

Hooked on Musky Fever - Delavan Lake stocked with 100 Tagged Muskies

By Mike VanderBunt

The musky is the most sought after trophy freshwater fish. People come to Wisconsin from all over the world to go after the fish of a thousand casts.

Delavan Lake is one of few Walworth County lakes spirited with the aura of musky angling. On November 2nd, 100 muskies were released into the 1,906-acre fishery. Delavan, with a maximum depth of 56 feet, has had muskies lurking its waters for decades. They are present but are rarely caught. It is unusual to find an angler launching a fishing boat into Delavan Lake to go out and throw musky baits, although the lake has been routinely stocked with muskies dating back to the early 1990s.

“We’re excited about the opportunity to give local fishermen and visiting anglers a greater chance of a lifetime to catch one of these storied fish,” said Town of Delavan Chairman Ryan Simons. Currently, the minimum size limit to keep a musky caught on Delavan Lake is 40 inches. The daily bag limit is one per day. We would love to see Delavan become the county’s premier musky angling destination in the near future.”

The Town partnered with Doug Welch, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources fisheries biologist, and The Muskellunge Club of Wisconsin to bring the 100 large yearlings to the Delavan Lake Yacht Club for stocking. Supplying the fish was Oswald Fisheries/Trophy Game Fish in Ellendale, MN.

Doug Welch is a Senior Fisheries Biologist for the DNR, responsible for Walworth, Racine, and Kenosha counties. He participated in the Delavan Lake stocking. “The pit tagging and stocking went well,” he said. “We tagged and fin clipped all 100 muskies designated for Delavan Lake.”

The Delavan Lake muskies received Passive Integrated Transponder Tags, or PIT tags, that were implanted. They are used when an individual fish needs to be identified. The tag contains a series of numbers and letters that can be obtained by passing a "PIT Tag reader" over the implanted tag. The pit tags and the associated equipment cost about \$600 according to Welch. “We internally implant under the skin of the fish,” said Welch. “Each individual fish can be identified. When we recapture the muskies during our fish surveys we can recover the information on the pit tag.” The main objective of this particular stocking and tagging is to track the growth rates of the muskies. “We will monitor them when we do our fish surveys in the spring and fall,” said Welch.

Scott Wilkie is the Secretary of the musky club, headquartered in Brookfield and founded in 1953. This coming April is its 60th anniversary, and it is the oldest musky club in the world. Welch got the word that Wilkie and the club were putting 150 yearling muskies into

Okauchee Lake in Waukesha County. “Doug gave me a call to see if we would put some fish in Delavan Lake,” said Wilkie. “They don’t get to work with muskies this big very often.” The average fish stocked was 17 inches long, and that size has a high survival rate of over 80 percent. “Most fingerling planted are only a few inches long,” continued Wilkie. “So, we got lucky. We had some left over stocking money.” Wilkie convinced the club that if the Delavan Lake Committee would be willing to match the club’s funds there would be enough money to make a difference. The muskies cost \$30 each. The club donated \$1,500, and the Delavan Lake Committee matched them. The entire project cost \$3000.

The muskellunge was introduced to Delavan Lake in 1990 when the DNR stocked it with 100,000 one-inch fry. Since then, there has been a relentless effort to establish Delavan Lake as one of southern Wisconsin’s best musky fisheries.

In 1991 Delavan was stocked with 17,860 two-inch fry. Then, in 1992, Delavan welcomed 290 11-inch fingerling. The next year it received an additional 2,670 11-inch fingerling. In 1994, the lake was stocked with 2,505 10-inch fingerling. There were 2,500 10-inch fingerling stocked in 1997. A total of 1,135 8-inch fingerling were stocked the following year. In 2000, the DNR stocked 250 9-inch large fingerling and followed up with a massive stocking program in 2001, releasing 4,136 10 ½-inch large fingerling. In 2003-04 there were 6,644 11-inch fingerling stocked. In 2006 there were 1,373 12 ½-inch fingerling planted that were originally strains of the Upper Chippewa River.

1,667 large fingerling from the Upper Wisconsin River strain were stocked in 2007. In 2008 2,267 10-inch fingerling from the Upper Chippewa River Chain were released, and since 2009, over 8,000 fingerling ranging between nine and 13 inches have been stocked into the depths of Delavan Lake.

Efforts continue to turn Delavan Lake into a musky angler’s dream, and now research will be collected showing the whereabouts and habits of these soon to be once-in-a-lifetime, trophy fish.





Pit Tags (passive transponders) which are inserted into the fish.

Pit Tag Reader