations
3. Managing predation
4. Assessing populations
5. Propagation (stocking)
6. Engaging anglers
7. Science





# Protecting and improving panfish habitat

- Create healthy lake habitats -> ex. healthy lakes program
- Promote habitat conservation, identify and protect critical areas -> ex. fish sticks
- Support AIS prevention, minimize AIS impacts on panfish
- Develop strategies for winterkill and carp lakes -  
> ex. aeration projects

# Panfish Habitat







# One tree's struggle to become fish habitat

Summer, 2007. A wind storm tips a big red pine.





# One tree's struggle to become fish habitat

June, 2008. The tree disappears.





# One tree's struggle

400 years of fish habitat,  
stacked and ready to burn.





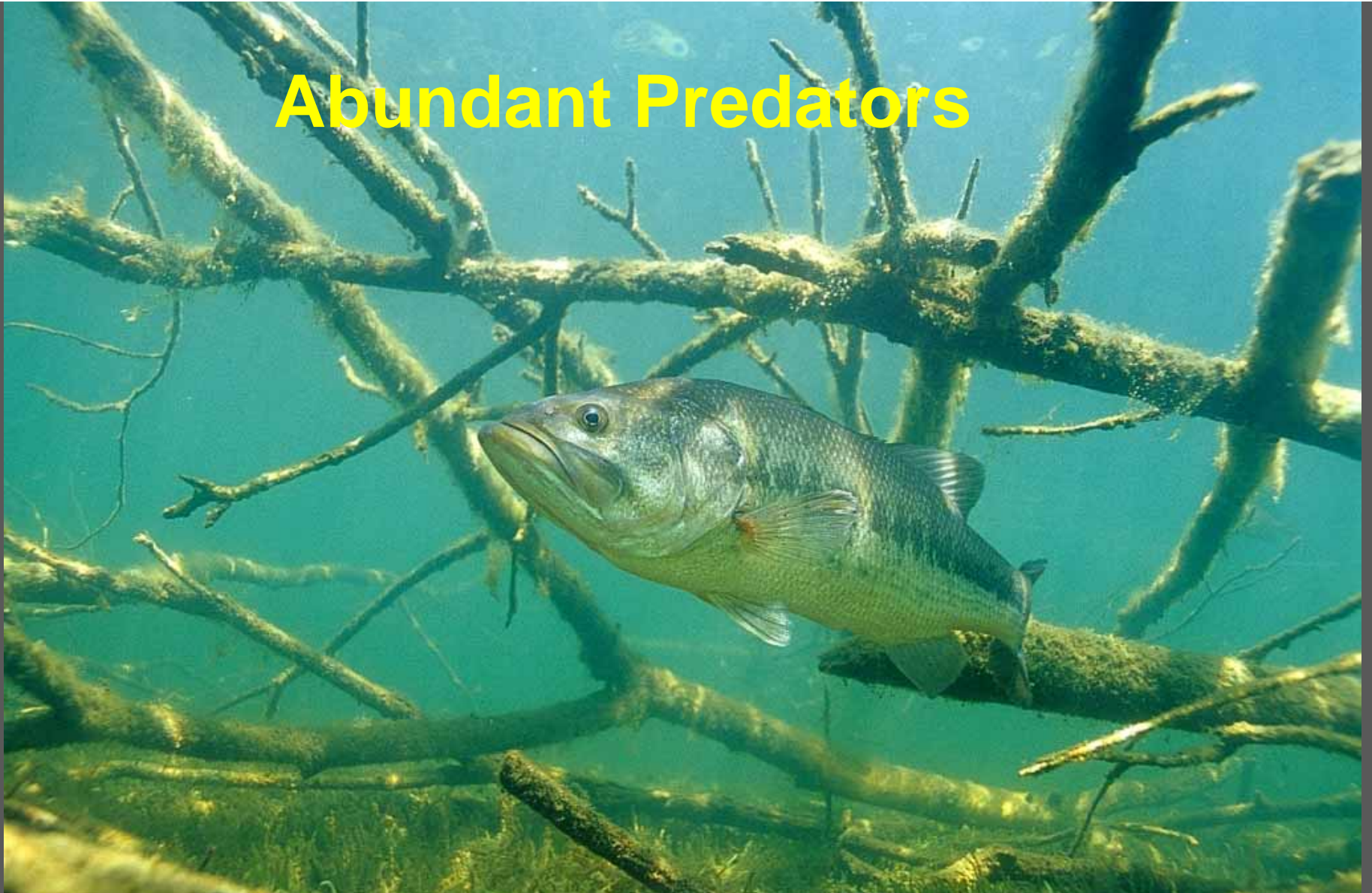








# Abundant Predators







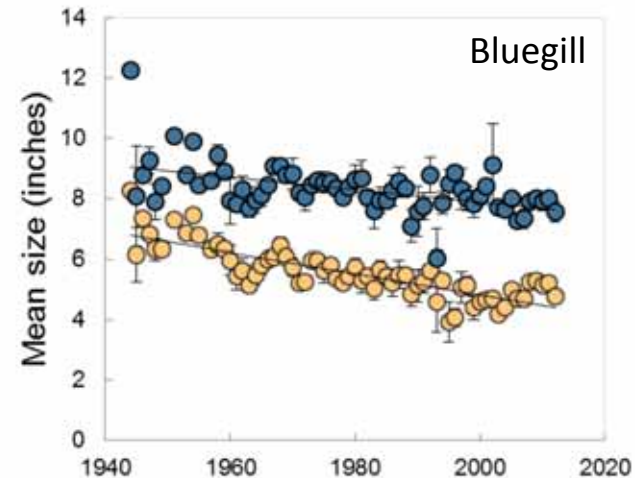


# Angler Regulations



# Wisconsin Panfish

- Trends in decreasing size
- Cause: “stunting” vs. harvest
  - “stunting” = slow growth
  - harvest = growth OK
- Restrictive regulations can improve size
  - Regulation must affect harvest
  - Reduced bags show potential increases in mean length of 1”



# Planning for panfish: public input

- Voluntary angler survey, 30 public meetings, focus group, 2014 CC spring hearing questions
- No consensus on statewide problem or need for change but interest in addressing “problem” lakes





# Addressing lakes with poor panfish size

- Unclear which regulation most effective and socially acceptable
  - Biological and social tradeoffs

GOAL: Increase average size of bluegill and crappie and identify which regulation is most effective

APPROACH: Apply best three regulations in a varied but structured manner and evaluate

