WISCONSIN

CLEAN & COOK GUIDE

Keep it fresh, fillet it right, cook it safe

From the hook to the Friday fish fry.



WISCONSIN

CLEAN & COOK

Guide

Keep it fresh, fillet it right, cook it safe



Clean & Cook Wisconsin Fish
First edition, October 2026

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Read this first. Fishing rules change every year and differ by lake. Everything about seasons, sizes and bag limits in this book is for the 2026–27 season, checked 2026-10-10. Always check the current Wisconsin DNR rules and your lake's own rules before you fish. Depth maps are not for navigation. Ice is never guaranteed safe. You are responsible for your own safety and for following the law.

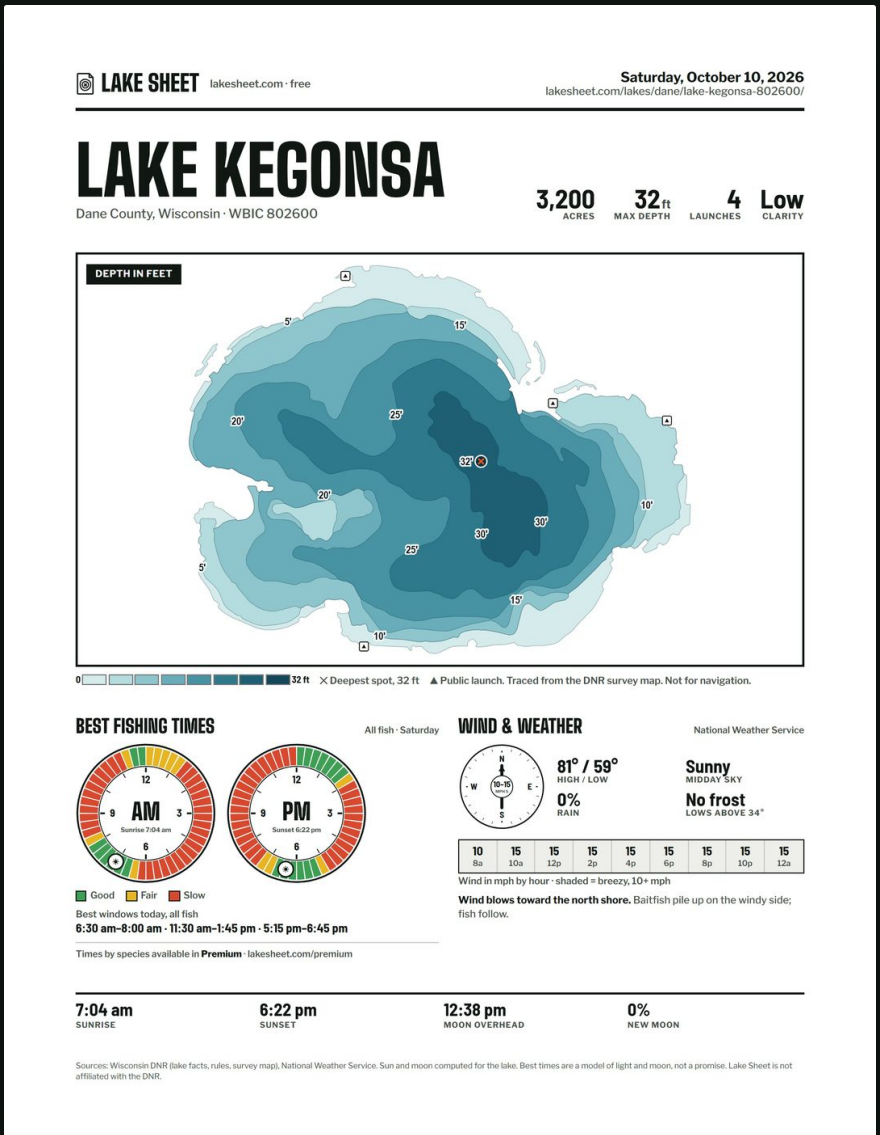
Lake Sheet is not affiliated with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Lake facts come from DNR survey and stocking records as published by Lake Sheet; see the sources at the back of the book.

lakesheet.com

FREE WITH THIS BOOK

YOUR FREE LAKE SHEET

Free for more than 4,600 Wisconsin lakes: two printable pages, made for the boat. This is the real sheet for Lake Kegonsa.



