WISCONSIN

FISH ID GUIDE

Name every fish you catch, from bluegill to sturgeon

Your field guide to Wisconsin's sport fish and their lookalikes.



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FISH ID

Guide

Name every fish you catch, from bluegill to sturgeon



Wisconsin Fish ID Guide
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 2026-10-08. 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.

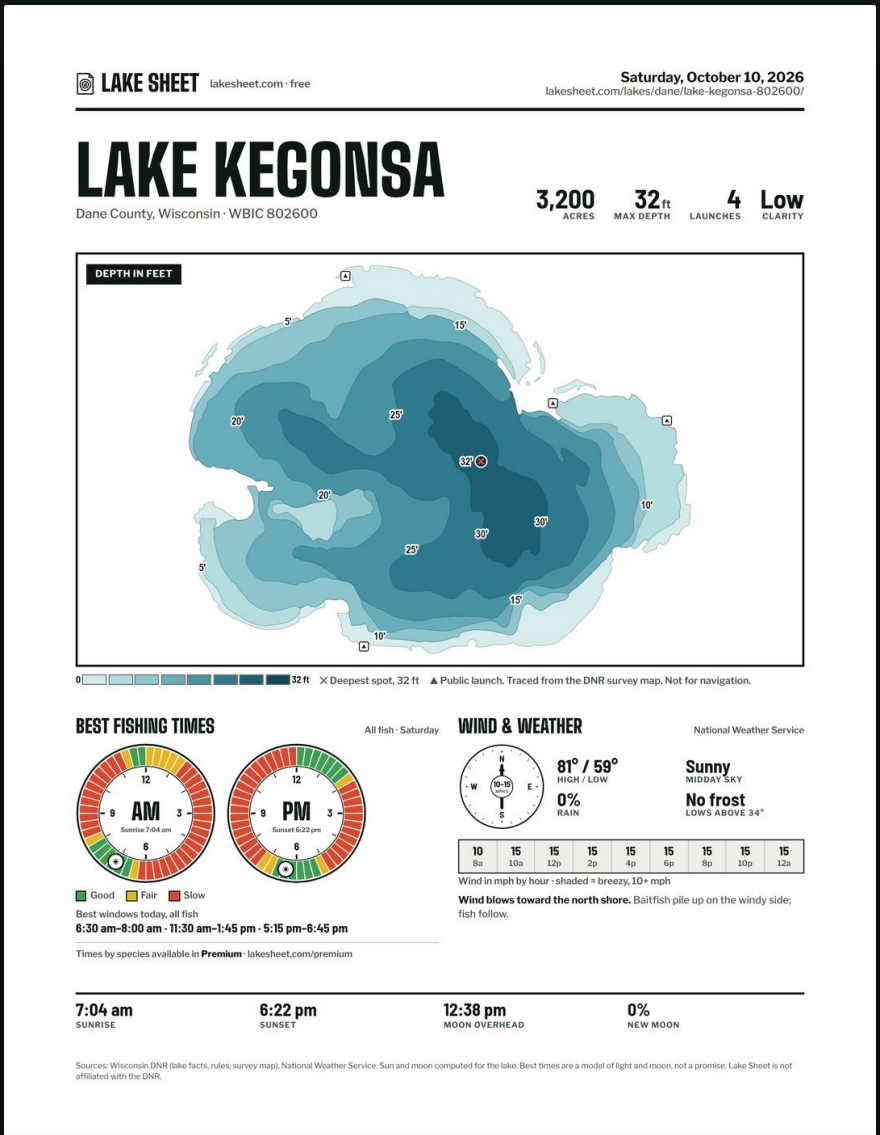
Lake Sheet is not affiliated with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Lake facts come from DNR survey and stocking records as published by Lake Sheet; see the sources at the back of the book.

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.

