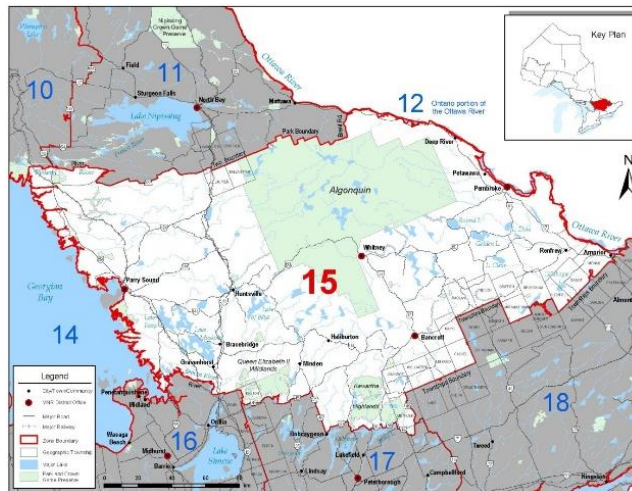


Fisheries Management Zone 15 Draft Fisheries Management Plan Proposal Summary

June 2022

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry with support of the FMZ 15 Advisory Council is seeking Indigenous Community feedback on the Draft FMZ 15 Fisheries Management Plan.



Purpose and Scope of the Fisheries Management Plan

The FMZ 15 Management Plan was developed by MNR/F with input and advice from the FMZ 15 Advisory Council, which is made up of First Nations and Métis representatives, various key stakeholders, members of the public, and avid anglers from across the entire zone. Input and advice were also sought from Indigenous communities whose traditional territories fall within the zone landscape throughout the planning process. The planning area extends from Georgian Bay in the west to the Ottawa River in the east. Its northern boundary follows the Pickering River, Highway 522 and the northern edge of Algonquin Provincial Park

The management plan for Fisheries Management Zone 15 (FMZ 15) is intended to outline the status of the fisheries in the zone, describe management objectives and provide direction for management actions. The fisheries management plan identifies management strategies and proposes actions to meet the stated goals and objectives based on advice from the FMZ advisory council. The intent of the plan is to assist MNR/F in balancing the demands placed on the resource with the biological capacity of the supporting ecosystems. This balance is based on analysis of fisheries

data and collaborative discussions with members of the public, government and partner agencies, Indigenous communities and non-governmental agencies.

Relevancy to Indigenous Communities

The Constitution Act, 1982 recognizes and affirms the Aboriginal and treaty rights of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. The Ministry has a legal duty to consult First Nations and Métis communities when a proposed activity or decision may adversely impact those rights. First Nations and Métis peoples have constitutionally protected Aboriginal and treaty rights to fish for food, social and ceremonial purposes. With respect to fisheries, the courts have clarified that conservation of fishery resources is the priority, after which existing Aboriginal and treaty rights take priority before allocation and management of the resources for recreational, commercial food and bait fisheries.

While the focus and scope of the FMZ 15 Fisheries Management Plan is on recreational fisheries within the zone, historical, current and proposed future fisheries management actions have and will influence fish communities upon which Indigenous communities rely upon for food, social and ceremonial purposes.

Initial Indigenous Community Feedback

Aboriginal rights and interests help guide fisheries management planning and activities in Ontario. MNR acknowledges and values the importance of Indigenous traditional knowledge and continues to explore opportunities to increase Indigenous involvement in fisheries management through collaborative partnerships. Communities have been engaged throughout the FMZ 15 planning process through invitation to participate in the Advisory Council and focus sessions with communities. Community members are invited again to provide feedback.

The following summary highlights key proposed species goals objectives and proposed (preferred) regulatory action options as well as other important fisheries management actions outlined in the draft plan including fish stocking strategies for relevant species. Additional proposed actions such as education and outreach are identified in the fulsome draft management plan. Please refer to the draft Fisheries Management Plan for alternative regulatory options also being considered.

Draft Plan Review

All members of the public are invited to provide feedback at this time. Instructions on how to provide feedback are provided at the end of this summary.

