Regulatory Analysis

Notice of Intended Action to be published: 571—Chapter 81
"Fishing Regulations"

Iowa Code section(s) or chapter(s) authorizing rulemaking: 481A.38, 481A.39, 481A.67 and 481A.76

State or federal law(s) implemented by the rulemaking: Iowa Code sections 481A.38, 481A.39, 481A.67 and 481A.76

Public Hearing

A public hearing at which persons may present their views orally will be held via virtual meeting as follows:

September 24, 2025 12 noon to 1 p.m.	Via videoconference

Persons who wish to attend the virtual meeting should contact Randall Schultz via email. A link will be provided prior to the hearing. Persons who wish to make oral comments at the virtual public hearing must submit a request to Randall Schultz prior to the hearing to facilitate an orderly hearing.

Free language assistance: If you need assistance in a language other than English, contact the Department of Natural Resources (Department) at randy.schultz@dnr.iowa.gov or civilrights@dnr.iowa.gov or by telephone at 319.217.9317 at least seven days before the event.

Asistencia lingüística gratuita: Si necesita ayuda en un idioma que no sea inglés, comuníquese con el Departamento al randy.schultz@dnr.iowa.gov o civilrights@dnr.iowa.gov o por teléfono a 319.217.9317 al menos siete días antes del evento.

Public Comment

Any interested person may submit written comments concerning this Regulatory Analysis, which must be received by the Department no later than 4:30 p.m. on the date of the public hearing. Comments should be directed to:

Randall Schultz
Iowa Department of Natural Resources
6200 Park Avenue, Suite 200
Des Moines, Iowa 50321
Email: randy.schultz@dnr.iowa.gov

Free language assistance: If you speak a non-English language, the Department offers language assistance services free of charge. Contact the Department at randy.schultz@dnr.iowa.gov.

Servicios gratuitos de asistencia lingüística: Si habla un idioma que no sea el inglés, los servicios de asistencia lingüística están disponibles de forma gratuita. Comuníquese con el Departamento al randy.schultz@dnr.iowa.gov.

Purpose and Summary

Proposed Chapter 81 establishes seasons, territories, daily bag limits, possession limits, and length limits for Iowa sport fishing. The regulation of fisheries ensures sustainable populations and recreational opportunities for Iowans into the future.

Analysis of Impact

1. **Persons affected by the proposed rulemaking:**

- **Classes of persons that will bear the costs of the proposed rulemaking:**

There are no costs associated with this rulemaking.

- **Classes of persons that will benefit from the proposed rulemaking:**

This chapter benefits recreational water body users by updating, clarifying, and reducing content of Iowa fishing regulations.

2. **Impact of the proposed rulemaking, economic or otherwise, including the nature and amount of all the different kinds of costs that would be incurred:**

- **Quantitative description of impact:**

Fishing regulations ensure sustainable fishing practices, prevent overfishing, and maintain healthy fish stocks for future generations. Fishing contributes to the economy through angler license, gear, and bait purchases and travel.

- **Qualitative description of impact:**

Fishing provides relaxation, recreation, social bonding, and outdoor recreation opportunities, improving the general quality of life for Iowans.

3. **Costs to the State:**

- **Implementation and enforcement costs borne by the agency or any other agency:**

There are no new costs associated with this rulemaking. The cost of implementation and enforcement of these rules falls within the existing duties and budgets of the Department law enforcement and fisheries bureaus.

- **Anticipated effect on State revenues:**

No effect on State revenues is anticipated.

4. **Comparison of the costs and benefits of the proposed rulemaking to the costs and benefits of inaction:**

This chapter implements fair chase practices and restrictions on overharvest of fishes in public waters in order to ensure the sustainability of this resource as mandated by the Iowa Code.

5. **Determination whether less costly methods or less intrusive methods exist for achieving the purpose of the proposed rulemaking:**

There are no less costly or less intrusive methods. The Department's duty to manage and regulate fish in public waters is mandated by the Iowa Code. The specific details of these regulations could be formulated in many other ways; however, the proposed rules have been carefully drafted to ensure protection of public natural resources while maximizing opportunities for public recreation.

6. **Alternative methods considered by the agency:**

- **Description of any alternative methods that were seriously considered by the agency:**

No alternative methods were considered. This is a regulatory chapter covering restrictions for overharvest of fishes in public waters. Variations in the details of fishing regulations are regularly reviewed and adjusted based on scientific data collected by the Department.

- **Reasons why alternative methods were rejected in favor of the proposed rulemaking:**

There is no fundamentally different way of regulating fisheries. Iowa's regulations are substantially the same as other states in regulating methods of take, seasons, and bag/possession limits.

Small Business Impact

If the rulemaking will have a substantial impact on small business, include a discussion of whether it would be feasible and practicable to do any of the following to reduce the impact of the rulemaking on small business:

- Establish less stringent compliance or reporting requirements in the rulemaking for small business.

