

Game and Fish seeks input on Lake DeSmet fishery

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Johnson County fishing license holders can expect to receive a survey from the Wyoming Game and Fish Department this month on fishing Lake DeSmet.

Lake DeSmet is one of the largest and most popular fisheries in the Sheridan region, according to Game and Fish. The five-minute survey was sent to license holders in Sheridan and Campbell counties as well.

What will potentially come of it is a regulation change for lake trout at Lake DeSmet. Lake trout at DeSmet currently fall under the statewide creel limit of six fish, no

more than one exceeding 24 inches. Creel limit refers to the total number of fish by species that anglers can legally harvest in any one day. Based on survey results, the department could consider increasing the creel limit on small lake trout or increasing the creel limit on all sizes of lake trout, the agency noted in a news release.

"The purpose of the survey is to hear directly from anglers on what changes they might support on lake trout regulations at DeSmet," Gordon Edwards, a Sheridan region fisheries biologist who manages Lake DeSmet, said in the release. "We hope everyone who receives a survey and fishes at DeSmet will submit

answers and comments."

Lake trout are long-lived, predatory fish, Edwards said, so their abundance can negatively impact other fish populations in the lake, including stocked rainbow trout and kokanee salmon. These fish have been present in the lake for many years, though they have not been stocked by Game and Fish in recent times and there is no evidence of illegal introduction, according to the agency. Lake trout are believed to have come downstream into Lake DeSmet from higher-elevation lakes and reservoirs. These fish are identifiable by their light spots that contrast with a dark, blue-gray

body and as well as white margins on yellow or orange fins and a forked tail.

The department has documented an increase in lake trout populations. Until roughly 10 years ago, there were few instances of anglers catching lake trout. Since then, these fish are being caught more frequently during both regular angling and the department's data collection.

In 2025, 80% of lake trout captured with gill nets were less than 20 inches and in good body condition, which suggests the population will continue to grow, according to Game and Fish.

"In response to the illegal

introduction of walleye into the lake in the early 1990s, we had to change our stocking regime, mainly by stocking larger trout," Edwards said. "Now we have another major challenge to address which is a booming lake trout population. We really need the help of anglers to harvest lake trout to control this growing population."

The survey seeks to learn more about which fish anglers pursue and catch most often at Lake DeSmet. The department will host follow-up public meetings in Buffalo and Sheridan in September to continue the conversation about lake trout and fisheries management at Lake DeSmet.