Draft Fish Community Objectives

Fish community objectives provide context for individual species objectives. The fish community objectives describe the management priority and emphasis for distinct groups of species and provide broad direction to guide individual species management. They help resolve potentially competing objectives for species of different thermal regime.

Coldwater Fish Community – Brook Trout, Lake Trout, Lake Whitefish

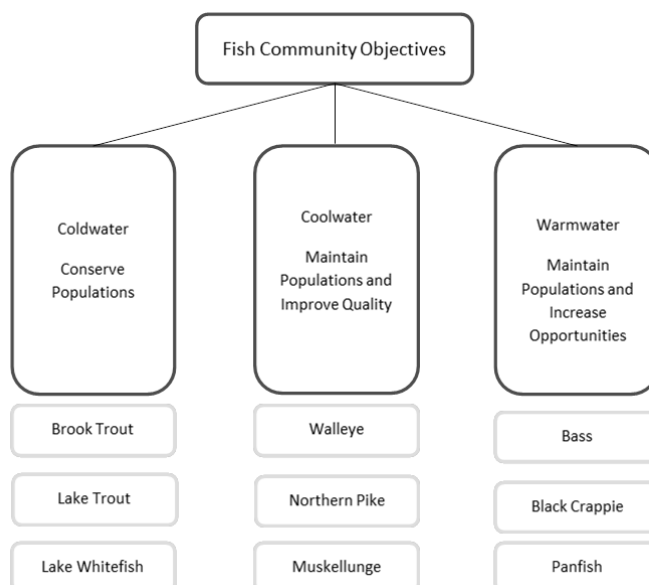
Consistent with overall goals for FMZ 15 and recognizing the large numbers of stressors on these species, the management emphasis will be to preserve the occurrence of coldwater species on the landscape and building resilient populations by taking a conservative, precautionary approach to management.

Coolwater Fish Community – Walleye, Northern Pike, Muskellunge

The management emphasis on coolwater species, especially for Walleye and Muskellunge, will be to maintain their current distribution (minimize expansion), and to maintain or improve fishing quality.

Warmwater Fish Community – Bass, Black Crappie, Panfish

The management emphasis for warmwater species will be to manage them liberally, to maximize opportunities, possibly ameliorate impacts on other species, under the belief that the desired fishing quality will be provided due to the resilient and diverse nature of populations on the landscape.



Draft Recreational Fish Species Proposed Goals, Objectives and Management Actions

Brook Trout

Goal: Conserve natural Brook Trout populations

Objectives:

- I. Maintain the number and distribution of natural Brook Trout populations.
- II. Improve the status of natural Brook Trout populations and fishing opportunities.
- III. Enhance angling opportunities for stocked Brook Trout.

Key Proposed Management Actions:

Implement a conservative sport fishing regulation on natural Brook Trout waters.

Proposed Zone-wide Regulation:

Season: 4th Saturday in April – September 30th
Daily Catch Limit: 2(S) and 1(C)

Rationale: The current zone-wide season of January 1 – September 30th and daily catch limit of 5(S) and 2(C) was deemed excessively liberal in the face of the threats to natural populations in FMZ 15. Additionally, the current zone-wide regulation was being applied to any natural Brook Trout populations not regulated via exception. Given the high degree of uncertainty with regards to reproductive status of many populations in the zone, applying a conservative zone-wide regulation provides protection to all natural populations. Providing a modest angling and harvest opportunity for natural Brook Trout is a priority to maintain stewardship of this highly valued resource.

Proposed Prime Natural Lakes regulation via exception (Lakes absent of harmful introduced species and supporting high quality fisheries and/or at high risk of intentional species introductions):

Season: 4th Saturday in April - September 30th
Daily Catch Limit: 2(S) and 1(C)
Bait, Gear and Other Restrictions: Use and possession of live bait fish prohibited.
Target Species: Brook Trout fishing only.

