



DARKHOUSE ANGLER



APRIL 2007

Michigan Darkhouse Angling Association

N5160 Bass Lake Road - Iron Mountain, MI 49801

The Michigan Darkhouse Angling Association actively works to establish equality of winter spearing and angling among all resident fishermen and to provide sound conservation practices of our sport.

MDAA

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Tom Richards

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Unless you were spending the winter along the Gulf Coast, you experienced one mixed up winter for Darkhouse angling. In southern Michigan most waters didn't have good ice until late January. In the north and Upper Peninsula it was late coming too. With cold temperatures and a lack of snow, getting around was the best it has been in years. When you have a limited amount of days to practice our angling method, it seems we were cheated out of some good fishing. Most made the best of it and February dealt us good ice all the way down to Lake St. Clair and the Detroit River.

We had a successful weekend in late January to film with Michigan Out-Of-Doors Producer, Gabe VanWormer and former MOOD host Jenny Olson. The subsequent show aired two weeks later on MUCC's regular Thursday evening programming. It was a great hit and we were swamped with information requests about Darkhouse angling. You can read the article in the newsletter. Oh, and Jenny Olson is even prettier in person.

I was talking with a member about the progress and support for Darkhouse angling we have from the angling public and fisheries division and he said, "Yes, but watch the fisheries people go and subvert the will of the people." His statement made me think of the past management decisions made by our fisheries managers. I remember reading articles about the Musky, Inc. mission to close lakes open to spearing northern pike in Minnesota when musky was planted in a lake. This effort was started in the late 60's along with reportedly, support from fishermen everywhere.

Their propaganda continued through the years, influencing many state fish managers to ban spearing as a tool negative to the angling experience. Musky, Inc. spread, seemingly truthful, information regarding the planting of muskies in more and more waters across the northern tier of states, which had a long tradition of Darkhouse angling. Their information gave no concern about the rights of Darkhouse anglers, viewing their methods negative toward growing large muskies for musky fishermen.

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Understandably, Darkhouse anglers looked at the Musky, Inc. propaganda as an attempt to end their angling method. Knowing you can't put a value on our cultural heritage, Darkhouse anglers organized and studied the Musky, Inc. attempts to push their agenda. In the past several years, concern about uncontrolled musky plantings by state fisheries managers has come under scrutiny. Musky are an introduced, exotic species that are non-native to most northern states.

It turns out that what Musky, Inc. has told fishermen and fisheries managers is not true. Research has found that muskies consume more native game fish than has been reported, reducing and in some cases wiping out previously healthy populations of native species. Populations of walleye, bluegill, crappies and other native game fish species are all affected by introduction of the non-native musky into bodies of waters that took Mother Nature thousands of years to make compatible.

This information, along with the very low numbers of actual musky anglers, have contributed to angling groups to question states fisheries managers about the introduction of the non-native musky into lakes with healthy native fish species.

After years of attempting to work with fisheries managers in Minnesota for fairer treatment of Darkhouse anglers, Minnesota spear fishermen decided to take a new path to advance their argument of fairness for Darkhouse anglers. After many months of research gathering of studies done by states on muskies, they formed Sportsmen for Responsible Musky Management (SFRMM). SFRMM has teamed up with Northerns, Inc. and the Minnesota Darkhouse Angling Association to spearhead this effort. The information gathered is interesting and they have just hit the tip of the iceberg. You can read about the research done in several states on their website, www.muskytroubles.com

When presented with these studies and information about the negative impact of introduced muskies on resident game fish populations, fisheries managers were at first reluctant to accept the facts. Attorney Kirk Schnitker, spokesman for SFRMM, said, "After meetings with the DNR, the DNR has decided to start over with its musky management plans and have put a hold on plans to stock two lakes with muskies. Concern for the resource comes first and when concern comes first, generally good fisheries management will follow." Kirk Schnitker has been appointed by Minnesota's Governor to a board to study the Minnesota DNR's policies and procedures.

Making law changes and fishing closures that support one angling method at the cost of another angling groups method is wrong. Discrimination, however perceived by fisheries division, is still discrimination.

Can you help??

Do you live in the Genesee County (Flint, MI) area and have an interest in teaching a short decoy carving workshop for kids and/or adults during the 2007 summer session? The workshops could be held on Monday, Tuesday or Thursday evenings. If you live in the area and are interested, please contact Nancy Edwards with the Genesee County Parks Department. Her contact info is listed below:

Nancy Edwards
nedwards@gc.parks.org
www.GeneseeCountyParks.org
1-800-648-Park



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Darkhouse Serenity

Being a spearing enthusiast living in a predominately non-spearing state can be tough. When I do get a chance to make a "road trip" I'm fired up. Firstly, there's a whirlwind of activity to finish some last minute decoys, bring equipment up to par, organize it, and get it in the truck.