LAKE SHEET lakesheet.com · free

Saturday, October 10, 2026
lakesheet.com/lakes/dane/lake-kegonsa-802600/

LAKE KEGONSA

Dane County, Wisconsin · WBIC 802600

3,200	32 ft	4	Low
ACRES	MAX DEPTH	LAUNCHES	CLARITY

DEPTH IN FEET

5' 15' 20' 25' 32' 20' 10' 30' 30' 25' 5' 15' 10'

0 32 ft · ✕ Deepest spot, 32 ft · ▲ Public launch. Traced from the DNR survey map. Not for navigation.

BEST FISHING TIMES

All fish · Saturday

AM — Sunrise 7:04 am

PM — Sunset 6:22 pm

Good · Fair · Slow

Best windows today, all fish
6:30 am–8:00 am · 11:30 am–1:45 pm · 5:15 pm–6:45 pm

Times by species available in **Premium** · lakesheet.com/premium

WIND & WEATHER

National Weather Service

81° / 59°
HIGH / LOW

0%
RAIN

Sunny
MIDDAY SKY

No frost
LOWS ABOVE 34°

10	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15
8a	10a	12p	2p	4p	6p	8p	10p	12a

Wind in mph by hour · shaded = breezy, 10+ mph

Wind blows toward the north shore. Baitfish pile up on the windy side; fish follow.

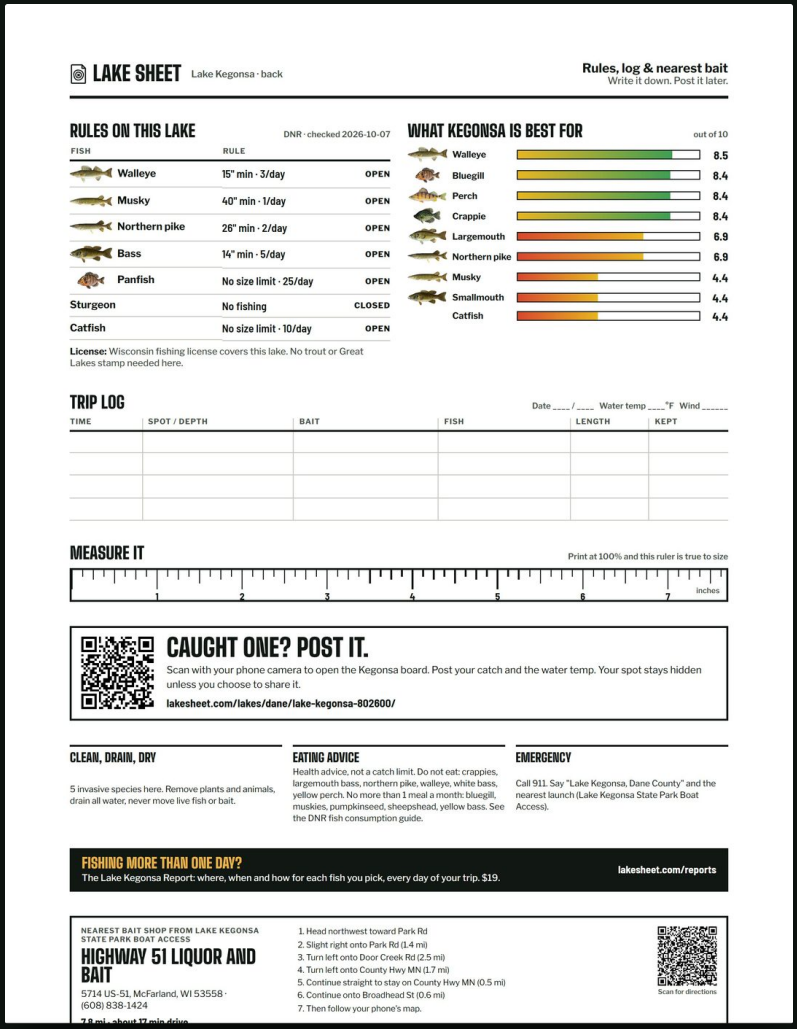
7:04 am	6:22 pm	12:38 pm	0%
SUNRISE	SUNSET	MOON OVERHEAD	NEW MOON

Sources: Wisconsin DNR (lake facts, rules, survey map), National Weather Service. Sun and moon computed for the lake. Best times are a model of light and moon, not a promise. Lake Sheet is not affiliated with the DNR.