- Establish less stringent schedules or deadlines in the rulemaking for compliance or reporting requirements for small business.
- Consolidate or simplify the rulemaking's compliance or reporting requirements for small business.
- Establish performance standards to replace design or operational standards in the rulemaking for small business.
- Exempt small business from any or all requirements of the rulemaking.

If legal and feasible, how does the rulemaking use a method discussed above to reduce the substantial impact on small business?

This chapter does not have an impact on small business.

Text of Proposed Rulemaking

ITEM 1. Rescind 571—Chapter 81 and adopt the following **new** chapter in lieu thereof:

CHAPTER 81
FISHING REGULATIONS

571—81.1(481A) Seasons, territories, daily bag limits, possession limits, and length limits.

	INLAND WATERS				BOUNDARY RIVERS
Lake Sturgeon	Closed	0	0	0	Same as inland waters
Shovelnose Sturgeon	Continuous	None	None	None	Same as inland waters except no harvest allowed in the Big Sioux River and aggregate daily bag limit 10, aggregate possession limit 20, in the Missouri River
Paddlefish*	Continuous	2	4	None	Mississippi River— Same as inland waters except for an open season and length limit; see below* Missouri and Big Sioux Rivers—Special regulations; see below*
Yellow Perch	Continuous	25	50	None	Same as inland waters except no bag or possession limit in the Missouri River
Trout	Continuous	5	10	None*	Same as inland waters
Catfish*	Continuous	8 Lakes 15 Streams	30	None	Same as inland waters except no bag or possession limit in the Mississippi River
Black Bass (Largemouth Bass) (Smallmouth Bass) (Spotted Bass)	Continuous	3 In Aggregate	6	See below*	Continuous open season; aggregate daily bag limit 5, aggregate possession limit 10 See below*
Combined Walleye, Sauger and Saugeye	Continuous*	5*	10*	None*	Continuous open season; aggregate daily bag limit 6, aggregate possession limit 12; except aggregate daily bag limit 4, aggregate possession limit 8, in the Big Sioux and Missouri rivers See below*

	INLAND WATERS				BOUNDARY RIVERS
Northern Pike	Continuous*	3	6	None	Continuous open season; daily bag limit 5, possession limit 10; except daily bag limit 6, possession limit 12, in the Big Sioux River
Muskellunge or Hybrid Muskellunge	Continuous*	1	1	40″	Same as inland waters
Crappie	Continuous	25*	None	None	Same as inland waters except 50 in possession
Bluegill	Continuous	25*	None	None	Same as inland waters except in aggregate with pumpkinseed on the Mississippi River
All other fish species*	Continuous	None	None	None	See below*
Frogs (except Bullfrogs)	Continuous	48	96	None	Same as inland waters
Bullfrogs (Lithobates catesbeiana)	Continuous	12	12	None	Same as inland waters

*Exceptions noted in 571—81.2(481A).

571—81.2(481A) Exceptions to seasons and limits, set in 571—81.1(481A).

81.2(1) Exception closed season. In lakes West Okoboji, East Okoboji and Spirit, there shall be a closed season on walleye beginning February 15 each year through the first Saturday in May. Open season for muskellunge and tiger muskie shall be from May 21 through November 30.

81.2(2) Black bass. The department may post season, bag or possession limits, length limits, and catch and release regulations specific to a body of water at that body of water. For bodies of water without posted regulations, the following regulations apply to black bass:

a. A 15-inch minimum length limit shall apply in all public lakes.

b. A 12-inch minimum length limit shall apply in all interior streams, river impoundments, and the Missouri River including chutes and backwaters.

c. A 14-inch minimum length limit shall apply to the Mississippi River including chutes and backwaters.

81.2(3) Walleye.

a. West Okoboji, East Okoboji, Spirit, Upper Gar, Minnewashta, and Lower Gar lakes in Dickinson County; Storm Lake in Buena Vista County; Clear Lake in Cerro Gordo County; and Big Creek Lake in Polk County. The daily bag limit shall be three, with a possession limit of six.

b. Length limits. Length limits shall apply to walleye in public waters that have length limits posted or published.

81.2(4) Paddlefish snagging is permitted in waters of the state designated in 571—81.1(481A) except as follows:

a. There shall be no open season above the Interstate 29 bridge in the Big Sioux River, nor in any tributary of this stream within 200 yards immediately upstream of a tributary confluence.

b. Snagging for paddlefish on the Missouri and Big Sioux Rivers is limited to Iowa waters only, beginning in the Big Sioux River below the Interstate 29 bridge to the Big Sioux River's confluence with the Missouri River and in the Missouri River, including all backwaters and sloughs and any tributary of the Missouri River, beginning at the Big Sioux River confluence and extending to the Hamburg Landing boat ramp.

