

Spearing Over The Decades: 1962

Since 1932, Wisconsin's annual sturgeon spearing season has provided a unique harvest opportunity and is a highlight of February for the communities surrounding the Winnebago System. While some aspects of the season have changed, the techniques and traditions remain relatively unaffected. Here's a glimpse at what the season was like sixty years ago, in 1962.

Sturgeon spearing regulations were slightly different in 1962 compared to today's regulations. Sex-specific harvest caps weren't in place until 1999, so the Lake Winnebago season ran from Feb. 10, or the second Saturday in February, until March 1. The entire season occurred regardless of the number of fish registered. The minimum length limit at the time was 40 inches. Participants could spear at any time of day and were required to bring their harvested fish to a registration station within 24 hours of harvest.

The harvest boundaries were also different at that time. The Upriver Lakes harvest included the same lakes as today; however, the Lake Winnebago harvest also included Little Lake Butte des Morts.

The 1962 Lake Winnebago harvest was relatively low despite favorable water clarity conditions. Water clarity was about 12 feet, which, historically and today, results in a harvest large enough to reach harvest caps in current seasons. The Lake Winnebago harvest was 262 fish, averaging 42 pounds and 53 inches.

The largest fish harvested was the 72-inch, 109-pound sturgeon speared by Paul Petrie from Kimberly, WI. Paul speared his fish in the northeast portion of the lake and brought it into the Stockbridge registration station. Paul's fish was one of only two fish over 100 pounds harvested on the entire system that season, the other being a 70-inch, 104-pound sturgeon speared by Walter Manteufel near Neenah, WI.

There were 3,258 licenses sold in 1962, much lower than the average 12,500 licenses sold per year today. The number of licenses sold is likely the cause for a lower harvest than water clarity conditions.

It hasn't always been the case that the Upriver Lakes harvest occurred via a lottery draw system. Beginning in 1959, the Upriver Lakes spearing season occurred once every three years. No harvest happened on these lakes during the years in between. Every third year when the harvest was permitted, any participant could spear the Upriver Lakes with a bag limit of one sturgeon and a minimum length of 40 inches.

The Upriver Lakes had a harvest year in 1962 with 217 fish registered in the area which averaged 25 pounds and 48 inches.

Orville Reifsnidee from Burnett, WI speared the largest fish on the Upriver Lakes in 1962, weighing 69 pounds and measuring 60 inches. That season took place over two days – Feb. 19-20.