1. **Depth map** traced from the DNR survey, deepest spot marked (traced lakes)
2. **Lake facts:** acres, max depth, launches, clarity
3. **Best times** from the sun and moon on AM and PM dials
4. **Wind and weather** by the hour, and which shore the wind hits
5. **Sun and moon** times for the lake
6. **Sources and date** on every fact

THE BACK OF THE SHEET

RULES, LOG & NEAREST BAIT



LAKE SHEET Lake Kegonsa · back

Rules, log & nearest bait
Write it down. Post it later.

RULES ON THIS LAKE

DNR · checked 2026-10-07

FISH	RULE	
Walleye	15" min · 3/day	OPEN
Musky	40" min · 1/day	OPEN
Northern pike	26" min · 2/day	OPEN
Bass	14" min · 5/day	OPEN
Panfish	No size limit · 25/day	OPEN
Sturgeon	No fishing	CLOSED
Catfish	No size limit · 10/day	OPEN

License: Wisconsin fishing license covers this lake. No trout or Great Lakes stamp needed here.

WHAT KEGONSA IS BEST FOR

out of 10

Walleye	8.5
Bluegill	8.4
Perch	8.4
Crappie	8.4
Largemouth	6.9
Northern pike	6.9
Musky	4.4
Smallmouth	4.4
Catfish	4.4

TRIP LOG

Date ____ / ____ Water temp ____°F Wind _____

TIME	SPOT / DEPTH	BAIT	FISH	LENGTH	KEPT

MEASURE IT

Print at 100% and this ruler is true to size

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 inches

CAUGHT ONE? POST IT.

Scan with your phone camera to open the Kegonsa board. Post your catch and the water temp. Your spot stays hidden unless you choose to share it.

lakesheet.com/lakes/dane/lake-kegonsa-802600/

CLEAN, DRAIN, DRY

5 invasive species here. Remove plants and animals, drain all water, never move live fish or bait.

EATING ADVICE

Health advice, not a catch limit. Do not eat: crappies, largemouth bass, northern pike, walleye, white bass, yellow perch. No more than 1 meal a month: bluegill, muskies, pumpkinseed, sheepshead, yellow bass. See the DNR fish consumption guide.

EMERGENCY

Call 911. Say "Lake Kegonsa, Dane County" and the nearest launch (Lake Kegonsa State Park Boat Access).

FISHING MORE THAN ONE DAY?
The Lake Kegonsa Report: where, when and how for each fish you pick, every day of your trip. $19.
lakesheet.com/reports

NEAREST BAIT SHOP FROM LAKE KEGONSA STATE PARK BOAT ACCESS

HIGHWAY 51 LIQUOR AND BAIT

5714 US-51, McFarland, WI 53558 · (608) 838-1424

7.8 mi · about 17 min drive

1. Head northwest toward Park Rd
2. Slight right onto Park Rd (1.4 mi)
3. Turn left onto Door Creek Rd (2.5 mi)
4. Turn left onto County Hwy MN (1.7 mi)
5. Continue straight to stay on County Hwy MN (0.5 mi)
6. Continue onto Broadhead St (0.6 mi)
7. Then follow your phone's map.

Scan for directions

1. **This lake's rules** for every fish, from the DNR
2. **What the lake is best for,** rated by fish
3. **Trip log** and a true-size **ruler**
4. **Invasive species** and eating advice
5. **Nearest bait shop** we know of, with turn-by-turn directions
6. Scan to post your catch

lakesheet.com

Find your lake, print it, take it in the boat

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book follows a fish from the moment it comes over the side of the boat to the moment it hits the plate. Read Chapter 1 before your next trip: most "fishy" fish was ruined in the first hour, not in the kitchen. After that, use the book like a cookbook. Find your fish in Chapter 4, your recipe in Chapter 7, and check Chapter 6 before you plan a meal from a new lake.

IF YOU'RE CLEANING FISH TONIGHT

1. Chapter 1.4: are they cold enough?
2. Chapter 3: set up your table and knife.
3. Chapter 4: find your fish, follow the steps.
4. Chapter 7.2: the beer batter fish fry.

IF YOU'VE NEVER CLEANED A FISH

1. Chapter 2: the $40 starter kit.
2. Chapter 3.3: practice on bluegill or perch.
3. Chapter 6: how often it's safe to eat.
4. Chapter 8: the questions everyone asks.