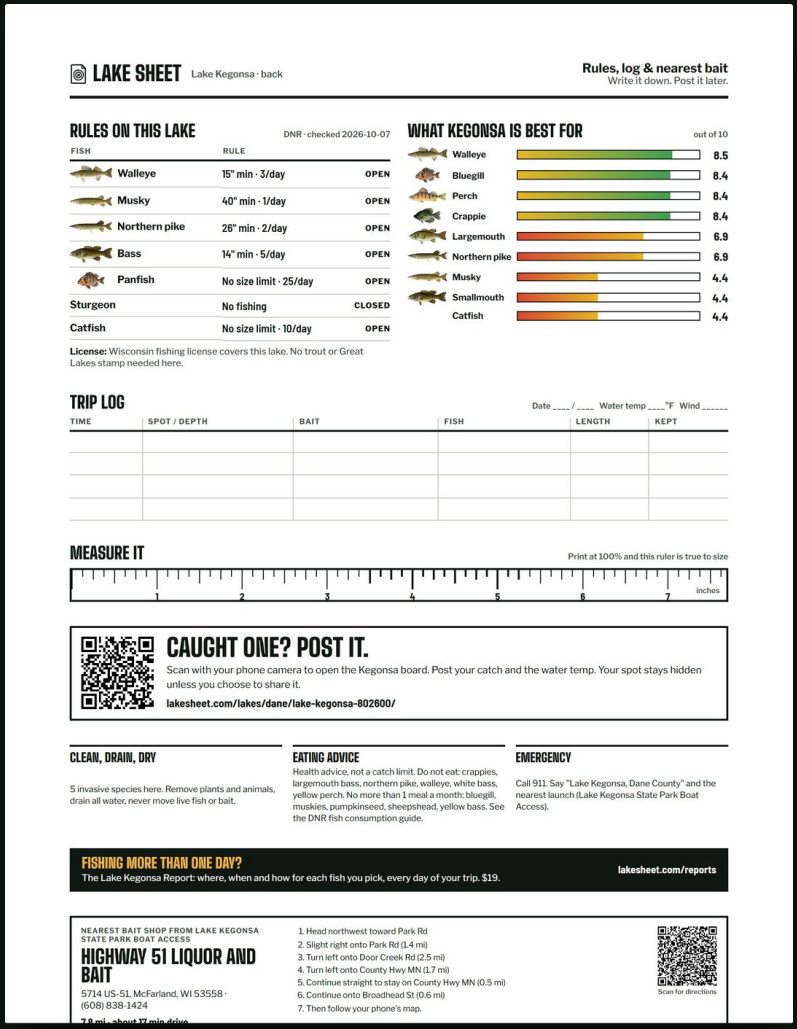
7:04 am	6:22 pm	12:38 pm	0%
SUNRISE	SUNSET	MOON OVERHEAD	NEW MOON

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

Keep this field guide in the boat bag. When something unfamiliar comes over the side, name it in a minute, know whether you may keep it, and get it back in the water fast if you can't.

IF A FISH IS ON THE DECK RIGHT NOW

1. Turn to the **quick-ID key** (Chapter 2) and start from the first thing you notice.
2. The key sends you to a page. Check the **"Tell it by"** marks against the fish.
3. Check the **lookalikes** line. Most mistakes happen there.
4. Read the **rules** line, then check your lake's rules box on its Lake Sheet.

IF YOU HAVE AN EVENING AT HOME

1. Chapter 1: the parts of a fish, so the marks make sense.
2. Read the lookalike spreads: walleye and sauger, pike and musky, the sunfish, the trouts.
3. Chapter 10: the fish you must let go and the ones you must report.
4. Start your **life list** in Chapter 14.

The pictures. Every fish in this book is shown in a painting or engraving that is in the public domain: most are by Duane Raver for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, or by Sherman Foote Denton for the New York fish and game reports of the 1890s and 1900s. Paintings show the marks more clearly than photos. A few "in the hand" photos from our own trips show the same marks on real Wisconsin fish. Real fish vary with water, season and stress, so trust the marks, not the exact color.