Secondly, I want to be on good water, a lake where I'm going to see some eating size fish, and also have a chance at a big one. I start doing my lake homework. This is where step 3 comes in.

Step 3 I'm networking with my spearing buddies to find out where I need to be and lining up time for some camaraderie after a day on the ice. It's not all about spearing when I'm on the road; I need to socialize with my fellow carver/spearers when I can. And have a chance to see their new work, or someone's collection of decoys and spearing memorabilia.

Along with all this road trip prep work, the actual drive to the destination can be a white-knuckle experience in winter weather. Winter storms tend to blow in the minute I hit the truck seat, and can make for some long rides into the night.

With all this you can see why I'm envious of guys who live near their spearing waters. Plus a guy who has quick access to a permanent shack on their favorite lake is a king in my book.

Once all the road work is done and I'm on "THE SPOT", have cut a hole, and set up my portable shanty, only then does all this work and preparation pay off. Getting in position, grabbing that favorite decoy out of the box, dropping it in, and having a pike come in (even if he's just a "pickler") is a great start to any day. Of course, getting a throw at a nice big pike will only add to the experience.

But there's another part to this day that really puts the cherry on top of an already good day. That's when you've finally relaxed from the prep work, the road trip and you've got the "pike skunk" out of the shack by sticking an early morning target. It's usually later in your day, and usually you're watching an old reliable decoy go through its moves and then it happens... Not an event, but this great feeling of serenity comes over you. A feeling of total ease and peace because you're finally doing what you really enjoy. Sitting in the dark, watching the decoy you've made with your own hands do its thing, with only the hiss of a heater to break the silence. It's like, "I've waited months for this day, and it can't get any better, and it doesn't need to."

So if you're keeping score on your spearing trips, how many, how big and so on. You might want to add another measure to the category, how good did that make me feel and how soon can I do it again?

I hope your season brought you a few pike, and a bunch of dark house serenity.

Doug Davis



Our yearly fundraiser helps pay the bills for the exposure we need to keep MDAA in the sporting public's eyes. Many of you support MDAA with donations of money when you send in your yearly memberships. We thank you for this support.

If you would like to donate items such as fish decoys, fish spears, lures, and almost any sporting collectibles old or new. All items are put up for auction on E-bay which has been very successful in the past. Please ship items to Mike Holmes and he will handle putting the items on E-bay. This is YOUR organization, the support you give MDAA helps all Darkhouse anglers continue to practice their angling method.

Writers Needed

We need you to write an article for the MDAA newsletter. People enjoy first hand experiences relating to Darkhouse spearing. How about encouraging your child, friend, or father to write an article? We would also like to see more good, quality photos.

Ideas:

Winter fishing experiences - angling or spearing, winter fishing tips, conservation issues pertaining to northern pike or muskies, fish decoy carvers/spearmakers from your area, experiences at a resort or bait shop that cater to spearers, or youth activities for young anglers.

The newsletter is only as good as you want it to be. Your contribution to its enjoyment is important.

MEMOIRS FROM A DARKHOUSE

By Jonathan Labs

It was early in the morning as we walked across the lake to our darkhouse. The sun was starting to lighten the sky as we carried our gear and supplies toward the bay where we would spend our day. We had a pail of firewood to keep us warm, some sandwiches and soda for lunch, a spud to open the hole, and of course, my trusted spear and decoy box.

We could see our breath in the crisp air and hear the snow crunch under our boots with every step on the frozen water beneath our feet. The sound of a turkey flying down from its roost in the trees told us to hurry up, and that the sunrise was coming. We reached our shack and I climbed inside. I put some paper and cedar kindling into the small wood stove and lit a match to start the fire. We would be quite warm in a little while.

With our anticipation starting to rise, we took the spud and began to open the hole in the center of the shack. We then removed all the ice to give us a clear view of the potato peels at the bottom of the lake.

My decoy box and spear were then handed into the shack. I have several spears hanging on my wall at home. Most of these were handmade by a blacksmith many years ago. The craftsmanship that went into making these spears back then has turned into a lost art today. I enjoy finding and collecting old spears. I look for spears with even proportions and nice flowing lines. They make a nice display on the wall of my den. I made the spear that we would be using today. My spear has seven tines and is attached to a 24-inch hexagonal shaft and a hardwood handle with carvings of fish and weeds on it that fits nicely into my hand. Harvesting a fish with a spear you made brings even more fun and enjoyment to the sport for me.

