

# 2024 WINNEBAGO SYSTEM STURGEON SPEARING REGULATIONS

PUB FH - 305 - 2024



Photo courtesy of Emily Ingbretson

# CONTENTS

Photo courtesy of Randy Koenigs

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Reminders .....                                  | 3  |
| Violation Hotline.....                           | 4  |
| Information Number.....                          | 4  |
| Season Information .....                         | 5  |
| Hours.....                                       | 5  |
| Lake Winnebago .....                             | 5  |
| Upriver Lakes.....                               | 5  |
| License Requirements.....                        | 6  |
| Tagging Your Sturgeon.....                       | 6  |
| Validating Tag.....                              | 6  |
| Attaching Tag.....                               | 6  |
| Protecting Tag.....                              | 6  |
| Registering.....                                 | 6  |
| Harvest Caps.....                                | 7  |
| Registration Stations.....                       | 8  |
| Harvest Photos.....                              | 8  |
| Station Locations .....                          | 9  |
| Regulations .....                                | 10 |
| Limits.....                                      | 10 |
| Possession And Use Of A Spear .....              | 10 |
| Fishing Equipment Or Gear .....                  | 10 |
| Ice Shanties And Shelters .....                  | 10 |
| Lights, Underwater Cameras, Depth Locators ..... | 11 |
| Ice Hole Restrictions .....                      | 11 |
| Ice Hole Marking.....                            | 11 |
| Litter .....                                     | 11 |
| Transportation .....                             | 12 |
| Spearing Of Rough Fish.....                      | 12 |
| Sturgeon Eggs And Meat.....                      | 13 |
| Guiding.....                                     | 13 |
| Sturgeon Guard .....                             | 14 |

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources provides equal opportunity in its employment, programs, services, and functions under an Affirmative Action Plan. If you have any questions, please write to Equal Opportunity Office, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240. The Department of Natural Resources is committed to serving people with disabilities. If you need this information in an alternative format, please call (608) 267-7498.

This pamphlet is an interpretive summary of Wisconsin's fishing laws and regulations. For complete fishing laws and regulations, including those that are implemented after the publication of this pamphlet, consult the Wisconsin State Statutes Chapter 29 or the Administrative Code of the Department of Natural Resources. Consult the legislative website: <https://docs.legis.wi.gov> for more information. For the most up-to-date version of this pamphlet, go to <https://dnr.wi.gov/tiny/1376>

## REGISTRATION STATIONS

See pages 8-9 for registration station locations.

To help with the registration process, the DNR asks that all harvested sturgeon be placed on your tailgate or in an easily accessible location. Please follow the signs and cones at each registration station to ensure a smooth registration.

## TAGS, LICENSES AND PERMITS



- Spearers must possess a paper copy of their sturgeon spearing license/tag at all times while spearing. A receipt of purchase, driver's license or GoWild card does not meet this requirement.
- It is ILLEGAL to possess more than one copy of a carcass tag.
- Carcass tags MUST BE validated immediately upon harvest by removing the validation stub.
- There is mandatory in-person registration of all harvested fish. Fish must be presented at a registration station by 2 p.m. the same day the fish is harvested.



A spearer on Lake Winnebago.

Photo courtesy of Emily Ingretson

The upper portion must remain with the harvested sturgeon and presented to a staff member at a registration station.

