

I'm reaching out to surrounding Muskies Inc. chapters because South Dakota is currently considering a regulation change that could significantly impact our musky fishery.

SDGFP has proposed allowing the harvest of muskies 45 inches and larger. South Dakota currently has a catch-and-release-only regulation for muskies, which was established in 2018 after South Dakota musky anglers successfully petitioned and spoke before the SDGFP Commission.

The proposed change would reverse that protection and allow the harvest of the largest muskies in our state.

Why We Are Concerned

South Dakota has a relatively small and fragile musky fishery. We have only a handful of musky waters, and our fisheries depend entirely on stocking because our muskies do not naturally reproduce.

SDGFP's primary argument is that there are not enough muskies over 45 inches for harvest to have a meaningful impact. We disagree based on the available data and what anglers are seeing on the water.

For example:

- A 2019 SDGFP survey of Lynn Lake captured 45 muskies. Eight were 44.5 inches or larger, and 11 were over 42 inches.
- Muskies Inc. records from Lynn Lake show that 23.5% of registered fish have been over 45 inches.
- Additional surveys in 2021 and 2023 showed approximately 35–36% of surveyed muskies over 42 inches.
- South Dakota anglers and visiting Muskies Inc. members regularly catch muskies exceeding 45 inches.

There is also an important stocking-history issue with the Lynn Lake data. The lake was not stocked from 2006–2010, followed by 770 juvenile muskies stocked in 2010 and 3,018 large fingerlings in 2012. The large number of 37–38-inch fish found during the 2019 survey appears consistent with those later stockings. Fish exceeding 45 inches in that survey would have had to come from earlier stockings.

More broadly, our concern is not simply how many fish are currently over 45 inches. These are the largest and most valuable fish in a relatively small, stocked fishery that does not naturally reproduce and depends entirely on stocking to maintain its populations. Removing these larger fish would reduce the number of trophy muskies available in an already limited fishery and could have a significant impact on the quality of the fishery.

Current Stocking Concerns

There are also concerns about recent stocking numbers in Lynn Lake.

Following the 2012 stocking, Lynn Lake continued to receive muskie stockings, but there were no stockings in 2017, 2018, or 2019. Notably, 2018 was the year South Dakota musky anglers successfully changed the regulation to catch-and-release only. Stocking resumed with only 26 juvenile muskies in 2020, followed by 1,048 juveniles in 2021.

South Dakota musky anglers have been concerned about the reduced stocking numbers since the 2018 regulation change.

How You Can Help

We are asking surrounding Muskies Inc. chapters and their members to get involved and help us keep South Dakota's musky fishery protected.

There are several ways to help, and you do not need to attend the meeting to make your voice heard.

- Submit a public comment opposing the proposed regulation change. This is a simple way to help if you are unable to attend the Commission meeting. Comments can be submitted directly through the SDGFP website, and we strongly encourage anyone who supports protecting the fishery to take a few minutes to submit one.
- Contact the SDGFP Commissioners directly and respectfully ask them to oppose allowing the harvest of muskies 45 inches and larger. Under the link provided there is a "email the commissioners" button, you can send an email directly to them through there.
- Attend the SDGFP Commission meeting on Thursday, September 10 at 2:00 PM in Winner, South Dakota.
- If you cannot attend in person, [join the meeting via Zoom](#). Meeting information will be posted on the SDGFP website closer to the meeting.
- Sign and share the petition.
- Share this information with your chapter members and other musky anglers who may be willing to help.

Anyone who attends the hearing, either in person or virtually, will have an opportunity to speak for up to three minutes.

The decision is expected to be made by the Commission that evening or the following day, so having strong participation and public comment leading up to the meeting is especially important.

South Dakota does not have the largest or most organized musky community, which is why support from surrounding Muskies Inc. chapters could make a real difference. Many anglers from surrounding states fish South Dakota's waters, and protecting this fishery benefits the broader musky community.

I have also started a petition opposing the regulation change, which currently has 460 signatures. I'll include that along with the other important links below.

Thank you for taking the time to read this and for considering helping us protect the South Dakota musky fishery. We would be more than willing to support other chapters and fisheries when the need arises.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

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Important Links

Petition:

www.Change.org/ProtectSDMuskie

Public Comment:

<https://gfp.sd.gov/forms/positions/>

SDGFP Commission Members:

<https://gfp.sd.gov/commission/members/>

SDGFP Commission Meeting Information / Zoom:

<https://gfp.sd.gov/commission/information/>

(Meeting information and Zoom link will be posted up to 3 days before the meeting at this link)