(1) There shall be an open season from February 1 through April 30.

(2) Snagging hours are from sunrise to sunset.

(3) Bag limit is one paddlefish per paddlefish fishing license.

(4) Paddlefish fishing license quota is 950 for resident anglers and 50 for nonresident anglers. Anglers may purchase one paddlefish license from December 15 through December 31 and either a first or second license between January 1 and January 7.

(5) Each angler fishing for paddlefish and any species listed in 81.2(11) on the Missouri and Big Sioux Rivers shall have a valid paddlefish license and unused tag.

(6) Immediately upon an angler's taking into possession a legal paddlefish, a valid transportation tag issued with the license shall be visibly attached to the fish's lower jaw. The transportation tag shall remain affixed to the paddlefish until the paddlefish is processed for consumption. The transportation tag shall be proof of possession of the carcass by the above-mentioned licensee. During the closed season, the possession of paddlefish on the Missouri and Big Sioux Rivers is prohibited unless the paddlefish are legally taken in Nebraska or South Dakota.

(7) A gaffe hook or other penetrating device cannot be used as an aid in the landing of a snagged fish.

c. Snagging for paddlefish on the Mississippi River is restricted to the area within 500 yards below the navigation dams and their spillways. The open season on the Mississippi River is the period from March 1 through April 15.

d. On the Mississippi River, a 33-inch maximum length limit shall apply; any paddlefish measuring 33 inches or more when measured from the front of the eye to the natural unaltered fork of the tail must immediately be released alive. On the Missouri and Big Sioux Rivers and on each Missouri River tributary from its confluence and extending to below its Interstate 29 bridge, a 35-inch to 45-inch protected-slot limit shall apply; a paddlefish measuring 35 inches to 45 inches when measured from the front of the eye to the natural unaltered fork of the tail shall immediately be released alive. To measure a paddlefish, the angler shall use a flexible tape and measure along and over the center line contour of the fish while it is lying flat.

81.2(5) Trout regulations. The department may post season, bag or possession limits, length limits, catch and release regulations, and tackle restrictions specific to a body of water at that body of water. On bodies of water posted as artificial lure only, "artificial lure" means a lure that does not contain or have applied to it any natural or synthetic substances designed to attract fish by the sense of taste or smell. For bodies of water without posted regulations, the following regulations apply to trout:

a. Open season is continuous.

b. A five-fish daily bag limit and ten-fish possession limit shall apply to any combination of brown trout, brook trout, rainbow trout, and their hybrids.

c. A trout fee is required to fish for and possess trout.

81.2(6) Exception border lakes. In Little Spirit Lake, Dickinson County; Iowa and Tuttle (Okamanpedan) lakes, Emmet County; Burt (Swag) Lake, Kossuth County; and Iowa Lake, Osceola County, the following species have a continuous open season and daily bag and possession limits as set forth below:

a. Walleye—daily bag and possession limit 3;

b. Northern pike—daily bag and possession limit 3;

c. Largemouth and smallmouth bass—daily bag and possession limit 3;

d. Channel catfish—daily bag and possession limit 8;

e. Yellow perch—daily bag and possession limit 25;

f. Crappie species—combined daily bag and possession limit 25;

g. Sunfish (bluegill, pumpkinseed, green sunfish, orangespotted sunfish, longear sunfish, warmouth, and hybrids)—combined daily bag and possession limit 25;

h. Muskellunge—daily bag and possession limit one. Open season shall be May 21 through November 30. A 40-inch minimum length limit shall apply on all border lakes;

i. Spears and bow and arrow may be used to take carp, buffalo, bowfin, gar, freshwater drum, and quillback with a continuous open season;

j. All species not listed above are subject to the inland regulations of the state and have a continuous open season.

81.2(7) DeSoto Bend Lake. All fishers shall conform with federal refuge regulations as posted under the authority of 50 CFR Section 32.34(a) effective as of [effective date of this rulemaking]. The text of the rules will be contained on the signs as posted.

81.2(8) General restriction. Anglers must comply with the most restrictive set of regulations applicable to the water on which they are fishing. Where length limits apply, fish less than the legal length must be immediately released into the water from which they were caught.

81.2(9) Catfish. For the purpose of this rule, stream catfish bag and possession limits apply at the federal flood control impoundments of Rathbun Lake, Red Rock Lake, Saylorville Lake, and Coralville Lake.

81.2(10) Identification of catch. No person shall transport or possess on any waters of the state any fish unless (a) the species of any such fish can be readily identified and a portion of the skin (at least 1 square inch) including scales is left on all fish or fillets and (b) the length of fish can be determined when length limits apply. "On any waters of the state" includes from the bank or shoreline in addition to wading and by boat.

