

I've been asked a couple times recently, if it's ok for people to share the email we sent out regarding our MMPA meeting at the muskie expo.

The answer is yes PLEASE!

Our goal over the last few months has been to expand the discussion around muskie management and forward-facing sonar, gather information and ideas, and start directing that conversation towards real options to address the concerns. We've made a lot of progress on that front, but the wider we expand it, the more likely we are to reach a positive outcome. I tried very hard fully summarize the ups and downs of each consideration in that last (very long) email. I would ask each of you to send that out to all of your muskie-friendly contacts. Let's keep things moving.

I recently attended two important events that pertain to muskie (and all fish species) management in Minnesota. The first was the MN-Fish Summit and the second was the DNR Citizen Workgroup Fisheries Summit. MN-Fish is a relatively new organization that has the goal of working with the DNR and the Legislature to have a positive impact on fishing all across MN. They have already made some big moves in a short time. This was the first time they've made a concerted effort to expand their focus and pull in input from the statewide angling community. I was pleased and impressed by their Summit. There were roughly 150-200 people in attendance, representing a wide variety of angling interests, and the crowd included everything from average anglers to some of the most influential and iconic names in fishing.

I was given the opportunity to lead a discussion on muskie management. Immediately prior to my speech, Jeremy Smith from Lindner Media lead a discussion on forward-facing sonar. That discussion circled frequently back to muskies which made a natural transition to my segment where I gave a brief summary of muskie management today and the direction of the next Long-Range Muskie Management Plan. I then focused most of my time on continuing the FFS discussion and the impacts on the muskie fishery.

The attached link will take you directly to my video segment.

If you have any trouble, just go to the MN-Fish facebook page and scroll down. The discussions were posted in 4 segments. Mine is segment 3.

<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/19vtoB5om2/>

A small company called Devoted Outdoors recorded and live-streamed the entire event. You can also find the videos posted on their facebook page.

This next link is very interesting. Please read the Devoted Outdoors description on this post. It details their first experience with using FFS to target muskies. It is enlightening.

<https://www.facebook.com/share/v/18EtaVHHeT/>

The next event was the DNR Fisheries Summit. This is an offshoot of the larger DNR Roundtable event, focusing solely on fishing related topics. The attendance of this summit is much smaller, consisting of members of the various species workgroups and the relevant DNR staff. This event allows representatives of the angling public to have face-to-face discussions with the DNR staff that directly influence fisheries management in MN.

The Esox (pike and muskie) workgroup met with the technology workgroup and had a very good discussion regarding FFS and muskies.

My takeaways from these events:

As we pretty much already knew, the DNR is not going to do anything proactive regarding the impacts of FFS on fisheries.

I am not impressed by their position on the issue or their reliance on information that, in my opinion, is not

indicative of the real users of FFS and how it is now being implemented. At both events, they stated that they see no evidence of increased catch rates, much less increased mortality rates, due to FFS. In both cases, that statement was met with sneers, eye-rolls, and whispers of contradiction in the audience. I made the statement that the DNR loses credibility with informed anglers when they make such statements.

All of these discussions have value. It seems that the more we talk about it, the more people recognize the potential for real harm to the fishery. Some of the most experienced users of FFS, having seen it all first-hand, are stating real concerns. The general angling public- muskie anglers as well as non-muskie anglers- seem to share a widespread sentiment that this technology, when used in certain ways, is not only damaging to the resource but also not ethical.

Self-imposed pressures have resulted in significant cultural and “ethical” shifts within the muskie community in the past, and it is going to be vital to undergo that type of change again. Taking personal responsibility for our actions, leading by example, open dialogue, education, peer pressure, social media efforts, and more, can play a big part in shifting anglers away from the practice of sharpshooting.

If anything is going to be done by way of regulation, it will have to be done by us, the anglers. Legislating regulatory change is the only way we will see an enforceable action.

Our next MMPA meeting is Saturday April 12, 10:00am at the Ultimate in Waite Park.

At our last meeting we found that all chapters, by majority, feel something should be done to address these issues.

We narrowed down the discussion to these 9 items that seem to hold merit. I would encourage you all to go back to that summary email and read through the pros and cons of these options. Implementing several of these options through voluntary social change, possibly in combination with seeking some form of regulation, is likely going to be the most effective route.

- 1.Total FFS ban
- 2.Ban FFS on all native muskie lakes
- 3.No sharpshooting
- 4.Limit to one FFS transducer
- 5.No FFS with gas motor
- 6.No FFS with fishing rods in boat
- 7.Night fishing ban
- 8.Barbless hooks
- 9.No removing muskies from the water

A new idea emerged at the MN-Fish summit that may be worth discussion. It may be possible to program FFS units to simply not work when in more than a certain water depth and/or not work while within a defined “geo-fencing” zone on the lake map. Can something like that be mandated? Something to think about. If you watch my discussion, you’ll see a guy call me out and suggest anglers limiting their own catch numbers. Maybe presented in a less-than-ideal way, but also valid to these discussions.

I hope you have all had the opportunity to discuss these items further, within your chapters and networks, and can come to the April meeting one step closer to finding the best way forward.

Thank you,
Aaron Meyer
MMPA Co-Chair