The eating advice. Most Wisconsin fish are safe and healthy to eat. Some waters have stricter advice, and on a few, some fish should not be eaten at all. Chapter 6 explains the advice in plain words and shows you where to find it for your lake on its free Lake Sheet.

The QR codes. The two lakes in Chapter 6 have codes. Scan one with your phone camera to open that lake's free Lake Sheet page, with the DNR's full eating advice for that water and the lake's own rules. The printed sheet has a short summary (6.6).

The rules. Size limits, bag limits and the rules for taking fillets home are for the 2026–27 season. Rules change every April 1. Check the current rules, and your lake's rules box on its Lake Sheet, before you keep a fish.

The food safety numbers. Cooking temperatures, freezer times and smoking temperatures come from the FDA, USDA and University of Wisconsin Sea Grant, and each is credited where it's used. Recipes are written for this book, with exact amounts, times and temperatures, for fish you caught yourself.



CHAPTER 1

FRESH FROM CATCH TO KITCHEN

The best fish fry starts on the water. A walleye or bluegill that goes from the hook to ice in five minutes tastes clean and sweet a day later. The same fish left in a warm bucket all afternoon goes soft, smells fishy and falls apart in the pan, and no batter can fix it. This chapter covers the first hours: keeping fish alive or killing and icing them, how long you can wait to clean them, and the Wisconsin rules for taking fish and fillets home.

1.1 Why fish go bad · **1.2** Livewell, stringer or cooler · **1.3** Kill and bleed · **1.4** Ice, the right way · **1.5** How long before you clean · **1.6** The rules for taking fish home · **1.7** Out-of-state trips

1.1
WHY FISH GO BAD

Two things spoil a fish after it dies, and both slow down in the cold:

- **Bacteria.** They live in the slime, gills and gut. In warm air they multiply fast; on ice they nearly stop. University of Wisconsin Sea Grant calls bacteria "the main cause of spoilage in fresh fish."
- **Enzymes.** The fish's own digestive and tissue enzymes keep working after death and start breaking down the meat. Sea Grant says icing or quickly freezing the fish "helps prevent such enzymatic action."

Signs a fish sat too long warm: soft meat that doesn't spring back, a sour or ammonia smell, cloudy eyes, thick grainy slime, and ribs pulling away from the meat, which Sea Grant calls **"belly burn."**

> **THE 40-DEGREE RULE**
> The FDA says to keep fresh seafood at **40°F or colder**. Fish on plenty of ice sit near 32°F, which is better still. Every hour above 40°F costs you quality you can't get back.

1.2
LIVEWELL, STRINGER OR COOLER

Sea Grant's advice is simple: keep a fish alive as long as you can, and once it dies, clean it and ice it as soon as you can. How you do that depends on the season and your boat.

METHOD	GOOD FOR	WATCH OUT FOR
Livewell with a pump running	Spring and fall, cool water. Fish stay alive and fresh for hours.	In July the livewell is as warm as the lake surface. Crowded fish in warm water stress and die. Check often; a dead fish in a livewell soaks up water and goes soft.
Stringer over the side	Short trips, cool water, shore fishing. Free.	Fish on a stringer drag in warm surface water, get beaten up and often die by afternoon. Use a clip stringer through the lips, never through the gills.

Wire fish basket hung over the side	Panfish from a dock or anchored boat	Same warm-water problem. Keep it in the shade side of the boat.
Bucket of lake water	Kids, a few panfish	The water warms fast. Change it every 20–30 minutes or move fish to ice.
Cooler of ice (kill first)	Summer, long trips, any fish you've decided to keep	Needs a lot of ice. Drain the meltwater.

Our rule of thumb: if the surface water is cool (spring, fall, early morning), a running livewell is fine. Once the water is warm, or the trip is long, kill your keepers and put them on ice. No state agency gives a water temperature for this; it's general practice.

DON'T

- Toss dead fish on the boat floor in the sun. Sea Grant also warns against letting fish flop around in the boat: the bumping bruises the meat.
- Leave a dead fish in the livewell or bucket. Out of the water, onto ice.
- Cull. Under Wisconsin rules, any fish you keep and don't release right away counts in your bag, even if you let it go later (1.6).



FIG 1.1 Walleye on cubed ice in the cooler. Keep them belly down with more ice piled on top, and they'll be firm and sweet when you clean them.

1.3
KILL AND BLEED

A fish killed quickly and bled tastes milder and has whiter meat, and it doesn't flop and bruise in the cooler. It's the kindest way, too.