Each entry gives the marks that tell the fish apart, its lookalikes, its usual size, the Wisconsin record, where it lives, the rules and how it shows on your Lake Sheet.

The records are the kept hook-and-line records from the DNR's Wisconsin Record Fish List, revised September 2026. **Sizes** are the typical and largest Wisconsin lengths from Wisconsin Fish ID, the identification database built by the University of Wisconsin Center for Limnology, the DNR and UW Sea Grant. **The rules** are for the 2026–27 season. Check your lake's rules box on its free Lake Sheet before you keep a fish.



CHAPTER 1

HOW TO NAME A FISH

Wisconsin has more than 160 kinds of fish, according to the DNR. You will catch perhaps 25 of them on hook and line, and almost every one can be named in a minute from a handful of marks: where the fins sit, what the mouth looks like, and whether the pattern is bars, stripes or spots. This chapter teaches you to look at a fish the way a biologist does.

1.1 Six steps to name any fish · **1.2** The parts of a fish · **1.3** Fins that sort fish into families · **1.4** Body shapes · **1.5** Mouths, teeth and whiskers · **1.6** Bars, stripes and spots · **1.7** Counting, when you have to · **1.8** A photo that proves it · **1.9** The rules, group by group

1.1

SIX STEPS TO NAME ANY FISH

Work through these in order. Most fish are named by step 3.

1. **Shape.** Torpedo, pancake, snake, or something with a beak? (See 1.4.)
2. **Whiskers.** Barbels around the mouth narrow it to catfish and bullheads (eight), burbot (one on the chin), sturgeon (four under the snout) or carp (two on each side).
3. **The fins on the back.** A little fleshy fin with no rays near the tail (the *adipose fin*) means a trout, salmon, whitefish, cisco, smelt or catfish. A spiny front fin means the perch, bass or sunfish families. One soft fin set far back means the pike family.
4. **The mouth.** How big, which way it points, and whether it has teeth (1.5).
5. **The pattern.** Vertical bars, horizontal stripes, or spots; dark marks on a light body, or light marks on a dark one (1.6).
6. **The lookalike check.** Every entry in this book lists the fish it is most often confused with. Rule them out one mark at a time.

> **NAME IT BEFORE YOU KEEP IT**
>
> In Wisconsin the rules depend on the species. A bluegill counts in the 25-panfish bag; a rock bass doesn't count at all; a longear sunfish may not be kept; a white perch may not be released alive on inland waters. If you can't name a fish, let it go.

1.2
THE PARTS OF A FISH

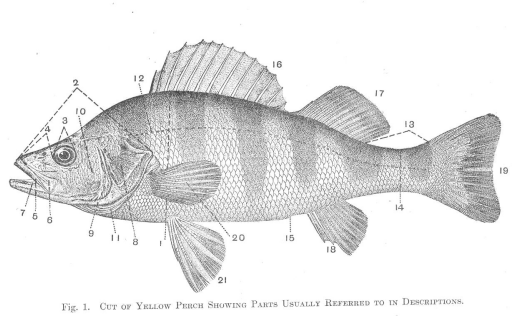

Fig. 1. Cut of Yellow Perch Showing Parts Usually Referred to in Descriptions.

FIG 1.1 The parts of a fish, on a yellow perch. 1 depth · 2 head · 3 eye · 4 snout · 5 premaxillary (front of the upper jaw) · 6 maxillary (rear of the upper jaw) · 7 lower jaw · 8 opercle (gill cover) · 9 subopercle · 10 preopercle and cheek · 11 branchiostegals (rays under the gill cover) · 12 lateral line · 13 length and 14 depth of the caudal peduncle (the "wrist" of the tail) · 15 vent · 16 spiny dorsal fin · 17 soft dorsal fin · 18 anal fin · 19 caudal (tail) fin · 20 pectoral fin · 21 ventral (pelvic) fin. H. M. Smith, *Fishes of North Carolina*, 1907.

