

MDC reminds snaggers that paddlefish season begins March 15

Imagine catching a giant, prehistoric fish whose ancestors swam during the time of dinosaurs. That is a reality for thousands of paddlefish snaggers during Missouri's annual spring paddlefish snagging season. Paddlefish -- named for their large, paddle-shaped snouts -- are an ancient species that can grow to seven feet and weight more than 100 pounds.

According to the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC), the state's major paddlefish snagging waters include Lake of the Ozarks, Truman Lake, and Table Rock Lake. The paddlefish snagging season for these and most other waters in the state runs March 15 through April 30.

The season for the Mississippi River is March 15 through May 15 with a fall season of Sept. 15 through Dec. 15.

Unless exempt, anglers must have a current fishing permit to snag or to operate a boat for snaggers. The daily limit is two paddlefish and snaggers must stop snagging for any species after obtaining the daily limit on Lake of the Ozarks and Truman Lake and their tributaries, and the Osage River below the U.S. Highway 54 bridge. Once a legal-sized paddlefish is caught, it must be kept by the snagger and included in their daily limit.

The minimum legal length for paddlefish at Lake of the Ozarks, Truman Lake, Table Rock Lake, and their tributaries is 34 inches, measured from the eye to the fork of the tail. The minimum legal length is 24 inches on the Osage River below Bagnell Dam and in other Missouri waters. All paddlefish under the legal minimum length must be returned to the water unharmed immediately after being caught.

The *Wildlife Code of Missouri* requires the head, tail, and skin to remain attached to all paddlefish while on the water, so paddlefish should not be cleaned until off the water. Also, extracted paddlefish eggs may not be possessed while on waters of the state or adjacent banks and may not be transported. Paddlefish eggs may not be bought, sold or offered for sale.

Additionally, paddlefish or their parts, including eggs, may not be used for bait.

Snagging Tips

MDC reminds snaggers that it is very important to immediately release sublegal fish for future harvests and offers these tips:

- Use landing nets, not gaffs, which can kill young fish.
- Wet hands before handling fish and avoid excessive handling.
- Never put fingers in the gills or eyes.
- Remove hooks carefully and get undersized fish back into the water as quickly as possible.

Season Outlook

According to MDC Fisheries Management Biologist Trish Yasger, the 2020 snagging season

should be good.

“The extremely large 2008-year class of fish is now 12 years old and will continue to provide good numbers of fish for snaggers to harvest,” Yasger explained. “Snaggers should expect to see a lot of sublegal fish from the extremely large stocking in 2016. These fish are now four years old and won’t begin reaching the 34-inch minimum legal length limit until 2023. Please release sublegal fish unharmed immediately and gently as these are the fish you will be harvesting over the next several years.”

Report Tagged Paddlefish

MDC has completed a five-year paddlefish tagging project to help monitor paddlefish numbers and improve species management. For the project, MDC staff placed metal jaw tags on thousands of paddlefish in Lake of the Ozarks, Truman Lake, Table Rock Lake, and the Mississippi River. Staff also implanted transmitters in 100 paddlefish at each of these locations to track their movements and gain other important research information.

MDC asks snaggers to NOT remove tags or transmitters from sublegal paddlefish.

Yasger added a “thank you” to all the snaggers who returned tags during the paddlefish tagging project.

"Please continue to help us monitor and better manage paddlefish by reporting all tagged paddlefish that you catch," She said. "Together we can keep snagging great for many years to come.

Report fish with jaw tags or transmitters by calling 573-579-6825 or by calling or e-mailing Trish Yasger at 660-530-5500 or Trish.Yasger@mdc.mo.gov. Snaggers can keep the silver jaw tags. MDC just needs a picture to verify the tag number. Report sublegal fish, but please do not remove tags. While supplies last, MDC will send an “I Caught a Missouri Paddlefish” t-shirt or hat to those submitting a tag.

Learn more about paddlefish snagging regulations, snagging reports, and more at <http://huntfish.mdc.mo.gov/fishing/species/paddlefish>.