We then needed to choose a bait to start with. Live or dead bait always works well, but I enjoy using a handmade decoy. The decoy we chose to start with today was one of the first decoys I made. It is all beat up and the paint is starting to peel off the brass fins. It doesn't swim particularly well, but the fish seem to like it on this lake. I've had several fish flash into my hole and just slam this decoy. They usually release it and pause just long enough for you to throw your spear, if you're fast.

Making decoys also adds another dimension to the darkhouse angling sport. When I'm not on the lake, I can often times be found in my workshop carving another decoy. I really enjoy making decoys, and when they lure in a pike, it is satisfying to see that the bait you made is working well. My decoy box is full of decoys. Most of them I made. Some are from friends, and others were traded for or maybe bought at an antique store.

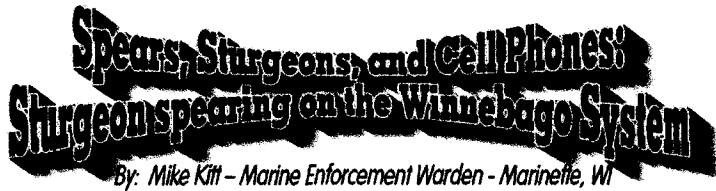
My partner today was my five-year old son. This would be his second time out spear fishing. We tied on our decoy and set it in the water. It wasn't swimming quite right, so I pulled it up out of the water and started to adjust the fins. Just then Michael says very calmly, "There is a big pike Daddy." I was surprised to hear him say that after only being in the shack for a few minutes. I looked down into the water and didn't see anything. I then leaned forward to look under my seat. There was a nice three-foot pike cruising right under me. I quick grabbed my spear and threw it down at the fish as it swam through the corner of my hole. With a silt starting to rise and reduce the visibility in my hole, I started to pull up the rope attached to my spear. I soon realized there was nothing on my spear but a few weeds and nothing more. As we waited for the silt to settle down we talked about the big one that got away. We put some more wood on the fire and removed our coats. It was time to get ready for the next fish.

As the time went by, I showed Michael how to make the decoy swim in a nice circle and then let it rest. While we were letting the decoy rest and do its job, we were both looking down into the hole when suddenly the water erupted in front of us as a muskrat surfaced in our hole for a breath of air. We both jumped up as the unexpected guest quickly dove back under the ice, as surprised as we were to see another mammal.

It was now time to crack open a soda and switch decoys. Michael wanted to use the decoy that we made together and he painted. It was a medium sized pike-colored decoy. As you can imagine, the paint job was quite remarkable for a five-year old.

We soon after decided to eat our sandwiches and have an early lunch. After a while of waiting and working our decoy, we saw a pike swim in slowly from the side of our hole. We decided it was big enough to take. As the pike slowly moved toward our decoy, I thrust the spear down at the unsuspecting fish. Once again the silt started to rise from the bottom of the lake, but this time there was a nice pike attached to the end of my spear. We opened the door of the darkhouse and threw the fish out onto the frozen ice. We would later filet the 28-inch pike and fry breaded fish sticks for dinner.

After waiting a little while longer, Michael was wondering if it was time to go home, and seeing how we had a fish for supper, I thought it was a good idea. So we packed up our gear and headed back to the truck with memories that will last a lifetime, and one nice fish.



When a person with any prior knowledge thinks about sturgeon spearing through the ice in Wisconsin, they probably envision something similar to watching an unplugged television set. And for the most part, that is a pretty accurate depiction.

That is unless you happen to hit it just right. For 25 years I have either worked the sturgeon spearing season as a Conservation Warden, or participated as a spearer. In that time I have stared down an awful lot of holes with little or no results. That is, until the 2007 season.

It all started one day in September, when I received a DNR letter in the mail. I figured it was either my "pink slip" or my earn-a-buck sticker. Much to my surprise, it was an upriver lakes sturgeon tag.

Lake Winnebago is open every year to anyone who purchases a separate sturgeon license. The three lakes upriver (Butte Des Morts, Winneconne, and Poygan) of Winnebago are considered a nursery for young fish and staging area for pre-spawn fish, and were only open once every five years to spearing. Beginning in 2007 the upriver lakes will be open every year with a limited number of tags issued in a lottery system. 2007 kicked off with a possible 500 tags available and 482 of those were actually purchased by the deadline. A system was set up whereby certain numbers of adult females, juvenile females, and males harvested, would trigger the closure of the season. This harvest cap insures against over harvest like the system has experienced several times in the past.

The afternoon before the season opener found me "cut in" on Lake Poygan in an area known to contain a lot of sturgeon in past years. I set up my canvass teepee and planned to watch for several hours to see if any fish were around. Soon I was joined by retired Conservation Warden Steve Schlimgen, who also drew a "highly coveted" upriver tag. I directed him to a likely looking area not far from my location. I watched for several hours and observed several Gar and some "well-fed" walleyes, but no sturgeon. None of the less, I was encouraged for the following morning.