An underwater photograph showing several small, dark-colored fish swimming in clear, greenish water. The scene is filled with a dense network of thin, light-colored branches and twigs, some of which are thicker and darker. The fish are scattered throughout the frame, some near the branches and others in the open water. The lighting is bright, creating a clear view of the fish and the surrounding environment.

**Manage for mediocrity:  
Liberal bag limit, no length  
limit, no closed season.**





**Restrictive bag limit.**

**25 panfish, 10 per species  
OR  
15 panfish, 5 per species**



**Spawning season restrictions.**





A photograph of a bluegill fish in a stream. The fish is positioned in the center, facing left. It has a yellowish-green body with a prominent blue stripe along its side and a blue dorsal fin. The background shows a rocky stream bed with fallen leaves and a large log. The text "Spawning season restrictions." is overlaid in yellow at the top, and "15 panfish / 5 of any species during May & June." is overlaid in yellow at the bottom.

**Spawning season restrictions.**

**15 panfish / 5 of any species  
during May & June.**

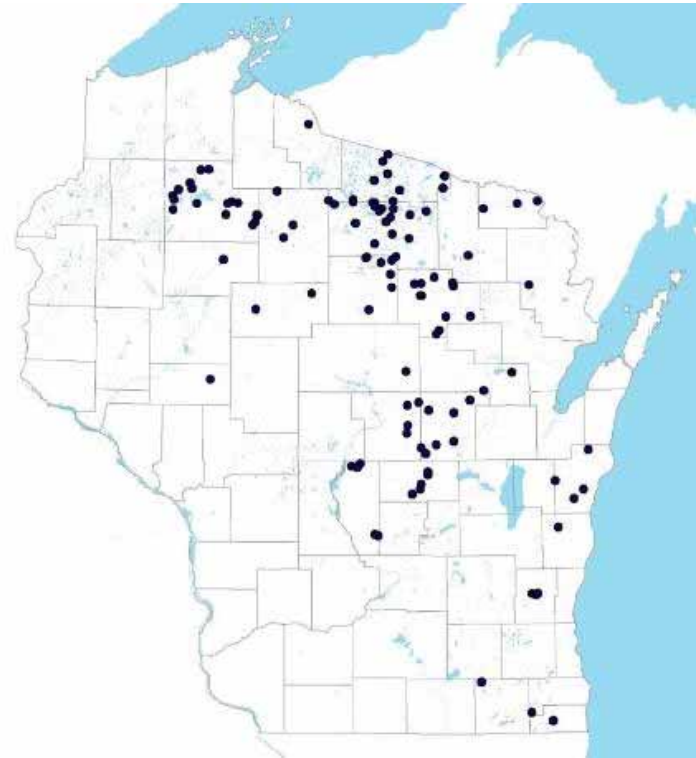
# Experimental Panfish Regulations

- 10-bag: 10 crappie, 10 perch, 10 bluegill, 10 pumpkinseed (25 in total).
- 5-bag: 5 crappie, 5 perch, 5 bluegill, 5 pumpkinseed (15 in total).
- Seasonal 5-bag: only in affect during May and June.



# The lakes

- Statewide in coverage but not extent
  - About 100 lakes
- Initial evaluation in 6 years and results reviewed for broader application



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