81.2(11) Method of take. Artificial light may be used in the taking of any fish. The following species of fish may be taken by snagging, spearing, and bow and arrow: common carp, bighead carp, grass carp, silver carp, black carp, bigmouth buffalo, smallmouth buffalo, black buffalo, quillback, highfin carpsucker, river carpsucker, spotted sucker, white sucker, shorthead redhorse, golden redhorse, silver redhorse, freshwater drum, shortnose gar, longnose gar, dogfish, gizzard shad, and goldfish. All other species of fish not hooked in the mouth, except paddlefish legally taken by snagging, must be returned to the water immediately with as little injury as possible. Snagging is defined as the practice of jerking any type of hook or lure, baited or unbaited, through the water with the intention of hooking fish in an area other than the mouth. No hook larger than a 5/0 treble hook or measuring more than 1¼ inches in length when two of the hook points are placed on a ruler are permitted when snagging. Exceptions to snagging as a method of take are as follows:

a. No snagging is permitted in the following areas:

(1) Des Moines River from directly below Saylorville Dam to the Southeast 14th Street bridge in Des Moines.

(2) Cedar River in Cedar Rapids from directly below the 5 in 1 Dam under Interstate 380 to the 1st Avenue bridge.

(3) Cedar River in Cedar Rapids from directly below the "C" Street Roller Dam to 300 yards downstream.

(4) Iowa River from directly below the Coralville Dam to 300 yards downstream.

(5) Chariton River from directly below Lake Rathbun Dam to 300 yards downstream.

(6) Spillway area from directly below the Spirit Lake outlet to the confluence at East Okoboji Lake.

(7) Northeast bank of the Des Moines River from directly below the Ottumwa Dam, including the catwalk, to the Jefferson Street Bridge. Snagging from the South Market Street Bridge is also prohibited.

(8) Missouri River, any Missouri River tributary beginning at its confluence and extending below its Interstate 29 bridge and the Big Sioux River from the Interstate 29 bridge to the confluence with the Missouri River, with the exception of snagging paddlefish or any of the species listed in 81.2(11) during the paddlefish open season.

(9) Des Moines River from directly below the Hydroelectric Dam (Big Dam) to the Hawkeye Avenue Bridge in Fort Dodge.

(10) Des Moines River from directly below the Little Dam to the Union Pacific Railroad Bridge in Fort Dodge.

(11) Skunk River from directly below Oakland Mills Dam to the downstream end of the 253rd Street boat ramp.

b. No snagging, bow and arrow fishing, or spearing of fish is permitted in the following areas:

(1) Clear Lake and Ventura Marsh from the Ventura Grade, Jetties and Bridge.

(2) Lost Island Lake Inlet within 300 feet of the concrete culvert and metal fish barrier.

(3) Lost Island Lake Outlet within 300 feet of the outlet structure and metal fish barrier.

(4) Barringer Slough Outlet within 300 feet of the outlet and metal fish barrier.

(5) The outlet area of Lower Gar Lake beginning at 230th Avenue and extending downstream to the signed Iowa Great Lakes Sanitary District property line.

81.2(12) Panfish. The daily bag limit for crappie and bluegill applies only to public waters of the state. In all waters of the Mississippi River, the daily bag and possession limit applied individually to crappie, yellow perch and rock bass shall be 25 and 50, respectively. In all waters of the Mississippi River, the daily bag and possession limit applied in the aggregate for bluegill and pumpkinseed and for white bass and yellow bass shall be 25 and 50, respectively.

81.2(13) Culling. It is prohibited to sort, cull, high-grade, or replace any fish already in possession. Participants in permitted black bass fishing tournaments are exempted, as are participants in catch and release catfish fishing tournaments if the participants are fishing from a boat with a functioning aerated or water-circulated live well. Any fish taken into possession by holding in a live well, on a stringer, or in other fish-holding devices is part of the daily bag limit. Once the daily bag limit of a particular species is reached, fishing for that species is permitted as long as all fish of that species caught are immediately released.

571—81.3(481A) Trotlines and throw lines.

81.3(1) *Where permitted.* It shall be lawful to use trotlines or throw lines in all rivers and streams of the state, except in Mitchell, Howard, Winneshiek, Allamakee, Fayette, Clayton, Delaware, Dubuque, and Jackson counties. Trotlines or throw lines may be used in the above nine counties in the following stream segments: Mississippi River; Maquoketa River, mouth to Backbone State Park Dam; North Fork Maquoketa River, mouth to Jones-Dubuque County line; Turkey River, mouth to the Elkader Dam; and Upper Iowa River, mouth to the first dam upstream in Winneshiek County.

81.3(2) *Removal of lines.* All trotlines and parts thereof shall be removed from the shore when not being actively fished. A trotline shall be considered actively fished if at least once daily the trotline is left with at least one baited hook in the water.

These rules are intended to implement Iowa Code sections 481A.38, 481A.39, 481A.67 and 481A.76.