



Test Water
Designation

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department

Dewey Building, 1 National Life Drive
Montpelier, VT 05620, 802-828-1000
STATUTORY AUTHORITY: 10 V.S.A. SECTION 4142

Chittenden Reservoir – including all tributaries upstream to the first barrier impassable to upstream fish movement

Pursuant to the provisions of 10 V.S.A. §4142, Chittenden Reservoir, as described below is hereby designated as Test Waters from January 1, 2023 through December 31, 2030.

1. Findings

- A. Chittenden Reservoir in the Town of Chittenden (Rutland County) is a 758-acre impoundment created by the construction of a hydroelectric dam operated by Green Mountain Power (GMP). Most of the surrounding shoreline is part of the Green Mountain National Forest. Vermont Fish & Wildlife (Department) provides public access to the reservoir and maintains a boat ramp and parking lot next to the dam under lease agreement with GMP. *Vermont Use of Public Waters Rules* prohibits the use of personal watercraft, and aircraft from May through November. Motor-powered vessels are restricted to speeds of 5 miles per hour or less.
- B. Department fisheries management efforts up to the late 1990's focused on salmonids, but these were not successful in establishing and providing quality fishing opportunities. In 1993, the department began stocking walleye with two goals: 1) reduce abundance, increase average size, and improve angling quality for yellow perch through walleye predation on the stunted and over-abundant population, 2) establish a self-sustaining walleye population and create a new (and only) inland walleye fishing opportunity in southwestern Vermont. Walleye were stocked annually from 1993 to 1998, and in alternate years beginning in 2001. From 1993 through 2009 walleye eggs for culture and stocking were sourced from the Poultney, Winooski, and Missisquoi rivers. Beginning in 2011, egg collection for Chittenden Reservoir stocking has been accomplished utilizing broodstock collected from the reservoir.
- C. A test waters designation was implemented from January 1, 1997, to December 31, 2002, establishing walleye fishing regulations as: Minimum Length Limit, 22-inches; Daily Harvest Limit, 2 fish per angler; Open Season, June 1 to March 15. The test water designation was adopted as a formal Special Regulation effective January 1, 2005 and has been in place since that time.
- D. Since 2011, department walleye assessment data has documented a steady decline in the size structure of adult walleye in the reservoir. The proportion of walleye exceeding the 22-inch minimum length limit has decreased from 46% of the catch during spring walleye egg collection in 2011 to just 3% in 2021. There is high angler effort, particularly during the ice fishing season.
- E. In recent years, Rutland District fisheries staff have fielded regular public complaints regarding the lack of legal, harvestable sized walleye, and an overall dissatisfaction with walleye angling opportunities on the reservoir.
- F. Fall electrofishing surveys in 2021 and 2022 documented natural reproduction and wild young-of-year walleye in the reservoir for the first time.
- G. The Special Regulation currently in place is no longer working to provide a recreational angling opportunity for walleye in the reservoir. The department is concerned that the paucity of mature, high-fecundity females may impact the department's ability to collect eggs for future stocking efforts and/or sustain natural reproduction that has just recently been documented.
- H. The public supports a change in walleye management. Via an online angler opinion survey run for 3 weeks in April 2022, 63% of the 163 respondents supported the implementation of a slot limit for walleye. 24% of the respondents supported a temporary prohibition on walleye harvest. The survey also indicated that 66% of the respondents preferred to target walleye on the reservoir, while 19% primarily target largemouth/smallmouth bass and 14% preferred yellow perch while fishing in the reservoir.
- I. The department will assess and evaluate wild reproduction and changes in the walleye population's size structure that may result from this Test Water designation before developing an appropriate long-term management and regulation proposal.

2. Statutory Determination

- A. Pursuant to 10 V.S.A. §4142, the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department Commissioner may, for the purpose of securing data relative to the propagation of fish, designate as Test Waters streams and ponds within the state.
- B. The Commissioner has determined that the designated Test Water is critical to the conservation and propagation of the species in those waters. (See Findings 1.A.-I.)

3. Conditions of the Test Waters

During the above specified period, Walleye Fishing in Chittenden Reservoir (Chittenden) shall be in accordance with the following:
1) Legal Length Limit: 18 to 20 inches. All walleye under 18 and over 20 inches must be released; 2) Daily Limit: 1 walleye; 3) Open Season: June 1 to March 15, inclusive.

Authorized by: _____

Christopher Herrick, Commissioner

Date: 12/5/2022