Rationale: There are approximately 20 natural populations remaining across the zone that are known to support localized fisheries and have relatively pristine fish communities. Brook Trout populations are most resilient to threats of climate change and overexploitation when their native fish communities are maintained. These populations represent a priority for management to avoid introductions of baitfish and other sportfish species. The use of live bait will be prohibited to avoid introductions of baitfish. Additionally, a unique proposal to only allow fishing for Brook Trout is intended

to disincentivize illegal introductions of other sportfish species into these pristine Brook Trout waters.

Proposed Stocked Lakes regulation via exception (Additional Opportunities):

Season: Open All Year
Daily Catch Limit: 5(S) and 2(C)

Rationale: Maintaining a liberal regulation for stocked Brook Trout Lakes is intended to encourage the diversion of angling effort and harvest away from natural populations.

Implement stocking strategy for Brook Trout

Proposed Stocking Strategies:

1) Supplemental stocking of waterbodies where viable natural populations are known to be present will not be done.

Rationale: Supplemental stocking can have detrimental consequences on natural populations via increased competition for resources, predation of natural Brook Trout by stocked fish, risk of genetic introgression and loss of native strains, and increased interest and subsequent angling effort and harvest of natural Brook Trout.

2) Conduct rehabilitation and re-introduction stocking of Brook Trout populations where appropriate, using local genetic strains (e.g. Dickson strain).

Rationale: Natural Brook Trout populations and their associated fisheries are facing many threats including introduced species, climate change, and overexploitation in FMZ 15. Rehabilitation including further regulatory restrictions and/or rehabilitative stocking are management tools which may be appropriate actions to take for populations which have been detrimentally impacted.

3) Continue to stock and manage Brook Trout to divert angling effort from natural Brook Trout lakes.

Rationale: Natural Brook Trout populations which are supporting localized fisheries are rare in FMZ 15. To minimize impacts of overexploitation, liberal regulations are being maintained on stocked Brook Trout lakes to divert effort and harvest from natural populations.

4) Continue to stock Brook Trout to create Brook Trout additional angling and harvest opportunities and look to improve effectiveness where possible.

Rationale: Brook Trout are a highly valued sportfish in FMZ 15 for recreational and consumptive purposes. Stocked Lakes will provide for Brook Trout angling opportunities year-round.

Lake Trout

Goal: Conserve natural Lake Trout populations

Objectives:

- I. Maintain the number and distribution of natural Lake Trout Lakes
- II. Improve the status of natural Lake Trout populations and fishing opportunities.
- III. Enhance angling opportunities for stocked Lake Trout.

Key Proposed Management Actions:

Implement a conservative sport fishing regulation on natural Lake Trout lakes.

Proposed zone-wide Regulation (small natural Lake Trout lakes < 500 ha, small-bodied):

Season: 3rd Sat. in May – Labour Day

Daily Catch Limit: 2(S) and 1 (C)

Size Limit: Minimum 40 cm

Proposed small natural Lake Trout lakes < 500 ha, large-bodied regulation via exception:

Season: 3rd Sat. in May – Labour Day

Daily Catch Limit: 2(S) and 1 (C)

Size Limit: Minimum 50 cm

Proposed large natural Lake Trout lakes > 500 ha, small-bodied regulation via exception:

Season: Sat. before Family Day to 3rd Sun. in March and 3rd Sat. in May to Labour Day

Daily Catch Limit: 2(S) and 1(C)

Size Limit: Minimum 40 cm

Gear Restriction: Only one line may be used when angling through the ice.

Proposed large natural Lake Trout lakes > 500 ha, large-bodied regulation via exception:

Season: Sat. before Family Day to 3rd Sun. in March and 3rd Sat. in May to Labour Day

Daily Catch Limit: 2(S) and 1(C)

Size Limit: Minimum 50 cm

Gear Restriction: Only one line may be used when angling through the ice.

