

New Walleye Sonic Tagging Study is Underway!

A new sonic tagging study is underway on the Winnebago System to evaluate adult walleye movement and habitat use on the system including the Wolf and upper Fox Rivers. Although the Wolf River holds some of the most productive walleye spawning marshes on the Winnebago System, walleye have also historically made spawning runs on the upper Fox River, and occasionally spawn along Lake Winnebago shorelines. Although past survey efforts and studies indicate that good numbers of walleye utilize the Wolf River for spawning, it is still unknown what percent make spawning runs up the Wolf River, upper Fox River, or stay in Lake Winnebago. Further understanding walleye habitat use on the Winnebago System is critical for guiding management and habitat restoration efforts. The upper Fox River walleye spawning run has become less predictable in recent years. Fishways have also been installed to improve fish passage including at Eureka in 1993 and more recently in Princeton and **Montello**. Many of the historical walleye spawning marshes are located downstream of Princeton on the upper Fox River, but walleye should now have access to upstream reaches with the recent Princeton and **Montello** fishways. Therefore, it is important to evaluate if walleye movement and habitat use has changed on the upper Fox River. The study will help guide management and habitat restoration efforts on the Winnebago System which also has some benefit to downstream populations.

During fall of 2021, DNR staff tagged 74 adult walleye with internal sonic tags on Lake Winnebago during electrofishing surveys in several areas including Black Wolf (24), Grundman County Boat Landing (19), Asylum Bay (14), Paynes Point (13), Pipe (3) and Fond du Lac (1). In addition, the upper Fox River receiver network was expanded upstream to Portage and staff are also working to install 20 releasable acoustic receivers on Lake Winnebago as part of the study. For 2022, staff will focus tagging efforts on Lake Puckaway and the upper Fox River. This study is currently being funded by the Department, the Natural Resource Damage Assessment, Walleyes for Tomorrow, and Sheboygan Walleye Club. We hope to expand the project with more partners as the project continues.

All sonic tagged fish are also marked with an orange loop tag near the dorsal fin that reads, **RESEARCH REWARD**. Anglers that happen to catch a sonic tagged fish are asked to record the tag number information and approximate length, take a picture with the fish and close up of the both sides of loop tag showing the number, and report their catch. If the fish is released please leave the loop tag intact. If the fish is harvested please contact the DNR, the internal sonic tags have a 3 year battery life and may be able to be reused. Anglers that report the catch or harvest of a loop tagged fish and have proper confirmation (the physical loop tag or picture with fish and verifiable loop tag number) will receive a \$100 reward (reward expires Dec. 31, 2025). To report tags and catch information, anglers can email the information to DNRWINNEBAGOSYSTEMTAGRETURNS@wisconsin.gov, call 920-303-5429, or mail to the Oshkosh DNR office (625 East County Road Y, Oshkosh WI 54901).