The words in Figure 1.1 are the ones every field guide, DNR leaflet and ID app uses. You only need about a dozen of them:

PART	WHERE	WHY IT MATTERS FOR ID
Dorsal fin	Top of the back. Can be one fin, two joined fins, or two separate fins	Spines or not, one fin or two, spots or a black blotch
Adipose fin	Small fleshy fin with no rays, on the back near the tail	Trout, salmon, whitefish, cisco, smelt, catfish and bullheads have one; nothing else you'll catch does
Caudal fin (tail)	The tail	Deeply forked, notched, square or rounded; white tip or not
Anal fin	Underside, behind the vent	Length and number of spines separate the white bass from the white perch, and the bullheads from each other
Pectoral fins	Behind the gill cover, one each side	Long and pointed on bluegill and pumpkinseed, short and round on green sunfish
Pelvic (ventral) fins	Underside, in front of the anal fin	Under the pectorals in bass, perch and sunfish; far back toward the tail in pike, trout and carp

Gill cover (opercle)	The flap behind the head	The "ear flap" on sunfish is the back edge of it, and its color names the species
Cheek	Below and behind the eye	Fully scaled on a northern pike, half scaled on a musky
Lateral line	A line of pored scales along the side	Bluegill and pumpkinseed have one; round gobies have none
Caudal peduncle	The narrow "wrist" in front of the tail	Thick or slim; spot at its base on a bowfin
Barbels	Whiskers around the mouth	Catfish, burbot, sturgeon, carp
Gill rakers	Comb-like bones inside the gill arch	A last resort for biologists; you won't need them

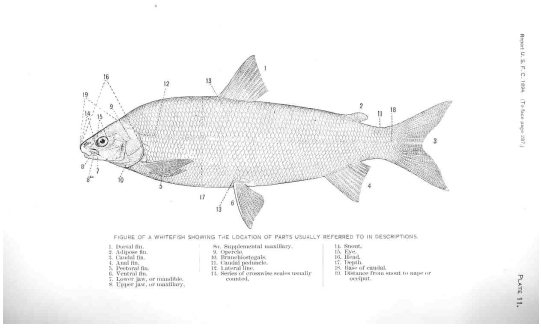

FIG 1.2 **The adipose fin (number 2) on a whitefish.** This little fleshy fin, with no rays in it, sorts the trout, salmon, whitefish and cisco from everything else with scales. B. W. Evermann, *Whitefishes of North America*, U.S. Fish Commission, 1896.

1.3
FINS THAT SORT FISH INTO FAMILIES

Fish families share a fin plan. Learn eight plans and you can put almost any fish you catch into the right chapter of this book.

FIN PLAN	FAMILY	WISCONSIN FISH	CHAPTER
Two dorsal fins, the first spiny; pelvic fins under the pectorals; 2 anal spines	**Perch family**	Walleye, sauger, saugeye, yellow perch (and the invasive ruffe)	3
One dorsal fin, spiny front joined to soft back; 3 or more anal spines; deep, flat body	**Sunfish family**	Bluegill, pumpkinseed, green sunfish, warmouth, rock bass, crappies, largemouth, smallmouth	4

One soft dorsal fin set far back, near the tail; duck-bill jaws full of teeth	**Pike family**	Northern pike, muskellunge, tiger musky, grass pickerel	5
Adipose fin; no spines; scales	**Trout and salmon family**	Brook, brown, rainbow and lake trout, splake, coho, chinook, cisco, whitefish (and smelt, its own family)	6
Adipose fin; no scales; eight barbels; sharp spines in the back and side fins	**Catfish family**	Channel and flathead catfish, black, brown and yellow bullhead	7
Two dorsal fins, first spiny; 3 anal spines; silver body; saw-edged gill cover	**Temperate basses**	White bass, yellow bass, hybrid striped bass, white perch	8
No spines; mouth on the underside; often barbels or fleshy lips	**Sturgeons, suckers, carp, buffalo**	Lake and shovelnose sturgeon, white sucker, redhorses, common carp, buffalo	9
Odd fin plans: one long soft dorsal, a beak, a chin whisker	**Ancient and odd fish**	Bowfin, gars, burbot, freshwater drum	9