Rationale: Lake Trout are a highly sought-after species within FMZ 15 and receive high levels of angling effort, often above maximum sustainable yield in some lakes. They are also facing other threats including illegal introductions of competing species and loss of habitat due to climate change. The majority of natural Lake Trout lakes in FMZ 15 are relatively small and vulnerable to overexploitation. To mitigate the risks of overexploitation, small waterbodies are proposed to have a shortened open water season with no winter season and large lakes are proposed to have a shortened winter season and shortened open water season. For large waterbodies where a winter season exists, only one line may be used when angling through the ice to minimize unintentional post-release mortality of Lake Trout. Lake Trout are also slow growing and slow to maturity and reside in low productivity lakes. In FMZ 15, there are both small-bodied populations, which predominantly forage on zooplankton, and large-bodied populations, which are predominantly piscivorous. The two different body forms necessitate unique regulations in size limits. The minimum sizes limits proposed ranked amongst the most sustainable size limit options available when modelled to assess long-term adult abundance.

Proposed stocked lakes regulation via exception:

Season: Open All Year

Daily Catch Limit: 2(S) and 1(C)

Size Limit: None

Gear Restriction: None; two lines may be used when angling through the ice.

Rationale:

Maintaining a liberal regulation for stocked Lake Trout Lakes is intended to encourage the diversion of angling effort and harvest away from natural populations.

Prohibit the use of live baitfish while fishing for Lake Trout in natural lakes that have not been impacted by introduced species.

Proposed ban of the use of live baitfish via exception:

There are 5 natural Lake Trout lakes proposed to have a ban on the use of live baitfish which do not currently have introduced species within their fish community.

Rationale: Lake Trout and their associated fisheries are most resilient to threats from climate change and overexploitation when the native fish communities they exist within are maintained.

Implement Stocking Strategy for Lake Trout

Proposed stocking strategies:

1) Stocking of waterbodies where viable natural populations are known to be present will not be done.

Rationale: Supplemental stocking can have detrimental consequences on natural populations via increased competition for resources, predation of natural Lake Trout by stocked fish, risk of genetic introgression and loss of native strains, and increased interest and subsequent angling effort and harvest of natural Lake Trout.

2) Conduct rehabilitation and re-introduction stocking of Lake Trout populations where appropriate, using local genetic strains.

Rationale: Natural Lake Trout populations and their associated fisheries are facing many threats including introduced species, climate change, and overexploitation in FMZ 15. Rehabilitation including further regulatory restrictions and/or rehabilitative stocking are management tools which may be appropriate actions to take for populations which have been detrimentally impacted.

3) Continue to stock and manage Lake Trout to divert angling effort from natural Lake Trout lakes.

Rationale: To minimize impacts of overexploitation, liberal regulations are being maintained on stocked Lake Trout lakes to divert effort and harvest from natural populations.

4) Continue to stock Lake Trout to create Lake Trout additional angling and harvest opportunities and look to improve effectiveness where possible.

Rationale: Lake Trout are a highly valued sportfish in FMZ 15 for recreational and consumptive purposes. Stocked Lakes will provide for Lake Trout angling opportunities year-round.

Lake Whitefish

Goal: Maintain Lake Whitefish populations.

Objectives:

- i. Maintain the number of Lake Whitefish populations.
- ii. Maintain the abundance of Lake Whitefish

Key Proposed Management Actions:

Reduce harvest of Lake Whitefish zone-wide to provide sustainable harvest opportunities and raise the social and ecological value of the species as a member of the coldwater fish community broadly across the zone.

Proposed zone-wide regulation:

Season: Open all year
Daily Catch Limit: 4(S) and 2(C)

Rationale: Lake Whitefish are a member of the coldwater fish community and are slow growing and late to maturity, making them vulnerable to overexploitation. They are also vulnerable to impacts of introduced species and climate change. The current daily catch limit of 12(S) and 6(C) is not restricting harvest based on available creel information. Anecdotally, there has been a long-term decline in Lake Whitefish abundance in many populations across the landscape. Some key fisheries are seeing current declines with the existing daily catch limit. The intent of the proposed daily catch limit is to provide some level of harvest control while raising the social value of this coldwater species.

