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MEDIA RELEASE

The Crappie fishing action on Clear Lake is getting ready to start again, and the Lake County District Attorney's Office would like to remind fishermen and women that there are limits on the take and possession of crappie. Failing to abide by those take and possession limits can be costly for violators.

Clear Lake has a long history of experiencing boom or bust crappie fishing years. During years of fantastic crappie fishing, such as last year, hundreds of people flock to Clear Lake to fish, and many disregard the crappie limits and catch dozens of fish over the limit. Some people also come to Clear Lake to catch over-limits of crappie to sell, which is also illegal. This illegal over-fishing is one of the factors that cause crappie to disappear from Clear Lake during some years. When the crappie populations decline severely it has a negative impact on local businesses that benefit from people who fish for crappie on Clear Lake.

Crappie fishing is also a great way to get kids interested in fishing, and provide kids with fun and entertainment that helps keep kids out of trouble. When the crappie fishing is good, young kids can catch lots of fish in a short period of time, and become interested in fishing and the outdoors. Crappie fishing is a sport kids can participate in without any significant expense. With a cheap fishing rod and some cheap crappie lures, kids can catch lots of crappie on docks and at local city county, and state parks. Unfortunately, when people get greedy and catch over-limits of crappie, the crappie fishery declines or disappears and deprives kids and their parents of the opportunity crappie fishing provides. That is one of the reasons why it is so important to protect the local crappie fishery from over-fishing.

Last year, and at least one time a few years ago, The Lake County Fish and Wildlife Advisory Committee and the Board of Supervisors asked the state Fish and Game Commission to reduce the crappie limit from 25 to 10 on Clear Lake. The possession limit reduction was requested in an effort to help prevent drastic declines in the crappie fishery, and to make it easier for game wardens to catch violators. The state Fish and Game Commission has so far not reduced the limit.

The combined bag and possession limit on Clear Lake and in most of the state for crappie and sunfish/bluegill is 25 fish. That means that a person can possess no more than 25 at any time, whether they are freshly caught, in an ice chest, or at home in a freezer. For example, if a person has 20 crappie or sunfish at home in the freezer, and they go fishing, they cannot catch and keep more than 5. The bag and possession limits are found in the California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Sections 1.17 and 5.82. In addition, a person who catches more than three times the daily bag limit can be fined up to \$40,000 and a second offender can be fined up to \$50,000. Fish and Game Code

section 7121 also makes it illegal to sell or purchase fish that are sport caught out of lakes and rivers. Individuals who work together to violate fish and game laws can also be charged with felony conspiracy.

The fine for catching crappie or sunfish exceeding the legal bag or possession limit is \$1,095.00 for the first fish over the limit, and \$82.00 each for any additional fish over the limit. In addition, fishing equipment and boats can be confiscated and ordered forfeited, and the person can have their fishing privileges / license revoked for up 3 years.

When the crappie fishing is good, local game wardens and state parks officers issue many citations for over-fishing, in an effort to preserve the crappie fishery on Clear Lake. During the 2016 crappie season, 31 cases were referred to the District Attorney's Office for prosecution for possessing more than 25 crappie. In those cases violators had anywhere from a half dozen to several dozen fish over the limit. 29 of those individuals were prosecuted, and 2 were not filed on. Of those 29 cases, 6 are still pending resolution and 23 have resulted in convictions. Most of those 23 violators were placed on probation, they were ordered to pay fines totaling \$45,220.00, and 20 of them had their fishing licenses/privileges suspended for 1 to 3 years.

Wardens and other law enforcement officers will be enforcing the crappie fishing regulations again this year. People that wish to catch more than the limit should practice catch and release, and help preserve the crappie fishery for our kids and other people who want to enjoy great fishing also. Catch and release is always a great conservation idea anyway. The fewer you keep, the less cleaning you have to do at the end of the day, and the better the fishing will be next time.

Richard F. Hinchcliff
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