

Bullheads in Lake Metonga: Public Enemy #1 For Now

Gary Mueller, Lake Metonga Association Fisheries & Habitat Committee

One of the recommendations of the recently completed Ten Year Lake Management Plan, was the establishment of several action committees. Before the ink was dry on the Plan, the Fisheries and Habitat Committee was formed and immediately tasked with formulating a plan to remove “young of the year” [YOY] bullheads from the lake.

The bullhead population has exploded again in recent years, even after Mole Lake Fisheries accomplished a major electro-shock reduction project from 2008-2017. That bullhead reduction initiative was profound, resulting in a substantial increase in perch and walleye reproduction numbers. But now, only three years removed from that project, the bullhead density has become so bad recently that even the crayfish population is decimated. What’s next, the perch and walleye?

Recognizing the urgency of the problem, Mole Lake Fisheries resumed electro shocking in a major way and at great expense. Fortunately, this years early ice out afforded them time to accomplish a strong bullhead removal between all of their walleye hatchery work. The harvest of over eleven thousand fish looks like a large number, but it represents only a fraction of the total population. Bullhead spawning will produce many times that if left unchecked.

But, the Mole Lake Tribe cannot continue to deal with bullhead overpopulation alone. The Lake Metonga Association and the Wisconsin DNR Fisheries have agreed to do their part in developing a long range bullhead management strategy. The LMA and in particular the Fisheries and Habitat Committee (F&HC) have agreed to develop a plan that will engage ALL lake stakeholders in this important task. As part of the plan, the DNR has had to put in place specific criteria that we need to follow. The DNR has piloted this type of project, with success, on several other lakes and therefore we are hoping to make the Lake Metonga bullhead project as successful as possible. To that end, everyone’s support and participation is greatly appreciated.



Over the course of several evenings this spring, Mole Lake Fisheries netted nearly 13,000 bullheads. Harvested using the Tribe’s electro shocking watercraft, the bullheads are donated to REGI (Raptor Education Group Inc.) to provide food for the eagles and other injured birds under their care.

In spite of all the Covid related meeting challenges, the association’s F&HC was able to establish a strong working relationship with our partners, Mole Lake and DNR Fisheries, to develop a specific plan to tackle the bullhead problem.

Objectives of the plan are straight forward:

1. Provide information to all lake stakeholders that will allow them legal participation in the project.
2. Maximize a verifiable bullhead harvest, and:
3. Provide the Mole Lake and DNR Fisheries the necessary data requested in order to assess the program’s effectiveness for Lake Metonga over time.

To achieve these objectives, the lake association and the fisheries committee will sponsor the following bullhead removal program during the peak bullhead minnow harvest weeks coming soon from mid-July thru early August:

Lake Metonga Bullhead Minnow Harvesting Program 2021

- Stakeholders are provided Bullhead Project Overview information and Volunteer Agreement forms in order to participate: www.lakemetongawi.org > Lake Info > Fishing].
- Signage has been prepared to advertise the collection times and drop off location.
- Bullheads will be collected at the handicap accessible fishing pier which is located in the NE corner of the Lake on East Lakeview Street. The site affords easy access by car or boat. The City of Crandon has been contacted and will work with us.



Three schools of small 1/2" long bullhead minnows collected in a single day using a simple swimming pool skimmer are put in a freezer bag and frozen until they can be turned in at the collection center. Once drained, a tablespoon of the minnows was transferred to a jar of water, then to a shallow dish where they could be counted as they are scooped out of the saucer. At this size, the minnows tallied 227 per tablespoon x 16 tbsp in a cup x 4 cups to a quart = 14,528 bullheads in one freezer bag!

- During collection hours, up to four UTV's with dump boxes will receive bullheads then deliver them to the designated disposal site for burial.
- Authorized attendants will handle minnow intake from either vehicle or boats at the pier. Note: ONLY LAKE METONGA BULLHEADS WILL BE ACCEPTED.
- The attendant will measure and verify the quantity of minnows delivered [by the gallon], record the approximate size of the minnows and the amount of time the volunteer spent harvesting. Those with signed Volunteer Agreement form [see bullet point above] will receive one raffle entry for every gallon collected. As an incentive to encourage Volunteer Agreement enrollment, a drawing at the end of the collection program will award five \$100 gift cards to the first five names drawn. Photos of the daily catch and completed bullhead removal log reports completed by the LMA authorized attendants will be provided to Mole Lake and DNR Fisheries. This data provides the necessary verifiable information to help develop meaningful strategies for future bullhead control.
- Once the attendant has verified the quantity in gallons, logged the collection information, and deposited the catch in the dump box, all participants dropping off Metonga bullheads will receive gift cards equaling \$10 for every gallon submitted.
- Hours of operation for bullhead drop-off at the pier will be from 12:00 noon till ??? for as long as bullhead minnows are being harvested, most likely July 10 or 17 and running thru the first week in August.

Please help if you can. The LMA encourages as many stakeholders as possible to sign up to volunteer and bring the bullhead population back under control.