

Why Do We Have Fishing Regulations?



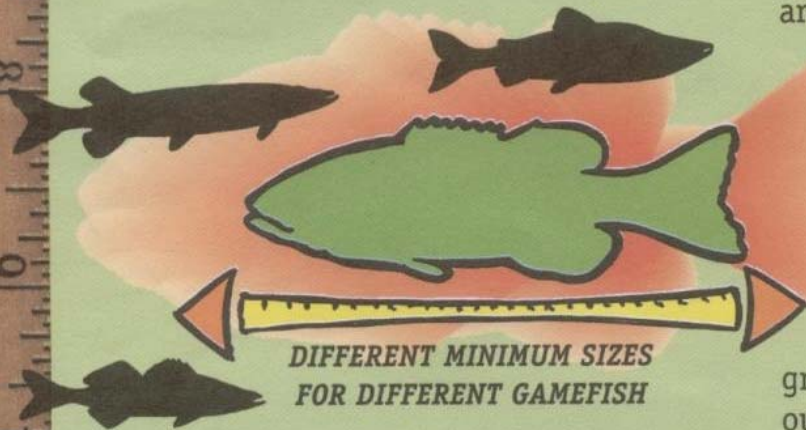
Sizes and Limits

All our fish are protected by regulations. How do these regulations actually protect fish? This article explains how. There are regulations that tell us how big fish need to be and how many we can keep. They are called minimum sizes and creel limits.

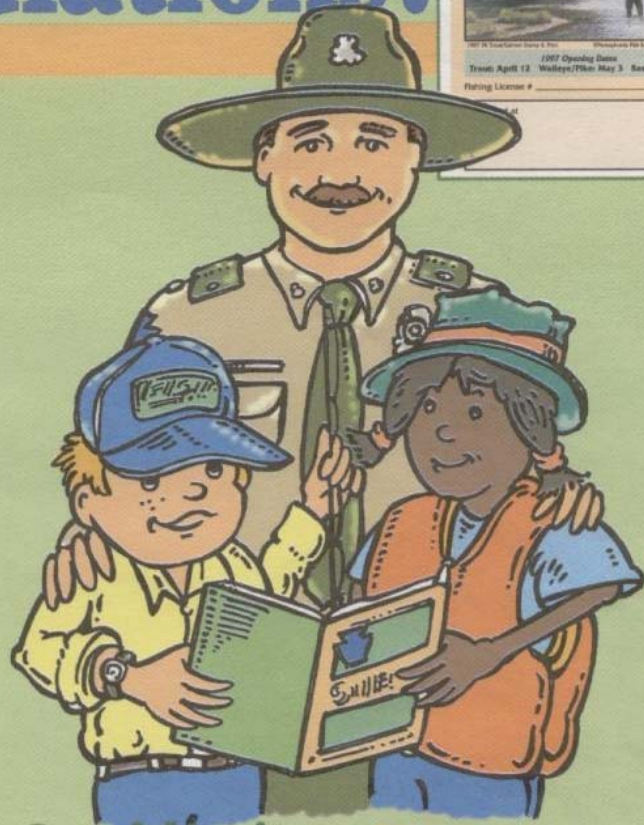
Minimum sizes

Nearly all gamefish have minimum size limits—you can't keep a fish unless it is a certain size. On most waters, smallmouth bass and largemouth bass can't be kept unless they are 12 inches or longer.

Why 12 inches? Bass don't spawn or reproduce until their third year or when they are about 12 inches long. This gives a whole lot of fish a chance to reproduce before they might be caught and kept. The more fish that reproduce, the more fish there will be for us to catch later. Each kind of fish grows differently. That's why we have different minimum sizes for each kind of gamefish.



Some waters can grow really big fish. Usually, the minimum size on these waters is bigger than other places. Biologists do that so we can catch a real trophy.



Creel limits

This is an easy one. What would happen if we kept every legal fish we caught? To make sure we have fish to catch in the future, there are creel limits. Creel limits are the number of legal-sized fish you can keep each day. There are different creel limits for each kind of fish.

Often, we can keep lots of the small, fast-growing panfish. Muskies and other fish that have fewer offspring and grow slowly have lower creel limits.

Remember that our waters are just like gardens. In each, there is only so much space to grow things in. You can have lots of tomato plants and grow lots of small tomatoes. Or you can thin out your plants and only have a few. But those few will grow bigger because they don't have to share. These regulations help to make sure there are enough fish for us to catch, and that they are the right size.