|  |                            |
|--|----------------------------|
|  Department of Natural Resources<br><b>Upriver Sturgeon Spearing License/Tag (Resident)</b>   |                            |
| Agent # 1312   | Issued: 10/30/2023 3:54 PM |
| <b>Stanley B. Sturgeon</b><br>Customer #: 123456789<br>Year of Birth: 1968<br>S: M H: 6' 2" W: 225 H: RED E: BLO   |                            |
| <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block; font-size: 24pt; font-weight: bold;">23</div>  |                            |
| Valid only in the following unit(s):<br><b>Upriver Sturgeon Spearing</b><br>Time Period: 2024 Upriver Season   |                            |
|    |                            |
| Valid on Lakes Poygan, Winneconne, and Butte des Morts from second Saturday in February for 16 consecutive days or until one or more harvest caps are reached. Immediately upon harvest, validate this tag by completely removing the validation stub by cutting along the dotted line. The person who harvested the fish and this tag must accompany the sturgeon until it is registered. |                            |
| Rules and regulations are available online at <a href="http://GoWild.wi.gov">GoWild.wi.gov</a> .   |                            |
| Validation Sub   |                            |
| <b>Upon harvest, remove this portion to validate the tag.</b>  |                            |
| Please do not litter.  |                            |

Remove the portion below the dotted line to validate your tag.

**Dear Winnebago Sturgeon Spearer,**

It continues to amaze me the tenacity, drive and dedication of spearkers to the Winnebago lake sturgeon, both during the season and beyond. The 2023 spearing season truly highlighted people's love for lake sturgeon and this sport. The spearkers that fought poor ice conditions and rain in 2023 found good water clarity and plenty of lake sturgeon. Thank you to everyone who respected the poor ice conditions and made sure to adjust accordingly. Despite the fact we saw fewer shacks during opening weekend, we still had 1,405 lake sturgeon harvested.

For those gearing up for the 2024 season, here are some updates. Chironomid larvae densities were, unfortunately, down during the 2023 summer sampling. The Upriver Lakes had the highest densities for the entire system. On Lake Winnebago, northern sites had higher densities compared to the rest of the lake. This prey source has a boom-and-bust life cycle and we have seen low densities in the past. We are due for a rebound in densities in the future and we will continue to monitor these prey populations. Results from the 2023 summer trawling survey indicate that gizzard shad densities are still lower than average, though values are similar to last year in 2022.

It continues to impress me that sturgeon spearkers are so informed and involved when it comes to not only the spearing season, but also the science and management behind the lake sturgeon population. Many of you already know that the US Fish and Wildlife Service has been evaluating whether to list the lake sturgeon as threatened/endangered since the initial petition in 2018. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has provided the most recent sturgeon survey and populations information to the US Fish and Wildlife Service to ensure their decision is based on the most up to date information. The DNR is following this process very closely. We will continue to inform everyone as new information from this decision arises as well as make people aware when there is a chance for the public to submit comments to the Fish and Wildlife Service. The final decision is due June 2024.

The spearing tradition holds value to so many people leading to stories and techniques passed down through generations. The DNR continues to work hard to manage this population so it can thrive. It is with the help of the spearkers and groups throughout the system that there is a strong lake sturgeon population and something we all should be proud of.

With that, I wish everyone the best of luck this season. Enjoy the time with friends and family, revel in anticipation as you sit in the spearing shack and celebrate loud and long when fate strikes and a fish is speared because this season is unlike any other. It is incredibly unique, special and we are all lucky enough to share in the experience.

For those taking to the ice to spear, please be safe. For everyone else, please come out and celebrate the spearkers and this incredible species at any of the registration shacks. And to all, have a safe and enjoyable spearing season. Hope to see everyone out on the ice.

**MARGARET STADIG**

DNR Winnebago Sturgeon Biologist

**REPORT VIOLATIONS**

1-800-TIP-WDNR (1-800-847-9367) or dial #367 from any cell phone.

**DNR INFORMATION LINE**

1-888-936-7463

## HOURS

7 a.m. to 1 p.m.

## LAKE WINNEBAGO

Feb. 10 through Feb. 25, 2024 on Lake Winnebago, or until any of the pre-set harvest caps for Lake Winnebago are reached or any of the pre-set Winnebago system-wide harvest caps are reached, whichever comes first (as per trigger closure rules).

## UPRIVER LAKES (LAKE BUTTE DES MORTS, WINNECONNE AND POYGAN)

Feb. 10 through Feb. 25, 2024 on the Upriver Lakes, or until any of the pre-set harvest caps for the Upriver Lakes are reached or any of the pre-set Winnebago system-wide harvest caps are reached, whichever comes first (as per trigger closure rules).

A limited drawing spear fishery was implemented on the Upriver Lakes in 2007. Spearers can either apply for an Upriver Lakes sturgeon spearing license or purchase a preference point (thus not included in the drawing for that season) by Aug. 1. Applicants are notified by Oct. 1 of whether they were successful in receiving authorization to purchase an Upriver Lakes sturgeon spearing license. Group drawing applications of up to four persons are accepted, and the group will carry the preference points of the group member with the fewest points.

Spearers not drawn for an Upriver Lakes sturgeon spearing license receive a preference point and can purchase a Lake Winnebago sturgeon spearing license. Applicants drawn for an Upriver Lakes sturgeon spearing license will lose their accumulated preference points regardless of whether they purchase their Upriver Lakes sturgeon spearing license.

Spearers can only buy a license for either Lake Winnebago or the Upriver Lakes, but they cannot buy one for both. License sales for the Lake Winnebago season ends Oct. 31. The Upriver Lakes sturgeon drawing fishery limits participation to 500 tags in 2024 and will have an allotment of the overall sturgeon harvest caps. Upriver Lakes tags can be transferred to a youth (age 12-17) or a person holding a valid Class A, B, C or D disabled permit.



Peering into the hole on opening weekend.

Photo courtesy of Lonny Ziemer



Adam DeKleyn with his Upriver Lakes sturgeon.

Photo courtesy of Adam DeKleyn

## LICENSE REQUIREMENTS

To spear sturgeon, residents must purchase a sturgeon spearing license for \$20.00 and nonresidents must purchase a sturgeon spearing license for \$65.00.

Only persons 12 years of age and older are eligible to spear sturgeon. No sturgeon spearing license may be issued or purchased after Oct. 31, 2023 except for:

1. Wisconsin residents that turn 12 between Nov. 1, 2023 and the last day of the 2024 spearing season; or
2. Wisconsin residents serving in the Armed Forces that are home on leave during the 2024 spearing season.

**The sturgeon spearing license/tag must be carried by the licensee at all times while fishing for sturgeon with a spear and no person may use or carry the license/tag of another person.** Lake Winnebago licenses are non-transferable, but Upriver Lakes licenses can be transferred to youth (age 12-17) or a person holding a valid Class A, B, C or D disabled permit.

## TAGGING YOUR STURGEON WHEN AND HOW TO VALIDATE TAG

Upon harvest, the carcass tag must be immediately validated by removing the validation stub of the carcass tag below the dotted line.

### WHEN TO ATTACH TAG

The validated tag must stay with the sturgeon until presented at a DNR-operated registration station. The tag does not need to be attached to the sturgeon unless the license holder leaves the fish.

### PROTECT TAG

It is the responsibility of the spearer to keep the tag protected and legible. Consider enclosing the tag in a sealed plastic bag.

### REGISTER

Any harvested sturgeon must be presented by the spearer at an official registration station by 2 p.m. the same day it was speared. Call in or online registration is NOT available for registering harvested lake sturgeon.

Group bagging is not legal. The person who speared the sturgeon must be the one to tag the fish.



Total harvest of sturgeon will be limited through pre-set harvest caps. Harvest caps for the 2024 Winnebago system spearing season are 350 juvenile females, 805 adult females and 1,242 males. Portions of the system-wide harvest caps have been allocated to the fisheries on Lake Winnebago and the Upriver Lakes as shown below.

The DNR will close the sturgeon spearing season on Lake Winnebago before the maximum 16 day season when any of the following conditions occur:

- At the end of a spearing day in which 100% of any one of the three Lake Winnebago harvest caps is reached or exceeded; or
- 24 hours from the end of a spearing day which concludes with a harvest of 90 to 99% of any one of the three Lake Winnebago harvest caps being reached.

The DNR will close the sturgeon spearing season on the Upriver Lakes before the maximum 16 day season when any of the following conditions occur:

- At the end a spearing day in which 100% of any one of the three Upriver Lakes harvest caps is reached or exceeded; or
- 24 hours from the end of a spearing day which concludes with a harvest of 90 to 99% of any one of the three Upriver Lakes harvest caps being reached.

The DNR will close the sturgeon spearing season on all waters of the Winnebago system before the maximum 16 day season when any of the following conditions occur:

- At the end of a spearing day in which 100% of any one of the three Winnebago system-wide harvest caps is reached or exceeded; or
- 24 hours from the end of a spearing day which concludes with a harvest of 90 to 99% of any one of the three Winnebago system-wide harvest caps being reached.

**2024 SPEARING SEASON HARVEST CAPS**

| Waterbody        | Juvenile Females | Adult Females | Males |
|------------------|------------------|---------------|-------|
| Lake Winnebago   | 280              | 725           | 994   |
| Upriver Lakes    | 70               | 80            | 248   |
| Winnebago System | 350              | 805           | 1,242 |

Tracy Goeglein with her sturgeon at the Pipe registration station.

Photo courtesy of Mitchell Goeglein

A person who spears a sturgeon must accompany the fish to an official sturgeon registration station. Phone-in or online harvest registration is NOT available for sturgeon registration.

Any fish harvested from Lake Winnebago must be registered at one of the registration stations on Lake Winnebago. Any fish harvested from Lakes Butte des Morts, Winneconne or Poygan (the Upriver Lakes) must be registered at one of the registration stations on the Upriver Lakes.

To help with the registration process, the DNR asks that all harvested sturgeon be placed on a tailgate or in an easily accessible location. Please follow the signs and cones at each registration station to ensure a smooth registration.

Stations are operated daily throughout the season by DNR fisheries staff. The registration process allows for collection of important biological information on the size, sex and tagging history of your fish. A metal registration tag will be attached to your fish during the registration process to signify to law enforcement staff that your fish has been properly registered. The registration tag must be retained until the carcass is consumed.

To avoid the “end of the day” rush, please bring your fish in as soon as possible after spearing it. You must be at the registration station and in-line to register your fish by 2 p.m. on the day it was speared.

Some registration stations may be closed prior to the end of the season depending on spearing activity and volume of sturgeon registrations. Any early closures will be posted at registration stations and included in daily harvest reports posted on the [DNR website](#).

### STURGEON SPEARING PHOTOS

Photos are a great way to capture special moments, and the DNR is looking for spearers to submit photos that help tell a story through a [photo submission form](#). Photos could be of spearers with their harvest, cutting in, shanty life, scenic views observed during the season or anything else that captures the spearing tradition.

Please be sure to include a brief description of each image. By submitting photos, the DNR is granted a non-exclusive license to use and reproduce the submitted photos for any purposes the DNR may deem appropriate, including future DNR outreach efforts.