1. **Stun it.** Hold the fish firmly and hit it once, hard, on the top of the head just behind the eyes, with a short club, the back of a heavy knife or a wooden priest. One or two blows is enough.
2. **Cut the gills.** Lift the gill cover and cut through the red gill arches on one or both sides with a knife or scissors, or cut the "throat" where the gills meet under the chin.
3. **Bleed it.** Put the fish head-down in a bucket of lake water for 3–5 minutes. The heart keeps pumping briefly and the blood runs out.
4. **Ice it.** Straight into the cooler.

Bleeding matters most on walleye, pike, bass, trout and salmon. On a bucket of bluegill, most anglers skip it and put the fish straight on ice.

1.4
ICE, THE RIGHT WAY

- **About as much ice as fish, by weight,** is a common rule of thumb; more in hot weather.
- **Crushed or cubed ice** touches more of the fish than a block. Blocks last longer. Many anglers bring one of each.
- **An ice slurry** (ice with a little clean water, not lake water) chills fish fastest, in minutes. Use it for the first hour, then drain it.
- **On a long drive,** stop every couple of hours to drain the cooler and add ice, Sea Grant says. Put it in the car, not the sunny truck bed.
- **Drain the meltwater.** Sea Grant warns that fish sitting in meltwater soak it up and go soft. Use a cooler with a drain, a raised rack, or put fish in zip bags before they go on the ice.
- **Belly down, ice on top.** Pack ice inside the belly of gutted fish. Cold air sinks; ice on top works better than ice underneath.

- **Shade the cooler** and keep the lid shut. Ice lasts longer in a light-colored cooler in the shade than in a dark one in the sun.

No ice at all? Sea Grant's fallback: wrap the fish loosely in a damp cloth or paper, put it in the shade (under a boat seat), and keep the wrap wet so evaporation cools it.

1.5

HOW LONG BEFORE YOU CLEAN

The honest answer: **as soon as you can.** Here's how long fish keep good quality, by how they're kept.

HOW THE FISH IS KEPT	CLEAN WITHIN	NOTES
Dead, in the sun or a warm boat	**Don't.** Throw it away if you can't remember when it died.	Warm, dead fish spoil within hours in summer.
Dead, in the shade, no ice, cool day (under 50°F)	Within a few hours (our advice)	Wrap in a damp cloth (Sea Grant).
Alive in a livewell or on a stringer in cool water	End of the trip	Kill, bleed and clean within an hour or two of landing.
Whole, on plenty of ice, drained	Same day; 24 hours at most (our advice)	Gut larger fish if you can't fillet the same day.
Cleaned fillets, refrigerated at 40°F or colder	Cook or freeze within 1–2 days	FDA: use fresh seafood within 2 days; FoodSafety.gov: 1–3 days for fatty fish.

Should you gut first? For fish you'll fillet that day, no: the fillet comes off and the guts stay with the frame. For fish that will sit whole for more than a few hours, or that you'll cook whole (trout, small panfish), gut them early. The gut holds most of the bacteria and the strongest enzymes. Chapter 3.1 shows how.

1.6

THE RULES FOR TAKING FISH HOME

Wisconsin's rules for transporting fish are short, but the fillet rule catches people every year, and it changed in 2024. A fish with a length limit may go home whole, gutted, or filleted **with the head and tail still attached**. Cut off the head or tail, or carry plain fillets, and you need a dated photo of the whole fish beside a ruler. Either way, gutted fish stay in one piece and fillets keep their **skin and scales on**.

FOR THE 2026-27 SEASON · CHECKED 2026-10-10

RULE	WHAT IT SAYS
Fish with a length limit	May be carried home whole, gutted, or filleted with the head and tail still attached. If you cut off the head or tail, or carry fillets, you must be able to show a warden a photo of the whole fish next to a ruler or measuring board: either a printed photo stamped with the date and time, or a phone photo whose data shows when it was taken (the warden may look only at that photo). Gutted fish stay in one piece, and fillets keep their skin and scales on. Applies to walleye, pike, bass, musky, trout and any fish with a size limit on the water you fished (s. 29.407(1)(b), Wis. Stats., 2023 Act 112).
How to measure	In a straight line from the tip of the snout, mouth closed, to the end of the tail pinched together (p. 21). Measure this way in the photo.
Fish with no length limit	Panfish, catfish and bullheads usually have no length limit, so the head-and-tail, photo and skin rules above don't apply to them. Check your lake: some lakes do set panfish sizes, and then the rules above apply.
Bag on the water	You may not have more than the daily bag while you're fishing or on the water, shore or ice, no matter how many days you've fished. Fillets in the cooler count.
Possession	Generally no more than twice the total daily bag at any time and any place, including your home freezer. Wisconsin–Michigan boundary waters: one daily bag. Trout from inland waters: 10.
No culling	Any fish you keep and don't release right away counts in your bag, even if you let it go later.