1.4

BODY SHAPES

SHAPE	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	EXAMPLES	WHAT IT TELLS YOU
Torpedo (fusiform)	Round in cross-section, tapered at both ends	Trout, salmon, walleye, white sucker	A swimmer of open water or current
Pancake (laterally compressed)	Tall and thin, flat from the side	Bluegill, crappie, freshwater drum	Turns quickly in weeds and cover
Arrow	Long, with the dorsal and anal fins far back	Northern pike, musky, gar	An ambush hunter that lunges from cover
Flat-headed (depressed)	Wide, flat head and belly	Flathead catfish, bullheads, burbot	A bottom dweller
Snake (eel-like)	Long and round with no paired fins	Sea lamprey, American eel	Lampreys have no jaws, only a sucking disk
Armored	Rows of bony plates, shark-like tail	Lake and shovelnose sturgeon	An ancient fish; special rules apply

1.5

MOUTHS, TEETH AND WHISKERS

Where the mouth points. A *terminal* mouth opens at the tip of the snout (bass, walleye, trout). A *subterminal* or *inferior* mouth sits under the snout, made for feeding off the bottom (suckers, redhorses, sturgeon, carp). An *upturned* mouth feeds from below on things at the surface (crappies are close to this).

How far back the jaw reaches. The single best mark for bass: on a **largemouth**, the upper jaw reaches past the back of the eye when the mouth is closed. On a **smallmouth**, it does not reach past the eye.

Teeth. Pike, musky and gar have rows of needle teeth; handle them by the gill cover with care. Walleye and sauger have a few long canine teeth. Bowfin have many sharp teeth. Bass and sunfish have only rough pads like sandpaper. Suckers and carp have no teeth in the jaws at all.

Gums. On salmon, look inside the mouth: a **chinook** has black gums at the base of the teeth; a **coho** has white or gray gums.

Whiskers (barbels).

BARBELS	FISH
8: two at the nostrils, two at the corners of the mouth, four on the chin	Channel and flathead catfish, all three bullheads
1, on the chin	Burbot
4, in a row under the snout, in front of a toothless sucking mouth	Lake and shovelnose sturgeon
2 on each side of the upper lip	Common carp (goldfish and invasive carp have none)

1.6

BARS, STRIPES AND SPOTS

Fish people use these words exactly, and so does this book.

- **Bars** run up and down (vertical): yellow perch, smallmouth bass, musky (sometimes), bluegill.

- **Stripes** run nose to tail (horizontal): white bass, yellow bass, the dark side stripe of a largemouth.
- **Dark spots on a light body:** musky (some), brown and rainbow trout, chinook and coho salmon, channel catfish.
- **Light spots on a dark body:** northern pike, brook trout, lake trout, splake. This one mark separates a pike from a musky and a lake trout from a brown trout.

Color changes. Fish from dark, stained water are darker; fish from muddy rivers are paler. Spawning males turn bright: a bluegill's breast goes rusty orange, a smallmouth turns bronze-black, a male chinook turns dark with a hooked jaw. Fish held in a livewell or bucket fade within minutes. That's why this book leans on fins, mouths and patterns more than color.

1.7

COUNTING, WHEN YOU HAVE TO

A few lookalikes can only be separated by counting. You'll rarely need these, but they settle arguments.

