



Commissioner Strommen,

March 27, 2024

We write to share our comments on the recent announcement by the Department of Natural Resources on the 2024 regulations for Mille Lacs Lake.

MN-FISH Sportfishing Coalition is a 501c4 organization formed in 2018 to represent the fishing interests of anglers, clubs, local organizations, and industry stakeholders. The National Marine Manufacturers Association (NMMA) is the trade association for the U.S. recreational boating industry, representing recreational boat, marine engine, and accessory manufacturers. The Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation (CSF) is the informed authority across outdoor issues and serves as the primary conduit for influencing public policy on Capitol Hill and throughout state capitals.

The recreational boating industry has a \$6.9 billion impact on Minnesota's economy, supporting over 25,000 jobs and 700 businesses, a majority of which are directly connected to the fishing industry. The recent announcement regarding Mille Lacs Lake has raised many concerns within the fishing and angling community.

While MN-FISH, NMMA, and CSF understand that co-management of Mille Lacs Lake creates levels of complexity for the agency, we also are sensitive to the passion that anglers have for fishing this lake and the businesses that serve them.

Minnesota anglers are well conditioned by the historical variability and highly restricted harvest levels that have been placed on Mille Lacs over the years, yet this decision and explanation of the data shared by the DNR does not seem to correlate with their experience.

We are hearing several concerns from anglers and other constituent businesses that depend on Mille Lacs Lake:

- First, we just witnessed an almost non-existent ice-fishing season that resulted in extremely low angling pressure and presumably lower harvest. Please reconcile the poor ice season with these even more restrictive, catch-and-release open-water regulations.
- Second, our members and guides on the lake repeatedly have suggested that the agency's test-netting during increasingly warm-water autumns is missing a solid percentage of the lake's walleyes that remain suspended in deeper water late into the year. Anecdotal data from the increasing use of forward-facing sonar supports these observations.

While MN-FISH, NMMA, and CSF share the goal of a healthy and long-term sustainable fishery on Mille Lacs Lake with the Minnesota DNR, we cannot forget Minnesota anglers' right to access their public waters for the opportunity to harvest their fish.

It is for these reasons we respectfully ask the Minnesota DNR to re-examine the fisheries data and methodology used by the DNR when making the 2024 harvest decisions for Mille Lacs and share the findings with a more comprehensive report for state anglers before the Minnesota fishing opener on May 11th, 2024. Further, we respectfully request the opportunity to meet with the DNR and further discuss.

Sincerely,

Dave Osborne, President  
MN-FISH Sportfishing Coalition

Jesse McArdell, Midwest Policy and Engagement Manager  
National Marine Manufacturers Association

Bob Matthews, Assistant Manager, Great Lakes States  
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation