

STATEMENT OF REASONS
WYOMING GAME AND FISH COMMISSION
CHAPTER 46
FISHING REGULATIONS

W.S. §23-1-302(a) empowers the Commission to fix season and bag limits, open, shorten or close seasons on any species or sex of wildlife (defined in §23-1-101) and to establish rules and regulations necessary for control of the game species.

W.S. §23-1-801 through §23-1-804 authorize the Commission to enter into reciprocal fishing agreements with adjoining states, provides for reciprocal stamps or authorizations among adjoining states and authorizes the Commission to establish orders as provided in this act to implement such reciprocal agreements.

Although fishing regulations were changed on January 1, 2024 and are usually set for a two-year period, the proposed changes will become effective October 1, 2024, following action by the Commission in July 2024. The proposed changes are necessary to address an overabundant and growing population of lake trout in Flaming Gorge Reservoir and to coordinate the timing of these changes with the State of Utah with whom Wyoming shares joint management of this interstate reservoir.

The current Chapter 46 regulation will remain in effect through September 30, 2024. Following action by the Commission in July, the Department and the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) will have two and a half months to publicize the upcoming changes to anglers. The Department will use news releases and social media to inform anglers. The changes will be made to the online version of the fishing regulation booklet on October 1, 2024. Changes will be incorporated into the 2025 fishing regulation booklets that will become available on January 1, 2025.

Section 2. Definitions;

(u): Revised definition of “Possession Limit” to clarify that fish legally taken in another state and transported to Wyoming (e.g., walleye harvested in South Dakota) do not apply to Wyoming’s possession limits. Included reference to Flaming Gorge Reservoir because it is the only exception to this regulation (see Section 30 below).

Section 5. Creel limits;

(e): Added reference to exceptions to the absence of creel limits for nongame fish pertaining to the proposed change in Section 28(g)(ii) and Chapter 52.

Section 28. Area 4 Exceptions to General Provisions;

(g)(i): Added a regulation reducing the number of kokanee salmon that may be harvested or possessed from four (4) to three (3). Kokanee are the most sought after species in Flaming Gorge Reservoir during summer months and are harvested by most anglers due to their popularity as food. However, kokanee are also the primary forage for lake trout and the growing population

of small lake trout in Flaming Gorge Reservoir has reduced the number of kokanee available to anglers. A reduction in kokanee creel and possession limits will address angler concerns regarding potential overharvest. Changes to the reciprocal fishing agreement (Section 30 below) and the UDWR's removal of a twice daily possession limit in the Utah portion of the reservoir will reduce the maximum number of kokanee that can be harvested and possessed from Flaming Gorge Reservoir from twelve (eight in Utah and four in Wyoming) to three.

(g)(ii): Designate lake trout as a nongame fish in accordance with the definition of "game fish" in Wyoming Statute § 23-1-101. The population of small lake trout in Flaming Gorge Reservoir has grown to the point that lake trout predation is decimating populations of other popular sport fish. The Department has been encouraging anglers to harvest small lake trout for many years. Beginning October 1, 2024 anglers will be encouraged to harvest as many lake trout as possible. Wyoming Statutes prohibit the waste of edible portions of game fish. Classifying lake trout as nongame fish would enable anglers to properly dispose of fish they do not want to consume. In addition to allowing the disposal of edible portions of lake trout, designation as nongame fish will allow the use of artificial light to take lake trout with a spear gun, allow the collection of lake trout for use as dead bait, and allow the sale of edible portions of lake trout.

(g)(ii)(A): Remove creel and possession limits on lake trout twenty-eight (28) inches and smaller. Although the number of trophy-sized lake trout (larger than twenty-eight (28) inches) is declining in Flaming Gorge Reservoir, the abundance of smaller lake trout is increasing and negatively impacting populations of other popular sport fish (e.g., trout and kokanee salmon). The elimination of creel and possession limits for lake trout smaller than trophy size is necessary to attempt to control the population.

(g)(iv): Replace reference to "lake trout" with "fish" in order to simplify regulations by having consistency with the regulation in the Utah portions of Flaming Gorge Reservoir.

Section 30. Flaming Gorge Reservoir Reciprocal Stamp;

In accordance with W.S. §23-1-801, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department and the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources have entered into a reciprocal fishing agreement for Flaming Gorge Reservoir. The agreement was revised in February 2024 to simplify regulations for anglers by treating the reservoir as a single body of water and limiting anglers to one creel limit for the entire reservoir, regardless of the number of reciprocal stamps or fishing licenses held. The revised language in Section 30 is identical to the language in this revised agreement. In addition, both agencies are pursuing regulation changes necessary to have identical creel and possession limits for all species in the reservoir. Section 30(c) is included in case there are differences in creel or possession limits in the future.

Section 36. Effective Date;

The effective date of this regulation will be October 1, 2024. This effective date will allow anglers to harvest unlimited numbers of lake trout during spawning beginning in 2024. Lake trout aggregate on spawning grounds in October and November during which time they are most vulnerable to angling.