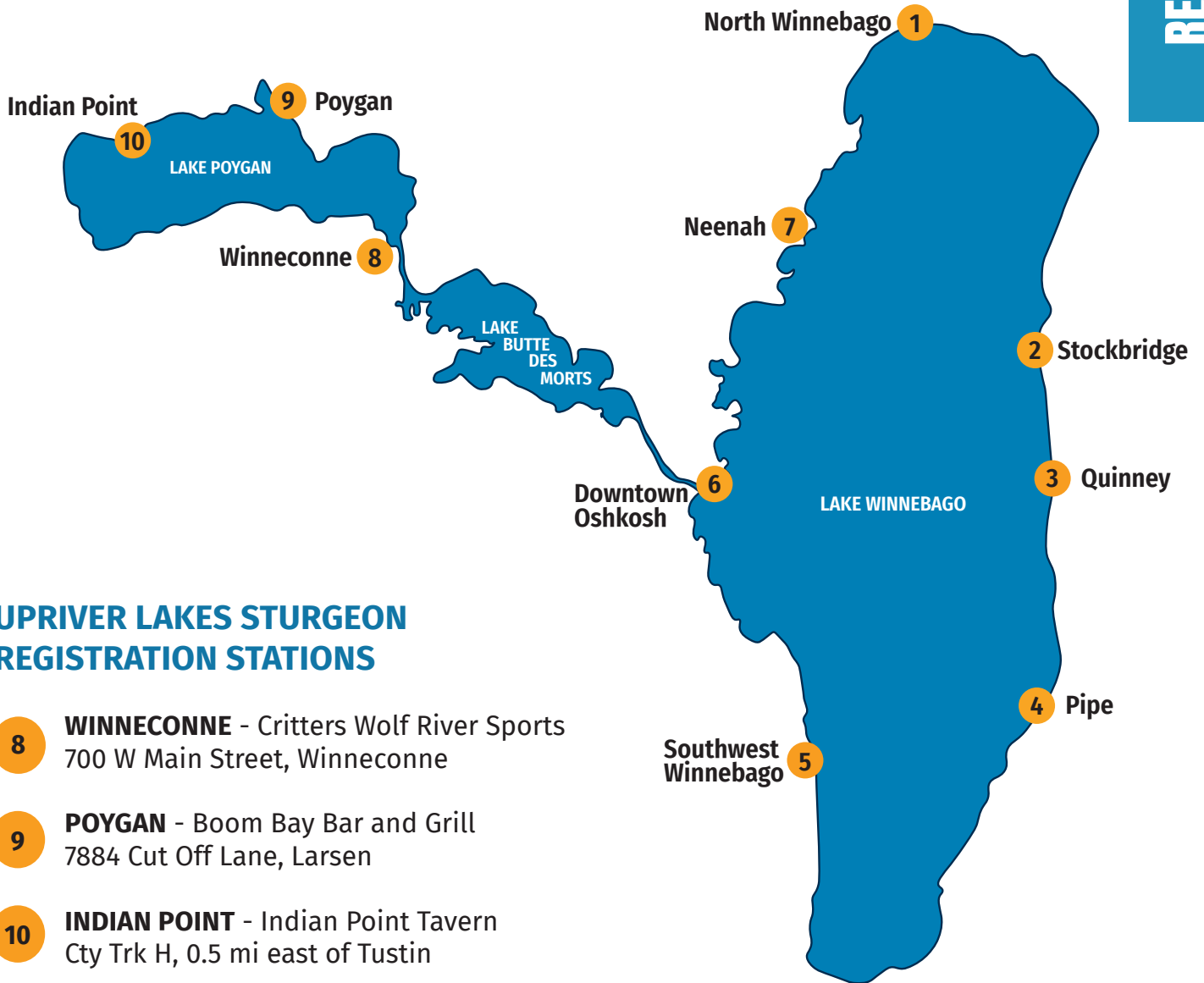
DNR staff collect vital biological information at registration stations.

Photo courtesy of Emily McParlane



## LAKE WINNEBAGO STURGEON REGISTRATION STATIONS

- 1 **NORTH WINNEBAGO** - Waverly Beach Resort  
N8770 Fire Lane 1, Menasha
- 2 **STOCKBRIDGE** - Stockbridge Harbor Bar  
1919 W Lake Street, Chilton
- 3 **QUINNEY** - Quinney Quencher  
W5626 Quinney Road, Chilton
- 4 **PIPE** - Jim and Linda's Supper Club  
W3496 County Road W, Malone
- 5 **SOUTHWEST WINNEBAGO** - Wendt's Marine  
N9691 Lakeshore Drive, Van Dyne
- 6 **DOWNTOWN OSHKOSH** - Jerry's Tavern  
1210 Ceape Avenue, Oshkosh
- 7 **NEENAH** - Payne's Point Bar & Grill  
1557 Paynes Point Road, Neenah