Join the Minnesota DAA

Support for Darkhouse angling comes from many sources and locations. One is the Minnesota Darkhouse and Angling Association. They are our sister club. You can support Darkhouse angling by joining their great organization. Because their organization has been in existence longer than our MDAA, they have more members with 17 chapters throughout Minnesota. Unlike our small MDAA newsletter, the Minnesota group has evolved to a bi-monthly, newspaper style newsletter that is full of lots of information pertaining to Darkhouse angling. Dues are \$10 per year. We have many Minnesota Darkhouse anglers that are supporting members of our Michigan MDAA. They support our fundraiser with donated items even though many never spear in Michigan.

I urge you to support the Minnesota organization by checking out their website at: www.mndarkhouse.org or by sending the \$10 membership to:

Minnesota Darkhouse & Angling Association
PO Box 1875
Burnsville, MN 55337
(952) 895-1774

The next morning found me at my portable shack at the 6:30 opening time. I quickly opened the hole and put out my decoy and prepared for the vigil to follow. Within minutes I saw a sturgeon. It was not very big – maybe 36”, but it was a sturgeon all the same – my first! Soon I was seeing walleyes, gar, and a nearly 40” northern pike. I am an avid pike spearer in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, and am used to seeing big pike, but putting a 40” pike in front of me when the season is closed is like putting a cookie in front of a child and telling them not to eat it. I stayed the course and continued the vigil.

At 8:20 am my cell phone rang. It was my boss and a fellow spearer, who was spearing on Winnebago – calling to see what I was seeing. I was explaining what a thrilling morning I was having, when I looked down and saw the unmistakable head of a sturgeon appear in the hole. This one was considerably larger than the previous sturgeon. I’m no stranger to big pike, but the sight of a more than legal sturgeon in the hole is a thrill that is unmatched, and downright terrifying! With the phone still in my hand, I grabbed the spear with my free hand and made a one-handed throw. My spear flew true, and as I took up the fight I apologized to my fellow spearman for hanging up as I heard his raucous laughter in the background.

Sooner than expected, the fight was over, and I had the fish on the ice and outside of the tent. Once I was able to stifle my uncontrollable shaking, I tagged the fish and pulled out my tape ruler. The fish taped out at 48” – not huge by sturgeon standards, but a thrill in my mind! I called my friend Steve over and we “high-fived” in celebration.

Once I had my gear squared away, I sat with my friend in his shack. In the next 30 minutes we had a big sturgeon swim by the edge of the hole, and a smaller, but still legal fish swim right through the hole.

I then set out to spread my “luck” around. I sat in another shack which contained another spearing friend of mine a short distance away. I sat with him for about 20 minutes when my cell phone rang again. I answered the phone and never heard the voice on the other end when we saw a large sturgeon enter the hole. I hung up just as my friend threw the spear. Soon the fight was on as the fish made big sweeps around the hole. After the customary “throwing out of the furniture”, we landed a fat 56” fish. My record now sat at 5 sturgeon in 4 hours!

A short time later, I went back to friend Steve’s shack, only to find out he had missed 2 big fish while I was gone. When the season closed for the day at 12:30, Steve had seen 6 sturgeon. The following day Steve saw 2 more fish and finally speared a 52” sturgeon.

When all was said and done, 12 sturgeon were seen in 3 shacks in 1 ½ mornings of spearing. Sturgeon spearing is anything but boring – when you are in the right spot!




Photo of Mike Kitt



On Friday January 26th, Michigan Out-Of-Doors Producer, Gabe VanWormer and former host of MOOD Jenny Olson, came up to Iron County to film a Darkhouse angling show for their program. Later that evening they did an interview with me about the MDAA and building fish decoys. On Saturday, we headed to a lake in southern Iron County to try our luck at spearing. The lake we choose has no size limit on Northern Pike and a 5 fish creel limit. Natural Resource Commissioner, Bob Garner was there along with MI Conservation Officer Dave Painter and Dave’s two sons. We were able to spear three pike that Gabe and Jenny captured on film and saw many more during the morning filming. Northern Pike lakes with no size limit are great lakes to get kids started on spearing. After a fruitful morning of spearing, we had a nice noon lunch to top out the days activities.

The episode aired two weeks later on the regular Michigan-Out-Of-Doors Thursday evening program. I had telephone calls and emails from all over Michigan and parts of Wisconsin from members and non-members saying how much they enjoyed the program. I kept track of the number of hits we had on our MDAA website thru the weekend and in three days, we had just over 425 people view our website. We had a lot inquiries about Darkhouse angling and many found the information we have on the website very helpful.

