Summary

AFS Policy Statement #28:
Special Fishing Regulations for Managing Freshwater Sport Fisheries
(Abbreviated)

Special fishing regulations have been used since the mid 1880s, but most early applications were short-lived, often politically influenced, and generally ineffective. Fisheries science was born in the 20th century and began making contributions to fisheries management in the 1940s and 1950s, with a trend toward liberalization of fishing regulations until approximately 1960. Changes in fishing, fisheries, and fisheries science have progressed rapidly since 1960, while management application of the science has proceeded at a slow pace.

In recent years introduction of more effective equipment, improved angler education, and more leisure time spent fishing have increased angler efficiency and exploitation. This combined with on-going habitat alterations, introductions, and a host of other accidental and deliberate activities have resulted in an overall decline in fishing quality. Fisheries science has generated increasing quantities of information about fisheries and the effects of exploitation, but mechanisms for effective application of these data have been lagging. Highly educated and demanding user groups have recognized declines in their fisheries and demanded change.

Special fishing regulations are designed for site-specific application and should be considered when angling harvest or other factors prevent attainment of specific management goals which may be based on biological or socioeconomic needs. In every situation, the purpose of special fishing regulations should be clearly defined to avoid confusion and possible misapplication.

Valid uses include maintaining or protecting a unique fishery, managing a fishery with unique potential, reserving certain fisheries for specific angler activities (e.g., fly fishing only, children's fishing areas), allowing liberal exploitation of highly productive or winter-kill prone waters, improving or maintaining fishing quality, providing angling opportunities to specialized angler subgroups (e.g., trophy and wild fisheries), and protecting threatened or endangered species.

Such special fishing regulations have been used extensively in recent years, but not all have been proposed, deliberated, adopted, and evaluated in a consistent and objective manner. This has led to substantial confusion among managers and anglers regarding their efficacy. Many regard special regulations as the solution for all existing fisheries problems, and some have promoted the use of regulations which have never been proven effective. Such improper use of otherwise effective tools can result in negative angler perceptions, continued decline of fishing quality, loss of agency and professional credibility, and unrealistic angler expectations.

Many anglers view special fishing regulations as a panacea for restoring angling quality, but many such regulations have not been developed and tested as effective management tools. While benefitting some fisheries, the social and economic consequences of their broad application are not well understood and are unpredictable at best. Implementation of management action without appropriate biological basis can undermine professional and agency credibility, while fishery quality continues to decline.

The AFS policy for application of special fishing regulations to freshwater sport fisheries encourages:

1. Development of fishery goals which are realistic and attainable and have measurable objectives. The goals of special regulations should be compatible with broader, ecological management objectives and be clearly defined and well stated so they are easily understood by anglers. Special regulations should include

Summary

quantitative objectives that are measurable within a specified time frame.

2. Involvement of the angling public in all phases of planning, development, and implementation of special regulations. Rationale for such regulations should be communicated to peers, associates, enforcement officials, and the public. This will minimize conflicts which may arise as a result of different expectations.

3. Assessment measures which include recognition of fiscal and temporal constraints, as well as peer-reviewed evaluation techniques which anticipate and minimize possible shortcomings. Use of replicates, reference waters, or other special measures may be necessary to account for natural biological fluctuations or lack of angler compliance which may lead to failure of a regulation that was otherwise biologically sound.

4. Recognition of unforeseen problems (i.e. concentrated fishing pressure, increased hooking and handling mortality, etc.) arising during implementation and evaluation of special regulations. Compensatory responses such as changes in angler behavior, reduced fish growth, or increased natural mortality may produce unanticipated results.

5. Communication of evaluation results to the public and the professional community through news media, agency reports, peer-reviewed publications, and appropriate public and professional presentations.