## UPRIVER LAKES STURGEON REGISTRATION STATIONS

- 8 **WINNECONNE** - Critters Wolf River Sports  
700 W Main Street, Winneconne
- 9 **POYGAN** - Boom Bay Bar and Grill  
7884 Cut Off Lane, Larsen
- 10 **INDIAN POINT** - Indian Point Tavern  
Cty Trk H, 0.5 mi east of Tustin

## LIMITS

**BAG LIMIT:** One (1) lake sturgeon per licensee

**MINIMUM LENGTH:** 36 inches

## POSSESSION AND USE OF A SPEAR

No person may have under his or her control any spear or similar device in any enclosure on the ice or waters of the Winnebago system except when authorized during established sturgeon spearing seasons during open spearing hours and while in possession of a valid sturgeon spearing license and unfilled carcass tag.

No person may take, capture, kill or attempt to kill sturgeon on the Winnebago system by any means other than spearing with a spear thrown by hand from inside a fishing shelter placed on the ice during the open spearing season.

It is illegal to spear a sturgeon and then release it back into the water.


## FISHING EQUIPMENT OR GEAR

It is unlawful to possess a fishing pole, hook and line angling equipment or other similar devices that could be used to catch fish in an ice fishing tent, shanty or ice fishing enclosure with ice holes larger than 12 inches in diameter or square.

**The maximum width of a spear head is restricted to 18 inches or less and tines can only be arranged in a single straight line.**

## ICE SHANTIES AND SHELTERS

The door of any occupied shanty/shelter shall be such that the door can be readily opened from the outside. All shanties/shelters must have the name and residential address or DNR customer ID number of the person owning or using the shanty. The name and address or DNR customer ID number must be painted or otherwise affixed on the outside with a minimum of 1-inch lettering. All shanties/shelters must be completely removed from the ice (for all inland waters south of Hwy 64) by the first Sunday following March 1.



**Daniel Arcand bringing up a giant speared sturgeon.**

Photo courtesy of Thomas Arcand



Cutting into the ice.

Photo courtesy of Tara Porter

## LIGHTS, UNDERWATER CAMERAS, DEPTH LOCATORS

The use of artificial lights as an aid during spearing is prohibited during sturgeon spearing. This prohibition begins 48 hours prior to the season opener and runs the duration of the season. Underwater cameras and other forms of technology may be used, but any lights on the camera must be disabled (turned off, taped over or non-illuminating).

## ICE HOLE RESTRICTIONS

No person may cut, use or maintain an ice hole larger than 12 inches in diameter or square for the taking of fish in any manner through the ice except spearing sturgeon on the Winnebago system during the open season. The total area of a sturgeon spearing hole or combination of holes may not exceed a total of 48 square feet, measured at the surface of the ice. Ice holes larger than 12 inches cut, used or maintained for spearing may not be covered by a shelter, shanty or similar device, except during the period from 48 hours before and continuing through the open sturgeon spearing season.

## ICE HOLE MARKING

Sturgeon spearing ice holes must be marked with at least two strips of wood that extend a minimum of three feet above the ice. The wood strips must not exceed 1.5 inches in width and .25 inches in thickness (wood lathe meets the requirement).

**When you first set your shanty, cut a hole and freeze the lathe into the ice for better marking of sturgeon holes. Lathe markers stuck in snow banks are NOT adequate because the lathe no longer marks holes when warm weather conditions melt snow.**

## LITTER

It is illegal to place or deposit any materials (including fish, fish parts or other biodegradables) on the ice or lake bed that cannot be retrieved. Any material used in a sturgeon spearing hole must be removed by the sturgeon spearer when the hole is abandoned or if requested by a warden. Any material that is left on or frozen in the ice or waters is the responsibility of the person who left the material (including tar paper, wood, cardboard or any other litter used adjacent to shanties).



## TRANSPORTATION

It is unlawful for any person to transport an unregistered sturgeon in or on any motor driven vehicle unless the sturgeon is openly exposed. "Openly exposed" means open to view by a person in a passing vehicle.

