

The 2013 spearing seasons on the Lake Winnebago System are destined for the recordbooks: 12- and 13-year-olds can now join their families in the spearing season under a new law aimed to bring more people into the fold.

And, population surveys suggest some lucky spearer just might break the reigning state record, a 212-pound fish speared in 2010, or cart home a trophy fish, regarded as one over 100 pounds. DNR crews captured a 240-pound, 87.5 inch adult female lake sturgeon in spawning surveys below the Shawano Dam in April 2012. As always, however, ice conditions and water clarity are key factors determining if the record falls. "The sturgeon population is strong. We estimate there are nearly 29,000 adult males and 19,000 adult females in the Lake Winnebago system," said Ryan Koenigs Department of Natural Resources senior fisheries biologist, who took over this season as DNR's sturgeon biologist.

"Seven of the top 10 fish have been harvested in the past three years, including the current state record fish, a 212.2 pounder harvested in 2010," Koenigs said. "The 2013 fishery will present spearers with the opportunity to harvest the next record sturgeon, as we know there are fish large enough in the population."

Wisconsin residents who turned 12 after Oct. 31, 2012, can still buy a spearing license through the end of the 2013 spearing seasons and join their family in the spearing tradition. Wisconsin residents serving in the U.S. Armed Forces who are home on leave during the 2013 spearing season may also still buy spearing licenses through the end of the year."

Through Oct. 31, 2012, the deadline for purchasing sturgeon spearing licenses, a total of 12,092 licenses were sold for the upcoming 2013 spearing season on Lake Winnebago (11,601 licenses) and the Upriver Lakes (491 licenses), where there is a lottery for the 500 available licenses.

This total ranks third highest of all time and the popularity of the upriver lakes lottery fishery continues to grow, as a record 4,894 people applied for the 2013 lottery fishery.