Proposed dipnetting regulation - Lake Whitefish and Lake Herring (Cisco):

Season: Closed all year
Waterbodies where permitted: Proposing to cease dipnetting opportunities on the 18 waterbodies where a limited fall season currently exists.

Rationale: Given the threats to this species, its priority for management within the coldwater fish community, and the ethical issues associated with dipnetting during vulnerable periods (spawning), the proposal seeks to cease dipnetting opportunities within FMZ 15.

Northern Pike

Goal: Maintain the Northern Pike fishery within FMZ 15.

Objectives:

- i. Maintain the abundance of Northern Pike populations
- ii. Minimize further unauthorized introductions of Northern Pike into new waters.

Key Proposed Management Actions:

Maintain current zone-wide daily catch limit (S:6; C:2) and season duration (Jan. 1 – Mar. and 3rd Sat in May to Dec. 31)

Rationale: The current liberal regulation balances the socio-economic benefits of the existing Northern Pike fisheries across the zone while promoting harvest of Northern Pike where they represent an undesirable member of the fish community via illegal introductions.

Muskellunge

Goal: Maintain the Muskellunge fishery within FMZ 15.

Objectives:

- i. Maintain the abundance of Muskellunge populations.
- ii. Maintain trophy angling opportunities in waterbodies with demonstrated growth potential.
- iii. Minimize further unauthorized introductions of Muskellunge into new waterbodies.

Key Proposed Management Actions:

Maintain current zone-wide daily catch limit (S:1; C:0) and season duration (1st Sat. in June - December 15th).

No changes are proposed for the zone-wide Muskellunge regulations. There are proposed changes to the Pickerel River exception season and minimum size limit.

Rationale: The existing regulation for Muskellunge aligns the goals and objectives for this species.

Smallmouth and Largemouth Bass

Goal: Maintain the bass fishery within FMZ 15.

Objectives:

- i. Minimize further unauthorized introductions of Smallmouth and Largemouth Bass into new waterbodies.
- ii. Maintain current abundance of Smallmouth and Largemouth bass
- iii. Increase and promote fishing opportunities for Smallmouth and Largemouth Bass

Key Proposed Management Actions:

Utilize the existing catch limit to ensure bass continue to be harvested at a sustainable level.

Implement an extended bass season to provide additional angling opportunities.

Proposed zone-wide regulation:

Season: 3rd Saturday in June to December 15th
Daily Catch Limit: 6(S) and 2(C)

Rationale: Bass tend to be spawning and fry leaving nests earlier due to warmer springs. This presents an opportunity to extend the bass season in early summer. Bass are also resilient to angling effort and harvest outside of spawning season and as such, provide opportunities for late open-water season angling opportunities.

Walleye

Goal: Improve Walleye populations.

Objectives:

- i. Maintain the number of Walleye populations.
- ii. Increase or maintain abundance of Walleye.
- iii. Minimize further unauthorized introductions of Walleye into new waterbodies.

Key Proposed Management Actions:

Implement a regulation to reduce harvest.

Proposed zone-wide regulation:

Season: January 1st to March 15th and 3rd Saturday in May to December 31st

Daily Catch Limit: 4(S) and 2(C)

Size Limit: 40-50 cm harvestable slot

Rationale: Walleye in FMZ 15 are generally in low overall abundance. The proposed size limit is more restrictive than the current size limit of no more than 1 over 46 cm. This proposed size limit ranked amongst the best size limit options when modelled for long-term adult walleye abundance. The intent is that this restrictive size limit will support a recovery of Walleye across the zone. The proposed size limit also aligns with adjacent FMZ 18 which will help reduce confusion amongst the angling community which angles in both zones.

Proposed size limit regulation via exception:

A handful of waterbodies in the eastern portion of the zone are proposed to maintain a minimum 50 cm size limit.

Rationale: The current minimum size limit appears to be providing for sustainable opportunities on some waterbodies where it's been implemented and has been well received by the angling community.

Lake Muskoka is proposed to have a 40-55 cm harvestable slot size limit.