MDAA is an affiliate of Michigan-Out-Of-Doors.



When we talk about winter Darkhouse angling (spearing), the first things that come to mind are Oscar "Pelee" Peterson and Jim Nelson fish decoys and Cadillac, Michigan. Cadillac, Michigan is considered the birthplace of the collectable fish decoy. Oscar Peterson fish decoys, 1887-1951, today command many thousands of dollars at auction. So it is only fitting that a local Cadillac, Michigan resort and fishing shop, include a winter spearing contest.

Forty some Darkhouse folks pre-registered for the Fifth Annual, Pilgrim Village and Fishing Shop, Free Winter Spearing Derby. The season long event is sponsored by Steve and Susan Knaisel's Pilgrim village and the Michigan Darkhouse Angling Association. Even with dismal ice conditions at the start of the spearing season, Darkhouse anglers turned in some very respectable Northerns.

The sponsor's position of "selective harvest" is well respected by everyone who participated in the derby.

Winners of the Pilgrim Village Spearing Contest are as follows:

First Place—Brian Kanouse—Pike—37 3/8 inch, 15.22 pounds—Signs of Wildlife and a Custom made spear by Tom Richards.

Second Place—George Fox—37 inch, 14 pounds—Shappell Jet Sled

Third Place—Aneta McCallister—31. inch, 9.2 pounds—Polar tip-up

Fourth Place—Chris Hansen—30 1/2 inch, 6.8 pounds—Michigan Darkhouse T-shirt and hat.

Fifth Place—Tom Richards—29 inch, 6.8 pounds—Custom made Priest by Richards.

Sixth Place—Ross Willis—27 . inch, 5 pounds—Bear Creek Decoy from K&E Tackle

Seventh Place—Karl Kotimaki—27 . inch, 5.1 pounds—Bear Creek Decoy from K&E Tackle

Eighth Place—Gary Swinger—27 . inch, 5 pounds—Bear Creek Decoy from K&E Tackle

Ninth Place—R.J.Willis—27 . inch, 4.5 pounds—Bear Creek Decoy from K&E Tackle

Tenth Place—Ed Shankland—26 . inch, 4.3 pounds—Bear Creek Decoy from K&E Tackle

Congratulations to the winners and to all who participated. Mother nature gave us a short season. See you all next year.

Tom Richards



Brian Kanouse - 1st place



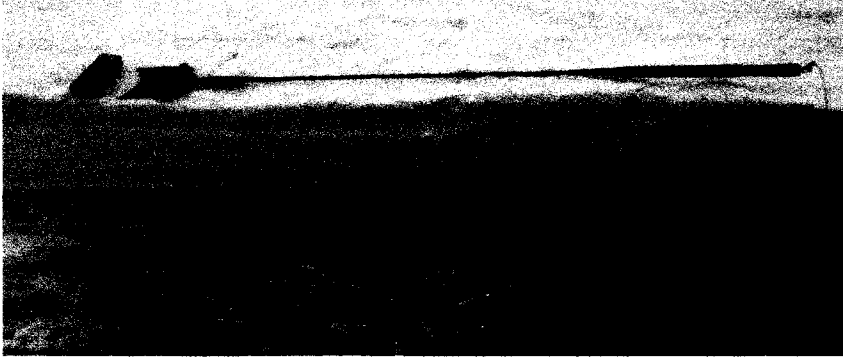
George Fox - 2nd place



Aneta McCallister - 3rd place

SMELT SPEARING

By Ross Willis



Most Darkhouse anglers know that there is a very popular spearing season for yellow perch on Lake St. Clair, but have you ever tried spearing smelt, at night using a light? Smelt spearing, through the ice, during the January-February Darkhouse angling season is becoming very popular. This year spearing action was "discovered" by MDAA member Ross Willis of Boon, Michigan. With input from the Eichenberg brothers of Ewart, MI spear maker Tom Richards made a couple

of prototype smelt spears to capture the smelt action. He settled on a lightweight, fifteen tine Cadillac style, barbless spear. Lake St. Clair perch spearers use barbless spears to harvest their quarry.

Willis, on his trial Higgins Lake outing did, 'very well' combining hook and line fishing and spearing. Using a submerged light, four or five feet under the ice surface, he found the smelt were easiest to hit. The smelt light was periodically raised from a deeper depth until the smelt came into that range. It was good, 'hand-to-eye' practice for northern pike spearing, which was slow this season. Night hook and line smelt fishing is very popular on Higgins Lake. Add to the mix a smelt spear, and you have the fixings of a great evening outing for the family.