**It is illegal to possess an unregistered sturgeon speared from Lake Winnebago outside the highway boundary area delineated as follows:** from the intersection of highways 10 and 114 in Menasha, east on Highway 114 to Highway 55; south on Highway 55 to U.S. Highway 151; south on U.S. Highway 151 to Winnebago Drive in Fond du Lac; west on Winnebago Drive to Scott Street; west on Scott Street to Highway 45; north on Highway 45 to Main Street in Oshkosh; north on Main Street to Waugoo Avenue; east on Waugoo Avenue to Bowen Street; north on Bowen Street to County Highway A; north on County Highway A to Highway 114 in Neenah; east on Highway 114 to the intersection of Highways 10 and 114 in Menasha.

**It is illegal to possess an unregistered sturgeon speared from Lakes Butte des Morts, Winneconne or Poygan outside the highway boundary area delineated as follows:** from the intersection of Highways 45 and 21 in Oshkosh west on Highway 21 to Highway 116; north on Highway 116 to County Highway B; west on County Highway B to County Highway D; west on County Highway D to Highway 49; north on Highway 49 to County Highway H; east on County Highway H to Highway 110; east on Highway 110 to County Highway II; south on County Highway II to County Highway M; south on County Highway M to Highway 116; east on Highway 116 to Highway 45; south on Highway 45 to Highway 21.

## SPEARING OF ROUGH FISH

Spearing of any species of fish other than sturgeon from the Winnebago system is prohibited during the sturgeon spearing season, except that a licensed sturgeon spearer with a valid unused sturgeon carcass tag and valid fishing license may retain or dispose of any carp taken incidentally while sturgeon spearing. Any carp incidentally speared must be removed from the water, bank or shore and properly disposed of.

Darian Van Offeren's first sturgeon.

Photo courtesy of Joe Van Offeren



## STURGEON EGGS AND MEAT

It is illegal to sell, purchase, barter or trade sturgeon eggs/roe/caviar/meat at any time.

Bartering is the exchange of goods or services for other goods or services without using money. This also means it is illegal to give, keep or accept any portion of lake sturgeon, including but not limited to eggs/roe/caviar/meat, as payment.

## GUIDING

No person may engage or be employed for any compensation or reward to guide, direct or assist any other person in sturgeon spearing/fishing unless the person is issued a guide license by the DNR.

Guiding includes receiving compensation of any kind (monetary, gratuity, physical items, etc.) for services rendered. Some examples of guiding would include providing a shanty with the ice hole already cut, placing out decoys, providing/renting equipment or other activities that assist the angler/spearer to locate, attract and/or harvest fish. Please contact your local [Conservation Warden](#) with any questions.

## SIGN UP FOR STURGEON UPDATES

Get daily updates throughout the 2024 spearing season and updates on the Winnebago System fisheries throughout the year by signing up at:

<https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/fishing/sturgeon/WinnSysSturgeonSpear.html>

**Adeline Bodinger's first sturgeon.**

Photo courtesy of the Bodinger family

## UPDATE ON STURGEON GUARD

Sturgeon are very susceptible to illegal harvest and harassment when they are spawning along the river's rocky shorelines. Each spring, Sturgeon Guard volunteers have an opportunity to protect lake sturgeon from poaching and harassment at their spawning sites on the Wolf, Embarrass, Little Wolf and Upper Fox rivers while educating the public about this unique fish species.

The Sturgeon Guard program works in collaboration with DNR biologists and game wardens, in addition to conservation groups like Sturgeon for Tomorrow and Shadows on the Wolf.

If you are interested in volunteering for Sturgeon Guard during the 2024 spawning season, please contact Josh Reitz at [wisconsinsturgeonguard@gmail.com](mailto:wisconsinsturgeonguard@gmail.com) or Don Meilke at [amerimilk@aol.com](mailto:amerimilk@aol.com) for more information, or visit the DNR website at <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Fishing/sturgeon/SturgeonGuard.html>.