Rationale: The faster growth rate and greater growth potential of Walleye in Lake Muskoka enables a larger harvestable slot range. Lake Muskoka is also the largest Lake in FMZ 15 and should support some additional targeted angling effort due to this more liberal size limit.

All existing sanctuaries will have no fishing March 1st to Friday before 3rd Saturday in May and due to late spawning population an alternative with no fishing March 1st to June 15th.

Implement the stocking strategy for Walleye

Proposed stocking strategies:

It is proposed that PGT stocking of Walleye will no longer occur in FMZ.

Rehabilitation of Walleye may occur on a limited basis where deemed appropriate.

Rationale: Walleye are not native to the majority of FMZ 15 but have naturalized due to illegal introductions in many waterbodies in the last 30 years so there are many more opportunities across the zone than there once was. Walleye will be managed for natural reproduction and, if necessary, the rehabilitation of natural populations will be considered.

Panfish (Black Crappie, Bluegill, Pumpkinseed, Yellow Perch)

Goal: Maintain the Panfish fishery with FMZ 15.

Objectives:

- i. Maintain panfish populations at current levels.
- ii. Minimize further unauthorized introductions and range increase of Panfish species into new waterbodies.
- iii. Increase angling opportunities and effort for Panfish to maintain current abundance.

Key Proposed Management Actions:

Streamline Panfish regulations to provide additional angling opportunities.

There are no proposed changes to the Black Crappie, Bluegill, Pumpkinseed, or Yellow Perch regulations.

Splake, Rainbow Trout, and Brown Trout

The main purpose of these species is to provide for additional angling opportunities and to divert angling effort from natural Brook Trout and Lake Trout fisheries via put-grow-take stocking. A goal statement was not explicitly developed for these species given their limited management role, however, relevant management objectives, stocking strategies and management actions have been proposed.

Relevant Objectives:

- i. Maintain the number and distribution of natural Brook Trout populations.
- ii. Maintain the number and distribution of natural Lake Trout populations.
- iii. Maintain angling opportunities for stocked Rainbow Trout, Brown Trout and Splake

Proposed Stocking Strategies:

Do not stock Rainbow Trout, Brown Trout or Splake into lakes that are managed as natural Lake Trout or Brook Trout populations.

Rationale: Supplemental stocking of other salmonids into natural Lake Trout or Brook Trout populations can have deleterious impacts to the natural trout populations which should be avoided.

Consider stocking Splake on a PGT basis in specific waterbodies to address fish community objectives and support local economies where management priority is not for natural reproduction.

Rationale: In some waterbodies where natural reproduction of Lake Trout or Brook Trout may be minimal, but the socio-economic potential of the fishery is significant, stocking on a put-grow-take basis may be rationalized.

Stock Splake in other waterbodies to divert effort from natural Brook and Lake Trout lakes. Rainbow Trout and Brown Trout have negative impacts on Brook Trout populations and should not be supported.

Rationale: Given the vulnerability of natural trout populations to overexploitation, it is important to continue to provide diversionary fisheries for other salmonids to help attract angling effort from natural trout populations.

Continue to stock Splake to create additional angling opportunities. and look to improve effectiveness where possible.

Rationale: Splake provide unique angling opportunities and are sought-after by many anglers for recreational and consumptive purposes.

Invasive Species Proposed Management Actions

Key Proposed Management Actions:

Prohibit the use of live fish as bait on high value and high-risk natural trout waters and waters that flow into Algonquin Park.

Proposed Regulatory Actions:

11 waterbodies containing natural trout populations within FMZ 15 are proposed to have live baitfish bans.

Rationale: The use of live baitfish poses a threat to native fish communities via introductions of non-native species. Algonquin Provincial Park is an aquatic ecosystem that has largely avoided the effects of introduced species. Maintaining this relatively pristine ecosystem is a priority for management.

How to Provide Feedback

Comments on the Draft FMZ 15 Fisheries Management Plan can be directed to the registry at: <https://ero.ontario.ca/notice/019-5715>

