

Wisconsin History, Programs and Economic Impact

By Jim Zegar

I. History

Founded in 1969 in Milwaukee by Jim Wrolstad, Walleyes Unlimited USA is a multi-species fishing club dedicated to the sharing of information, teaching others how to fish, and the overall protection, enhancement, and enjoyment of the natural resources in our lakes, streams, and rivers.

In 2007, Walleyes Unlimited was inducted and enshrined into the Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Fame, located in Hayward, Wisconsin.

On December 23, 2010, the Internal Revenue Service acknowledged the organization as a qualified public charity and granted it tax-exempt status under IRC Sec. 501(c)(3).

In 2019, the organization will celebrate its 50th year of serving the people of Wisconsin.

II. Wisconsin Programs

Wisconsin residents provide a core of membership but the organization has members from other states. These non-Wisconsin residents pay dues and provide volunteer assistance to promote, enhance, and sometimes participate in, Wisconsin programs and activities. Non-resident assistance is important to the success of these Wisconsin events.

In no particular order of importance, these are the programs that benefit and are available to Wisconsin residents, along with a list of the activities that occur in the state. The net profits from the club's Annual Jamboree help fund everything:

Scholarship program-

For more than twenty years, scholarships have been provided to the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point for qualifying students majoring in fisheries science. Annual awards to recipients range from \$1,000 to \$2,000 each and total thousands of dollars since the inception of the program.

Fish stocking-

The club participates in fish stocking activities both with volunteer labor and contributions of money for the purchase of fingerlings. Our most recent efforts have been in the Fox River near Tichigan, Wisconsin, with walleye fingerlings. In addition to helping with the effort, we have donated \$4,000 to help defray some of the cost. Last year, one member assisted with the stocking of muskies in Lake Geneva.

Kids' fishing clinics-

Walleyes Unlimited makes a big effort to teach children not only about fishing, but also the outdoors in general. At Scout Lake in Wisconsin, each year we host two kids' clinics open to the public that are advertised and promoted in local Wisconsin media. One event is for open water fishing and the other ice fishing. The club provides tackle, bait, refreshments, and all the labor so the youngsters can not only learn about fishing, but also have a good time while doing so. At the Bong Recreation Center near Kansasville, Wisconsin, our members help the DNR manage the Free Fishing Day during the month of June every year. This is one way any Wisconsin resident can get some free education about tackle, presentation, or simply how to catch more fish, and have his or her questions answered.

Wind Lake Boat Launch-

For as long as anyone here can remember, we have assisted the DNR with the April cleanup and maintenance at the Wind Lake, Wisconsin, boat ramp.

Board of director meetings-

100% of our board meetings are held at the Birchwood Grill in Kenosha.

Club outings-

Approximately 95% of the club's fishing outings are held on Wisconsin waters. Every year, events are held at these locations: Sturgeon Bay, Pewaukee Lake, Delavan Lake, Geneva Lake, and Washington Island. We even conduct a whitefish trip to Door County during the winter. From time to time, we'll have an event on Big Green Lake, the Mississippi River at LaCrosse, and other locations.

Boat Night and Fish Fry-

In July of every year we host our Boat Night and Fish Fry at MW Marine located in Hales Corners, Wisconsin. This event is free to the public. Club members do all the cooking with fillets donated by club members and funds from our treasury are used to purchase all the other items needed for this large cookout.

Wisconsin Council on Sport-Fishing Organizations-

Our club provides a member to this important organization. In addition, during past years, we have funded the cost of the "how to" fishing publication for children.

Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Fame-

As an adjunct to our induction, we fund a yellow perch display in the organization's museum.

Wisconsin Conservation Congress-

Club members not only participate in the public hearings conducted by the Congress, we have also provided delegates to it over the years.

M-W Marine Seminars and Brat Fry-

Although MW Marine is a for-profit company, it conducts free fishing seminars open to the public featuring top-notch Pro Staff fishermen. Located in Hales Corners, Wisconsin, MW provides brats to seminar attendees. Walleyes Unlimited volunteers cook and serve the brats, and share their own fishing knowledge about various species, techniques, and locations as merely another example of our mission to educate other anglers. The brats are free. Sometimes, we'll get a donation and that money gets earmarked for our scholarship program as referenced above.

III. Economic Impact to Wisconsin-

Although it's impossible to quantify, the economic impact to Wisconsin communities from club activities in the state is enormous. Consider the sales tax collected by retailers that is shared with local municipalities and state government. Consider the incremental state income taxes due from retailers and other businesses created by the profits from not only Walleyes Unlimited purchases, but a thousand times more from members' individual purchases.

Hundreds of thousands of dollars are spent on lodging, gasoline, other transportation costs, fishing tackle, bait, marine equipment, food and restaurant purchases, and all the ancillary expenditures our hundreds of members incur on all the Wisconsin outings and trips referenced earlier in this document. Consider the boat launch fees collected by the DNR as well as private docks.

Regular club meetings are held at the Pallas Restaurant in West Allis, Wisconsin, where the restaurant takes in considerable proceeds for room rental and food and beverage sales, as just an additional small example of our economic impact. Purchases from Wisconsin companies are also made to conduct the annual Jamboree. And the list goes on and on.

Our annual Wisconsin Jamboree creates net profits from the raffles. 100% of that net profit is used to fund the Wisconsin activities and programs described above. We are proud of our Wisconsin heritage and our continuing benefit to the residents of and businesses in the State of Wisconsin.