

On Tuesday June 28, 11 LOFA members gathered at Beaver's for a conversation with our local DNR Fish Biologist Zach Lawson on the subject of the fisherie in Lake of the Falls. This is a summary of the our wide-ranging and very interesting 90-minute discussion.

According to Zach, the walleye population is in decline not only in Lake of the Falls but in most lakes across the north woods, likely as a result of our changing environment. Warmer temperatures, overharvesting, variations in ice-off dates, alterations in our shorelines and more are all contributing factors in the decline. Across the region, more fish are being stocked in our lakes while fewer are surviving.

Since 2013 Lake of the Falls has been a participant in the Wisconsin Walleye Initiative, a DNR research program in which they have been stocking LOTF in alternate years with extended length walleye fry, and surveying our fish population at regular intervals. LOFA has not stocked any walleye on our own since 2013 because of this program, which is projected to end within the next few years. We have the option of withdrawing from the project, but at this late date the general feeling was in favor of continuing with it, and then resuming our own stocking efforts after the study is concluded. Zach stated a couple of times that stocking walleye fry might not directly result in an abundance of larger fish in a few years, but is still a good idea in the interest of maintaining a healthy balance in the lake.

Possible projects to enhance the lake environment for walleye would include the introduction of more fish cribs, tree drops, fish sticks, etc., but would probably not result in a noticeable increase. Most of these things have been tried before with minimal effect. We could also look into stocking a different species, but we'd have to decided what that would be and whether or not it would be worth it.

As for other species of fish, our muskie and Northern pike populations were found to be "healthy and self-sustaining," and our panfish numbers are normal. Other topics discussed included our relationship with the other lakes in the Turtle River watershed, the effect of the dam on our water levels, and procedures for future stocking of walleyes and how LOFA members can get involved. We have a recording of the entire meeting; if anyone would like a copy, let us know. It's a big file but we'll try to figure out how to get a copy to you.