TO SEPARATE	COUNT	ANSWER
Musky from northern pike	Pores under the lower jaw, one side	Musky 6–9; pike usually 5
Rock bass from other sunfish	Spines in the anal fin	Rock bass 5–7; bluegill, pumpkinseed and the others 3
Black crappie from white crappie	Spines in the dorsal fin	Black usually 7–8; white usually 5–6
Black, yellow and brown bullhead	Rays in the anal fin	Black 15–21; brown 21–24; yellow 24–27
White bass from yellow bass	Rays in the anal fin	White 11–13; yellow 8–10
Longnose from white sucker	Scales along the lateral line	Longnose over 90; white 55–85

Counts from Wisconsin Fish ID (UW Center for Limnology, Wisconsin DNR and UW Sea Grant) and the DNR crappie leaflet.

1.8

A PHOTO THAT PROVES IT

A good photo lets a DNR biologist, a bait shop or an ID app confirm your fish later, and in some cases the law asks for one. Wisconsin law (2023 Act 112) lets you carry home a fish that has a length limit 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: a printed photo stamped with the date and time, or a phone photo whose data shows when it was taken. Gutted fish stay in one piece, and fillets keep their skin and scales on. A clear whole-side photo also proves the species.

THE ID PHOTO SET

1. **Whole side**, fish flat on a wet board or the bottom of the net, head to the left, fins spread.
2. **The head up close**, mouth closed (for bass jaws and pike cheeks).
3. **Under the jaw** for pike, musky and tiger musky (the pores).
4. **The tail** for walleye and sauger (white tip or not) and for salmon (spots on both lobes or only the top).
5. **Inside the mouth** for chinook and coho (gum color).
6. **A ruler or bump board** in the frame, with the fish laid along it, mouth closed, tail squeezed.

DON'T

- Hold a fish up by the jaw at arm's length for an ID photo. It makes the fish look bigger and hides the fins.
- Keep a fish out of the water while you look it up. Take the photos, release it, then identify it from the pictures.
- Squeeze a fish you plan to release, or touch its gills.

1.9

THE RULES, GROUP BY GROUP

Wisconsin's rules are written for groups of fish, so naming the fish tells you which line applies. Every species entry in this book names its group. This is the statewide starting point for inland waters; many lakes have their own limits, shown in the rules box on each Lake Sheet.

FOR THE 2026–27 SEASON · CHECKED 2026-10-08

GROUP	WHICH FISH	SEASON	BAG	SIZE
Walleye	Walleye, sauger, saugeye (together)	May 2, 2026 – Mar 7, 2027	3	15" min. (Ceded Territory: 15" to under 20", plus 1 over 24")
Bass	Largemouth and smallmouth (together)	Keep May 2, 2026 – Mar 7, 2027 (smallmouth from June 20 in the Northern Zone); release only at other times	5	14" min.
Musky	Musky and tiger musky	May 2 – Dec 31, 2026, open water only	1	40" min. (many lakes 50")
Northern pike	Northern pike	May 2, 2026 – Mar 7, 2027	5 north of US Hwy 10; 2 south	None north; 26" south
Panfish	Bluegill, pumpkinseed, green sunfish, warmouth, orangespotted, crappies, yellow perch	All year	25 in total	None
No-limit bass	Rock, white and yellow bass	All year	None	None
Catfish	Channel and flathead	All year	10 in total	None

Bullheads, rough fish	Bullheads; suckers, redhorse, carp, buffalo, drum, burbot, bowfin, gar, smelt	All year	None	None
Cisco, whitefish	Cisco, lake whitefish, hybrids	All year	10 in total	None
Lake sturgeon	Lake sturgeon	Listed waters only, first Saturday in September to Sept 30 (Sept 5–30 in 2026; Sept 4–30, 2027), harvest tag	1 a season	60" min.
Trout, salmon	All trout and salmon	Separate trout regulations guide	—	—
Closed: invasive	Ruffe, gobies, white perch (inland)	Closed	Kill; may keep 1 for the DNR	—
Closed: protected	Threatened and endangered fish; grass pickerel; American eel	No open season	0	—

General inland waters, pamphlet p. 16–17, 71–72. Great Lakes, Winnebago system and border waters differ.

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