

“Record Breaking Fish”

In Sunday’s report, I described how 100+ pound sturgeon have become more frequent in our harvest and spawning assessments over the last decade. I would like to expand on that report and discuss how the record books have been re-written in the last 10 years.

For decades the most heavily talked about fish was the 180 pound fish harvested by Elroy Shroeder in 1953. Elroy’s fish was the standing state record for 51 years, until 2004 when Dave Piechowski harvested a 79.5” sturgeon that topped the scales at 188 pounds. Unlike Elroy’s fish which held the record for 50+ years, Dave held the record for a mere 6 years until Ronald Grishaber registered his 212.2 pound, 84.2” sturgeon at Harrison Town Hall in 2010 and imprinted his name in sturgeon spearing folk lore. Ronald’s fish was the first ever to eclipse 200 pounds at the scale, and is currently mounted and on display at Lake Park Pub in Menasha.

Piechowski and Grishaber’s fish aren’t the only two recently harvested sturgeon to enter the record books though. In fact, coming into the 2013 spear fishery, 7 of the top 10 fish on record had been harvested in the last three years (2010-2012). Further, 9 of the top 10 had been harvested since 2004, with Elroy Schroeder’s fish being the only exception. The record fish trend has continued in 2013 with Peter Vander Wielen’s 179.0 pound fish harvested on opening day weighing in as the 6th largest fish on record.

Our DNR staff has been seeing 200+ pound fish during spring spawning assessments for the last 5-10 years. Further, we know that there are fish in the population right now that could shatter the current state record! We handled one such fish below the Shawano

Dam this past April. We estimate that the 87.5” female sturgeon (photo insert) weighed 240 pounds before she starting spawning and was 125 years old! This is the largest fish, by weight, ever to be handled on the Winnebago System and will long be the fodder of spearers dreams, at least until we either capture a larger fish or someone breaks the current state record; both of which could happen in the not so distant future!



We don't really know for sure how large our lake sturgeon can get. The current regulations and management program are providing these fish the first opportunity since the late 1800s to show us their stuff – or how large and old they can really get. In another 40 to 50 years we may have an answer to the questions on longevity and ultimate size, but for now I would say that in time spearers can expect to see more fish over 200 pounds, and eventually I would not be surprised to see fish larger than 250 pounds and over 150 years in age show up in our harvest! I hope to be around as the Winnebago Sturgeon Biologist for quite some time, and hopefully I will be able to see the true growth potential of these fish. I know two things though, 1) I am thankful for the hard work that DNR staff and sturgeon interest groups have collaboratively done to provide us with the population and fishery that we currently enjoy and, 2) I am very excited for what lies ahead of us!