

Preserve America's fish by keeping big ones in the water

Bluegill take years to reach half-pound size

With temperatures and dew points running as high as gas prices, it doesn't seem the time to be thinking about hunting, but there's a change in the rules this year

that we have to be thinking about soon.

In the past, hunting-application deadlines were scattered through late summer and early fall. I personally know of many folks who missed applying because of just that — mixed due dates.

I believe a welcome change has come from the state Department of Natural Resources that makes sense for once. The application deadline for white-tail deer, fall turkey, Horicon- and Collins-zone Canada goose, sharp-tailed grouse, otter, fisher and bobcat hunting and trapping permits now is Aug. 1. Deadlines for spring turkey and bear also will be consolidated to one date. A tip of the cap to the DNR for this one.

JIM CHEADLE SCALES & TAILS

* * *



Last week, I briefly touched on what is considered by many to be America's fish. The bluegill, bream, sun perch, blue brim or roach has subspecies, including red and green breasted sunfish, pumpkinseed, shellcracker and longeared sunfish. Unlike other fish, males are the larger of the two sexes. The males also stay and guard the nest, eggs and young. They seldom feed during the spawning cycle, but aggressively guard the nest and remove anything that comes near. That is precisely why they are so susceptible to over-harvest.

In our northern climate, it takes eight to 10 years for a male to reach more than a half-pound size. This would compare to a 10-pound walleye or 5-pound bass!

Many anglers believe it is proper to fish over spawning beds because they are helping to "thin the herd" and prevent stunting of their favorite water. Nothing could be further from the truth.

In the gill's world, something happens during the spawn known as chuckholding. While the large males guard the nest and run off trespassers, the smaller, stunted males dart in and fertilize some of the eggs. This is what actually produces stunted fish.

Something that seems to work well on Cox Hollow Lake during the spawn is that bedding areas are posted "off limits" to fishing to prevent taking the large males off beds. Slight fishing is fun, but folks must put their egos in the back of the boat and let the big boys swim.

Post-spawn, it's the deeper water near these areas where the fish scatter. North and west shorelines that are protected from spring winds are where you should start. Coves, high-bank areas and dead-end creek arms also protect the eggs from wind and waves that would scatter them.

Most folks don't venture deep enough when fishing. If you're taking smaller fish, move deeper, add more weight and bigger bait. A slow dropping bait will catch greater numbers, but remember, if it hangs in the strike zone longer, the smaller fish usually found at the top of the school often will take your offering.

Adding more weight and getting to the bottom faster will get you to the big guys! Dropphotting is an excellent way to accomplish this. I like a 3/8- or 1/2-ounce sinker on the end of the line with two 12 to 18-inch droppers tied 1 and 2 feet up from it. Try whole angleworms, half crawlers or whole leaches. Again, if little fish keep pecking away, go deeper.

The Wild Goose says: In this weather, if your fishing partners have four legs, don't forget a jug of fresh, cool water just for them.

Write Jim Cheadle at 4108 W. Spring Creek, Beloit, WI 53511. Email him at cjc-headle@gmail.com.