WISCONSIN STURGEON SEASON RESULTS

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Winnebago Sturgeon Biologist, Ron Bruch is to be commended for his successful change in the handling of the numbers of sturgeon spearers, seasons and new sturgeon lottery. Bruch and his Winnebago Citizens Sturgeon Advisory Committee, made a major change this year in the Upriver Lakes sturgeon season, to protect the concentrated stocks of sturgeon and maintain a spearing season on those waters. The Upriver Lakes lottery of 500 sturgeon tags, was a huge success and was well received by sturgeon spearers. The Upriver Lakes lottery will continue each year instead of an open season ever 5 years.

The 2007 season began on Saturday February 10 and ran the full 16 days on Lake Winnebago and 6 days on the Upriver Lakes with a 65% success rate.

A total of 8533 sturgeon spearing licenses were sold: 8048 for Lake Winnebago (7915 resident and 133 non-resident), and 485 for the Upriver Lakes (482 resident and 3 non-resident) Darkhouses on the Upriver Lakes were 325 while on Lake Winnebago by the second weekend was 4633.

System-wide sturgeon harvest was 1347, with the largest sturgeon harvested weighing in at 158# and 74". Three from our Darkhouse fraternity were successful this year. Jeremy Kraemer and Dennis Bertram from Minnesota connected with 41#, 56" and 39#, 55 1/2" on Lake Winnebago. Jeremy is a spear maker and Dennis is a maker of fish decoys. The third person MDAA member, Michael Kitt who was lucky enough to get drawn for the Upriver Lakes. Mike's sturgeon was 48". Mike is one of the many Wisconsin Conservation Wardens that are active members of MDAA and my spearing partners.

Interest in starting a Wisconsin Darkhouse Angling Association, is growing in Wisconsin. With the huge numbers of sturgeon spearers in Wisconsin, efforts to open spearing of pike and musky in Wisconsin waters should go smoothly.

North Dakota Pike Spearing 5-Year Recap

FROM THE BEGINNING

In the February 2007 issue of the North Dakota Outdoors Magazine, published by the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, was the article, "Pike Spearing, 5-Year Recap", that was very informative.

North Dakota established a Darkhouse angling season starting in 2001, after public support for winter spearing was recognized. The North Dakota State Legislature "passed a law in 2001 requiring the Game and Fish Department to establish some type of season that would allow spearing of northern pike through the ice. At the time, many North Dakota fishing waters had excellent pike populations and spearing was considered a new recreational opportunity." The proposed spearing season was not without concern from some anglers. I spoke with several North Dakota residents that said the few anglers that were against the proposed December, January and February spearing season were fishing guides and catch & release angling groups. As is in most states that have a winter Darkhouse angling season, these same, greedy, self-serving angling groups don't care about anyone else but their interests. Some anglers raised concerns about, "potential over-harvest", forgetting that legal size fish belong to all licensed anglers and releasing or harvesting is an option.

North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries division chief Greg Powers said, "The legislature gave us a lot of ability to set rules and regulations as we saw fit. We did take the conservative approach and continue to do so."

Continued on page 9

In 2001, 24 lakes were opened to spearing. At the start of the 2006-2007 season, "just under 40 lakes were open to spearing." The article stated that of the lakes open to spearing, "about half will experience an estimated spearing harvest of fewer than 10 fish each, and few of them won't attract much if any spearing activity."

HIGH HARVEST CONCERNS

On the other hand, lakes with clear water may attract spearing activity even if the fish population isn't great. That factor has been the basis for concerns of over-harvesting pike from certain lakes. Generally, that has not yet materialized. Power said, because spearing accounts for such a small percentage of the annual northern pike catch.

For instance, Game and Fish estimated a statewide pike harvest of 235,000 from April 2004 through March 2005. About 3,600 fish from that total, or 1.5 percent, were taken by spearing, Power noted.

While pike taken by spearing average about a pound larger than pike taken by angling, either summer or winter, the overall number is so small that the potential for taking out too many big fish hasn't been a major concern for biologists.

THE NEXT 5 YEARS

Now that the initial surge is past and participation has leveled off, Power doesn't anticipate that darkhouse spearfishing participation will change much either way unless overall pike populations change.

People have also discovered that Darkhouse spearfishing can be a lot of work. On the other hand, the appearance of a large northern pike stalking a decoy creates the same type of anxious moment that, like the triggering of a tip-up or submersion of a bobber, lures people back again and again.

"It's a niche fishery," Power said. "I don't see it ever becoming anything more than that. We'll continue to monitor its impacts, but it's nice to know that some people sure enjoy it."

I've taken the "meat and potatoes" out of the article for your reading. But, most Darkhouse anglers know this about our sport already. It was refreshing to see the positive side of winter spearing coming from fisheries managers that are new to the experience of Darkhouse angling.