No group bags	The person who catches a fish counts it. Fish someone gives you count toward your possession limit.
Live fish	Never move live fish away from a water. Fish out of the water are not considered live. Transporting them on ice is legal and recommended.

Statute s. 29.407(1)(b) (2023 Wis. Act 112, in force since March 2024) and pamphlet p. 10–11 and p. 21. The 2026–27 pamphlet (p. 11) also says fillets may be carried if they meet the minimum length; that wording is not in the statute, and the statute's skin-and-scales rule is not in the pamphlet. The statute controls, so this book prints the statute.

Rules change every April 1, and many lakes have their own limits. Always check the current rules: **https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/fishing/regulations**, and your lake's rules box on its free Lake Sheet.

The photo rule, step by step. If you'll fillet a walleye, pike, bass or any fish with a size limit before you get home (at a cabin, a resort's cleaning shack, or the launch), do this for **each** fish before the head or tail comes off:

1. Lay the whole fish on a ruler or a bump board (measuring board). Nose against the end, mouth closed, tail pinched.
2. Take a photo with your phone that shows the whole fish, the species clearly, and the length markings.
3. Make sure your phone records the date and time (most do automatically). A printed photo needs the date and time stamped on it. A warden may look only at that photo on your phone, nothing else.
4. **Leave the skin and scales on** the fillets. Skin them at home.
5. Keep the photos until the fish are eaten.

The easy way: keep size-limited fish whole, on ice, until you're home. Or fillet them with the skin on and the head and tail still attached to the fillet. Panfish and catfish usually have no length limit, so you can fillet and skin them at the lake, but check: some lakes do set panfish sizes, and it's on the lake's Lake Sheet.

How many fish can you have at home? The possession limit is generally twice the total daily bag (check the table: pike are the exception), and it counts the fish in your freezer, too.

FOR THE 2026-27 SEASON · CHECKED 2026-10-10

FISH	TOTAL DAILY BAG	POSSESSION LIMIT
Panfish (bluegill, pumpkinseed, yellow perch, crappie)	25 in total	50 in total
Walleye, sauger and hybrids	5 in total (most lakes allow only 3 from any one water)	10 in total
Largemouth and smallmouth bass	5 in total	10 in total
Northern pike, north of U.S. Hwy 10	5 in total	10 in total
Northern pike, south of U.S. Hwy 10	2 in total	10 in total
Musky	1	2 in total
Catfish	25 in total	50 in total
Cisco and whitefish, inland	10 in total	20 in total
Rock bass, white and yellow bass, bullheads, rough fish	None	None

Total daily bag = all waters fished that day combined (pamphlet p. 16–17). Each water's own daily bag is usually lower; it's on that lake's Lake Sheet. Trout bags are in the separate trout guide.

Rules change every April 1, and many lakes have their own limits. Always check the current rules: **https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/fishing/regulations**, and your lake's rules box on its free Lake Sheet.

COUNT FILLETS AS FISH

Two fillets are one fish. Pack fillets in bags by meal and write the number of fish on each bag (5.5). It keeps you honest on the possession limit, and it answers the question if a warden asks.

1.7

OUT-OF-STATE TRIPS

Other states have their own transport rules, and some are stricter than Wisconsin's. If you fish across the border (Minnesota, Michigan, Iowa,

Illinois, Canada), check that state's or province's current rules and follow them until the fish are home.

Minnesota requires that dressed fish and fillets keep a patch of skin, at least one square inch with the scales on, somewhere other than the belly, so the species can be identified. Sunfish, crappie and bullheads are exempt. In Minnesota a fish may not be cut into more than two fillets, so the five-fillet pike method (4.5) waits until you're home. Fish must be packed so they can be unwrapped, separated and counted (Minnesota Rules 6262.3200, checked October 2026).

Back in Wisconsin, Wisconsin's rule applies too: skin and scales on the whole fillet, plus the photo if the head and tail are off (1.6).