

ABSTRACT

A special regulation allowing anglers to catch and release largemouth and smallmouth bass from April 1 to the Memorial Day weekend, prior to the normal bass season, is being tested on six lakes from 1988 to 1992. Effects on the fisheries and bass populations are being evaluated at five lakes by means of periodic creel census, opinion questionnaires, and bass population surveys. First-year results are as follows. About 81% of the anglers approved of this test and would approve of extending the concept to other lakes, 7% disapproved, and 12% had no opinion. Spring bass fishing pressure probably increased a modest amount over previous years, and based on angler opinions, a 38% gain is likely. Spring bass catch was also modest. Changes in the fisheries were relatively small mainly because many anglers (about 44% of all anglers and 69% of the frequent bass anglers) were already in the habit of fishing for bass prior to the normal bass season. Thus, to a large extent, the special season made angler behavior legitimate. A large percentage of all anglers (66%) said they usually release most of the bass they catch during the normal bass season. No unusual law enforcement or other problems were encountered. The test should proceed at least through 1990 to determine final equilibria.