MDAA has promoted "increased angling opportunities" for winter fishing anglers all along. The North Dakota State Legislature, in passing this legislation in 2001, mandating the North Dakota Department of Game and Fish to establish a northern pike spearing season, recognized winter Darkhouse angling as, a "new recreational opportunity".

MDAA, up to now, has not needed legislative action to reopen bodies of waters closed to Darkhouse angling by the Michigan fisheries division. We continue to maintain support for Darkhouse angling from organizations like the Michigan United Conservation Clubs and Upper Peninsula Sportsmens Alliance as well as overwhelming public support. We feel our dealings with Michigan fisheries personal has been positive and progressive and we will continue to promote Darkhouse angling until such a time as past spearing closures are reversed.



W A N T E D	Vintage Fish Spearing Decoys
	Old Spears
	Handcarved Fish Plaques
	Decoy Boxes
	& Old Spearing Photos
	Contact
	Tim Speck - Box 462 - Stillwater, MN 55082
	(651) 439-1110
	fishdecoy@fishdecoy.net

The following fish disease information was summarized from information available from the Michigan DNR and the New York State DEC. VHS can have a dramatic detrimental affect on our fishery resources.

What is VHS?

Viral hemorrhagic septicemia (VHS) virus is a serious pathogen of fresh and saltwater fish that is causing an emerging disease in the Great Lakes region of the United States and Canada. VHS affects fish of all size and age ranges. It does not pose any threat to human health. VHS can cause hemorrhaging of fish tissue, including internal organs, and can cause the death of infected fish. Once a fish is infected with VHS, there is no known cure. Not all infected fish develop the disease, but they can carry and spread the disease to other fish. VHS has been blamed for fish kills in Lake Huron, Lake St. Clair (MI), Lake Erie, Lake Ontario, the St. Lawrence River and Conesus Lake (Western NY).

What is the history of VHS?

VHS was first discovered in the mid 20th Century in Europe where it was originally a significant and costly disease of cultured rainbow trout. In 2005, a very large die-off of freshwater drum in Lake Ontario and a muskellunge kill in Lake St. Clair were linked to VHS, representing the first documentation of the disease in freshwater in the western hemisphere. A subsequent test of an archived muskellunge collected from Lake St. Clair in 2003 tested positive for the virus, indicating that the virus was present, but undetected in the Great Lakes system for at least two years. In 2006, additional fish kills in Lake Huron, Lake Erie, Lake Ontario, the St. Lawrence River and Conesus Lake were linked to VHS. Species involved in fish kills included muskellunge, smallmouth bass, northern pike, freshwater drum, lake whitefish, gizzard shad, yellow perch, black crappie, bluegill, rock bass, white bass, redhorse sucker, round goby, burbot and walleye. Other freshwater fish species that have tested positive for VHS are chinook salmon, bluntnose minnows and emerald shiners.

How is VHS spread?

VHS can be spread from one water body to the next through a variety of means, not all of which are known at this time. One known method of spreading VHS is moving fish from one water body to another. This can be done by importation, stocking, or the use of bait fish. Other potential sources of VHS spreading are natural fish movements, recreational boating/angling, bird assistance, ballast water discharge, and sampling activities.

What can be done to prevent the spread of VHS?

To reduce the likelihood of spreading VHS anglers and boaters are encouraged to abide by the following guidelines:

- * Do not transport fish from one body of water to another;
- * Only release bait fish into the water body it was taken from. Bait purchased commercially should not be released into any body of water;

* Do not dispose of fish carcasses or by-products in any body of water.

- * Remove all mud, aquatic plants and animals from all gear, boats, motors and trailers before leaving a body of water;
- * Drain your live well, bilge and bait tanks before leaving the water you are fishing or boating on. Anglers or boaters using any water body known to be infected with the VHS virus should disinfect their live wells and bait wells with a 10 percent chlorine/water solution. Rinse well to remove all residual chlorine;
- * Inform your friends about the VHS problem. It will take the cooperation of ALL anglers to help prevent the spread of VHS.

USDA-APHIS Federal Order Prohibiting Importation of Certain Species of Live Fish

Due to the potential adverse effects of this disease to fish populations and the desire to prevent or delay its spread to other states, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) issued a Federal Order on October 24, 2006, that prohibits the importation of certain species of live fish from Ontario and Quebec and interstate movement of the same species from eight states bordering the Great Lakes, effective immediately. The states included are Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. Fish species included in the federal prohibition are: Atlantic cod, black crappie, bluegill, bluntnose minnow, brown bullhead, brown trout, burbot, channel catfish, chinook salmon, coho salmon, chum salmon, emerald shiner, freshwater drum, gizzard shad, grayling, haddock, herring, Japanese flounder, largemouth bass, muskellunge, Pacific cod, northern pike, pink salmon, pumpkinseed, rainbow trout, redhorse sucker, rock bass, rockling, round goby, smallmouth bass, sprat, turbot, walleye, white bass, white perch, whitefish and yellow perch. Additional fish may be added to the order as they are confirmed to be carriers of this disease. Additional information on the Federal Order can be found on the APHIS website www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/aqua/.

