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News Release

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Revised VHS fish disease rules effective April 4, 2008

Anglers can keep leftover purchased minnows under certain conditions

MADISON – Revised rules to prevent the spread of [VHS fish disease](#) take effect Friday, April 4, and will allow anglers statewide to keep leftover minnows purchased from a Wisconsin bait dealer and use them again under certain conditions.

Anglers can use the leftover purchased minnows on the same waterbody at a later date, or, if they want to use them on another lake or river, they must make sure the minnows have not been exposed to any fish or water from the lake or river they've been fishing. That means anglers can't add any water or fish from a lake or river to their bait bucket or a livewell, but must keep the minnows in water from the bait dealer, from a well, a tap, melting snow, or some other source.

“Generally, you shouldn't move live fish if you want to make sure you're doing everything you can to keep Wisconsin fish healthy,” says Mike Staggs, Wisconsin's fisheries director. “But the revised rules allow some limited conditions under which you may move minnows purchased from a Wisconsin bait dealer and left over after your fishing trip.”

The rules aim to prevent the movement of infected bait minnows and water. People moving infected bait minnows to another lake or river is the main way that viral hemorrhagic septicemia is spread, with people moving large quantities of infected water a distant second, he said.

Most of the revised VHS rules remain the same as in the current rules adopted in fall 2007. Other key changes, however, prohibit anglers from collecting minnows for personal use from any water infected with VHS and its connecting waters up to the first barrier impassable to fish; such harvest is already prohibited for commercial use. VHS waters are Green Bay, Lake Michigan, Lake Superior, Lake Winnebago, the Mississippi River and their tributaries up to the first barrier impassable to fish. Minnows can be harvested from non-VHS waters for personal use but they must be used on the same water and they can't be taken away live.

The state Natural Resources Board revised the VHS rules March 26 after lawmakers objected to provisions in the current statewide rules that limited anglers from moving live minnows away from any lake or river. Lawmakers this past week informed the DNR they would allow the emergency revised rules to stand and would not request any more changes.

“We’ve listened to anglers’ and lawmakers’ concerns and addressed them as far as we can without leaving our fisheries at undue risk,” Staggs says. “We’re done with the rulemaking and now it’s time to get back to our main mission, which is to make sure all of us who fish and boat in Wisconsin take personal responsibility to not spread VHS and other aquatic invasive species.”

VHS is a fish disease that does not affect humans but can kill native panfish, bait fish and game fish and caused large fish kills in the lower Great Lakes in 2005 and 2006. VHS was first detected in Wisconsin in May 2007 in the Lake Winnebago and Lake Michigan systems, and is believed to be in Lake Superior and the Mississippi River, which are both hydrologically connected to Lake Michigan.

Other parts of the revised VHS rules affect boaters and anglers in the following ways:

- People must drain all water from boats and equipment when leaving any state waters or before entering the state over land. Anglers allowed to take live purchased minnows away under other rule provisions may transport the minnows in up to 2 gallons of water. No other fish may be kept in the same container with the minnows. Containers of drinking water don’t need to be drained.
- People who live on a lake or are vacationing at a resort may keep live minnows in submerged or floating containers tethered to a dock or boat. Any unattended containers holding minnows or fish must be labeled with the owner’s name and address.
- May use dead fish, fish eggs or fish parts for bait in certain instances, explained below.
- Fresh or frozen fish are okay to use as bait on the water from which it was harvested or on Lake Michigan or Green Bay and their tributaries upstream to the first barrier impassable to fish.
- Fish preserved by a method that does not require refrigeration or freezing is okay to use as bait on any water.
 - People may not use or possess live fish or live fish eggs for use as bait if obtained outside Wisconsin. Exceptions: bait from Iowa or Minnesota may be used on the Mississippi River "between the tracks" and imported bait may be used if it was imported in compliance with Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection rules.

A [summary of VHS rules](#) is available on the DNR Web site.