

Wisconsin DNR: Concludes multi-state probe into fish poaching

Posted on Monday, Jun 6, 2022

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

MADISON, Wis. – The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR), along with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, concluded a multi-year law enforcement investigation into the poaching and over-harvesting of hundreds of vulnerable spawning lake whitefish from the Menominee River.

The multi-state investigation concluded with court-ordered seizures and rights revocations against individuals from Wisconsin, Michigan and Illinois.

Law enforcement officials from the Wisconsin and Michigan natural resources agencies, with logistical help from the Illinois department, teamed up to track confirmed violations on the popular border river between Menominee, Michigan and Marinette, Wisconsin.

Among the violators, 11 were from Illinois, with one from Michigan and one from Wisconsin. The investigation also found most of the individuals were repeat violators.

“Our joint investigation found these violators were organized, strategic and intentional,” said DNR Marine Warden Jeff Lautenslager. “The lake whitefish in this river are particularly vulnerable during the late-year months. They congregate in the up-river systems in Wisconsin every fall for their annual spawn.”

All court proceedings for this case recently concluded. Twenty-nine citations were issued, with 91 whitefish seized and confiscated by the court, which also ordered a total of 24 years of rights revocation. The citations included exceeding the daily bag limit of whitefish, intentionally snagging fish and failing to release foul-hooked fish.

“The DNR wardens and investigators in this case remain hopeful the removal of these numerous violators will make room for the legal and ethical individuals who enjoy viewing and legally fishing lake whitefish. The laws we have are specifically to protect this valued and vulnerable fish species,” Lautenslager said. “People who fish and enjoy observing wildlife should know their state conservation officers often work together to protect our resources and the people who enjoy them. We hope this case deters egregious and blatant violating of fishing laws.”

The case began in 2019 when wardens and officers became aware of these organized attacks on the lake whitefish. Officers from the three states joined forces and continued their focused investigation through 2020 into 2021, leading to the court adjudication.

The investigation also led to a 2020 Michigan case in which Michigan residents were found to have shined and shot deer in the area while holding a flashlight in their mouth, killing deer at night and hunting deer without a license. Enforcement action was taken through the Michigan court system on the cases.