What to do if you find sick/dead fish

If you witness a large number of dead or dying fish, please contact the nearest DNR office or use the DNR Web site at www.michigan.gov/dnr. Anglers should contact the DNR if they observe fish that exhibit any of the following signs: hemorrhaging in the skin, including large red patches particularly on the sides and anterior portion of the head; multiple hemorrhages on the liver, spleen, or intestines; or hemorrhages on the swim bladder that give the otherwise transparent organ a mottled appearance. This information will help DNR fisheries staff to track VHS and take appropriate management actions to help slow the spread of this virus.

Minnesota Sportsman Responds to Overzealous Musky Management Efforts

Kirk Schnitker

In Minnesota there has been pressure by pro-musky stocking forces to stock more lakes and then to ban spearing. The Sportsmen for Responsible Musky Management (SFRMM), Northern, Inc., (NI) and Minnesota Darkhouse Angling Association (MDAA) have teamed up to compel the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to use caution and slow down in the musky stocking efforts.

SFRMM has challenged the DNR's statements that it is a "myth" and "misconception" that muskies can be a predation problem for other fish species. Studies in Wisconsin, Michigan and Missouri all show there have been such predation problems. Biologists in those States advise caution, forethought and study. Go to www.muskytroubles.com to see the studies cited by SFRMM. SFRMM, NI and MDAA prepared a joint proposal to the DNR that has a theme: study first, plan second and stock if appropriate. Musky stocking proponents inside and outside the DNR are confronting this proposal with opposition.

The objective of the joint proposal is to take a step back and assess where we are at, develop sound stocking criteria and do so in a transparent and accountable manner. It is the resource that must come first as opposed to special interests. Existing native fish species should be protected as well as existing rights that include Northern Pike angling and spearing.

Large predators displace other predator fish - i.e., muskellunge for pike. This adversely affects those who enjoy catching pike. Also on many lakes in Minnesota the DNR initiates spearing bans once muskies are stocked. When that happens another stakeholder group is given a setback to appease another stakeholder group. This should not be occurring if the available science does not support the initiative. It is as simple as that.

Minnesota sportsman in the form of SFRMM, NI and MDAA are making changes that make sense. The DNR has decided to start over with its musky management plans and have put a hold on plans to stock two lakes with muskies. Concern for the resource comes first and when that concern comes first generally good fisheries management will follow.

MDAA Membership Application

Date: _____
 Name: _____
 Street Address: _____
 City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____
 Phone: _____ E-mail: _____
 Web Site URL: _____

Home Page Web Listing on MDAA site is free to paid members.

MEMBERSHIP LEVEL

- 1 Year Youth Membership (16 and under) \$5.00
 Birthdate _____
- 1 Year Adult Membership _____ \$20.00
 Renewal _____ \$20.00
- MUCC Affiliation w/ magazine subscip.(May Only) _____ \$10.00

MEMBER PRIDE (Shipping is included in price)

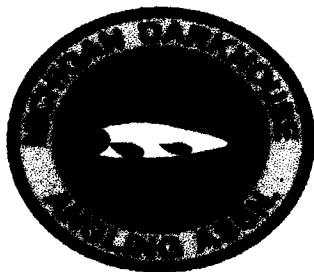
- License Plate 18.00 _____
- Bumper Sticker 5.50 _____
- Window Decal 5.50 _____
- T-shirt 15.00 _____
- Jacket Patch 6.75 _____
- Baseball Cap 10.50 _____
- Stocking Cap 10.50 _____
- Membership Total _____
- Member Pride Total _____
- Donation _____
- Order Total _____
- Check # _____

Mail with appropriate funds to:

**Michigan Darkhouse Angling Association
 N5160 Bass Lake Road – Iron Mountain, MI 49801**

SHOW YOUR SUPPORT WITH MDAA GEAR

ALL PRICES INCLUDE SHIPPING



MEMBER

Window Decal
5" x 5 1/2" \$6.50



Jacket Patch
\$6.75



Baseball or Stocking Caps
\$10.50



Bumper Sticker
11" x 4" \$6.50



Navy or Grey T-shirts \$15.00



License Plate \$18.00