

Fishery Conservation



With its multitude of islands and bays on Lake Superior, as well as numerous lakes and streams on the interior of the island, Isle Royale provides many opportunities for outstanding recreational fishing for wild, native fish. How can you help to conserve and minimize damage to the Isle Royale fishery?

- Catch only what you plan to keep or eat. Catch and release, while encouraged, can be damaging and very stressful on fish.
- Know the minimum legal size of fish so that if they are too small they can be quickly released.
- If moving from Lake Superior to an inland lake, change to a different spool of line. This will help prevent spread of the spiny water-flea, an exotic aquatic invertebrate that competes with juvenile fish for food. It has been found in Lake Superior waters of the park but is not yet documented in inland waters. Spiny water fleas can adhere to fishing line and be easily spread to other bodies of water.
- Release larger fish and keep medium size fish to insure future productivity. Larger, more mature fish produce more offspring than smaller fish.
- Instead of killing trophy fish, consider a modern graphite mount produced from a picture of the fish.
- Return fish to the water as soon as possible. While unhooking them, keep fish in the water as much as possible.
- Try not to handle fish, but if you need to, do so with a wet hand. Release handled fish gently by allowing them to swim from your hands rather than throwing them back into the water.

- Do not squeeze the fish or place fingers in the gills, since a torn gill can cause the fish to bleed to death.
- Remove the hook gently. Pliers work best. Cut the line near the hook if a fish is deeply hooked. A steel hook will decompose in time.
- Use only artificial lures (required in inland waters) as exotic species can accidentally be introduced by using live bait and live bait are often swallowed deeper resulting in more damage to fish.
- Use single, barbless hooks or bend down the barbs on the hooks. Using larger spoons when fishing for larger fish will help prevent catching undersize fish.

Disposal of Fish Remains

At Rock Harbor, please use the fish cleaning station. At other locations, the preferred method is to dump remains chopped up into pieces 4" or less in deep (50' or deeper) water. This reduces the unsightly remains and odors around campgrounds and the unnaturally large gathering of gulls at these sites. At inland lakes the preferred method of disposal is to chop fish remains into pieces 4" or less and deposit into deep water via canoe. If you do not have a canoe, you could request the assistance of a canoeist. The alternate method is to chop up remains into pieces 4" or less and move at least 200 feet (75 steps) from campground and throw remains as far as possible into deep water. These steps will eliminate the potential for attracting and feeding wildlife at campgrounds. Please clean fish away from docks and campgrounds. Do not throw remains in shallow water near shore or throw remains to gulls or other animals.

Transporting Fish to the Mainland

You are allowed only one day's catch in your possession. While the license holder remains on the Island, Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) allows those with DNR permits to ship legally-taken fish on the *Ranger III*, *Isle Royale Queen IV*, *Wenonah*, *Voyageur II* and the seaplane. This one-time per year permit covers up to a single day's catch limit. Fish must be claimed when the ferry service arrives at their destination. Permits may be obtained by writing: Department of Natural Resources, 427 U.S. 41 North, Baraga, Michigan 49908-9627 or calling (906) 353-6651.

Fishermen returning on the *Ranger III* must check in their fish with the ship's purser. Fish cannot be transported in coolers on private boats onboard the *Ranger III*.

Fish Consumption Advisory

Contaminants discovered in the Park ecosystem remind us that although Isle Royale is remote, it is part of a global system. Ongoing research in six inland lakes (Sargent, Siskiwit, Eva, Shesheeb, Wagejo, and Angleworm) shows fish with mercury levels exceeding the State of Michigan fish consumption advisories.

For information on fish consumption advisories check with park staff or visit the Michigan Department of Community Health website at: <http://www.michigan.gov/mdch>

Jay Glase
Fishery Biologist

New for 2009:

- **Barbless hooks only in all inland lakes, streams and creeks.**
- **No minimum size limit for Northern Pike in inland lakes, 30" maximum.**

Fishing at Isle Royale

A Michigan fishing license is required for fishing in Lake Superior, including narrow bays and harbors, and when transporting fish from the island to the mainland. If you are under 17 years of age, you may fish without a license. Licenses are not required to fish on the inland waters of Isle Royale; possession limits are the same as those set by the State of Michigan. **Also see additional information on this page regarding special brook trout regulations.**

Anglers should refer to the Michigan fishing regulations for possession limits and detailed license requirements for Lake Superior (also see the chart on page 7 for a brief guide to regulations). Only 24-hour licenses are available on the island and only when concession services are open.

You may purchase a Michigan fishing license online at www.michigan.gov/dnr.

Special Brook Trout Regulations

Recent surveys indicate populations are dangerously low and may be at risk of disappearing unless they have more protection. The National Park Service and Michigan DNR have implemented protective regulations at Isle Royale in order to help with the recovery of this once common fish.

Brook Trout can be identified by their nearly square tail and wormlike pattern on the back and dorsal fin. If you're uncertain about the species you catch, return it to the water.

Lake Superior Waters (extend 4.5 miles out from the island)

Catch and release only for all brook trout, including all bays and harbors.

Inland Waters

Catch and release only in all lakes, streams, and creeks. Only artificial lures and barbless hooks can be used in all lakes, streams, and creeks.

Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia

Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia (VHS) is an exotic virus that could have severe impacts on fish in the Great Lakes.

- VHS is a disease that may affect up to 37 fish species – Lake Trout and Coaster Brook Trout are at risk. The disease is often lethal, and can result in massive die-offs. Once VHS has invaded a body of water, there is no known way to eliminate it.
- VHS is in the lower Great Lakes, Lake St. Clair, and a few inland lakes of New York, Michigan, and Wisconsin. The virus has yet to be detected in Lake Superior.
- VHS does not affect humans, but humans are advised against consuming any fish suspected of carrying any disease. Fish that are affected by VHS may or may not show external signs such as red blotchy areas on the skin, redness near the base of fins, and bulging eyes with redness around the eye. Internal organs such as the liver or spleen often show signs of hemorrhaging. **If you catch a fish with any of these signs at the park, please keep it, note the location and date that you caught it, and report it as soon as possible to a visitor center or park ranger.**
- Live and dead fish bait, fish parts, and fish eggs from infected fish are some of the ways that the disease can be transmitted to wild fish populations. Freezing, salting, or borax treatment of eggs does not kill the virus. **The possession or use of bait for fishing within the Lake Superior waters of the park is limited to those fish and / or fish parts that are caught within Isle Royale National Park waters. Transporting fish or fish parts for use as bait to the park is prohibited.**
- Boat water in bilges and live wells from waters where VHS is present can spread the disease. Boaters should empty their bilges and live wells prior to leaving a mainland port, and again before entering park waters. Please ask for any specific updated guidelines and regulations before your trip. **Boats being transported via the *Ranger III* must be decontaminated prior to being loaded at the Houghton dock.**
- The following websites provide information on VHS and how you can help.
 - Isle Royale National Park website: <http://www.nps.gov/isro/>
 - Michigan Sea Grant: <http://www.miseagrant.umich.edu/ais/fish-diseases.html>
 - Michigan DNR: <http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,16077-153-10364---,00.html>
 - Wisconsin DNR: <http://dnr.wi.gov/fish/vhs>