

Bass Regulations Forum
Wildlife District 1 Office
1500 Dublin Road Columbus, OH 43215
November 15, 2008, 9:30 AM - 12:00 noon

Meeting summary prepared by Angela Latham (angela.latham@dnr.state.oh.us)

Attendees: Bass tournament organizers and state leaders from the Ohio Bass Federation, Ohio BASS Federation Nation and Division of Wildlife representatives (see attendees on page 5)

Objective: To provide an overview of the current Division of Wildlife process for review and revision of Ohio bass regulations in reservoirs and gather input regarding tournament bass angler opinions, attitudes, and preferences.

Welcome: Ray Petering, Executive Administrator, welcomed tournament organizers and leaders and explained the main focus of the Bass Regulations Forum. This is the beginning of a process and it will be a few years before any new regulations are proposed. The focus of this meeting will mainly be on largemouth bass length and bag limits in inland reservoirs. Division of Wildlife employees have begun to analyze a large block of data and seek the opinion of bass groups in the evaluation process. Biological data and socioeconomic components together will lead to decision making for future years.

Overview (Scott Hale):

Regulations Approach and Chronology of Ohio Bass Regulations - The development of regulations is a science based process using biological and social information. Regulations present challenges because we are managing for a diversity of interests, different levels of participation, values and perceptions. Our approach includes reviewing our history and neighboring state's regulations, gathering and analyzing biological and social data, evaluation of options and making recommendations. Prior to the 1900's there were few bass regulations. Starting in 1902, commercial harvest of Ohio bass was prohibited. Statewide inland and Lake Erie bass regulations were introduced in 1940 – 1970's. From 1977 – present there are statewide and site specific regulations. The next step is to group types of lakes for a lake-specific approach from a statewide perspective.

Bass Regulations of Neighboring States (Rich Carter):

We have looked at what neighboring states, including Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois Michigan and West Virginia, as well as aggressive states including Oklahoma and Arkansas, have done to manage bass (largemouth, smallmouth and spotted). General length limit categories include no length limit, 12 – 16" minimum, trophy, catch and release and slot limits. Different types of regulations are in place due to differences in habitat and fish populations, opinions among anglers, and philosophic differences among agencies. A variety of regulations have been tried in different states and in Ohio it's time to step back, evaluate what works and change what makes sense.

Data Types and Availability (Don Swatzel):

The four data types the Division of Wildlife collects and will be using while it reviews Ohio's current bass regulations include electrofishing surveys, creel surveys, tournament results, and angler opinion surveys. During electrofishing surveys fisheries personnel measure bass population abundance, individual fish length and weight, and collect scales to determine growth. In addition, limnology data such as dissolved oxygen and temperature profiles of the water column, water conductivity, and water transparency are measured. Creel surveys measure angler effort (the number of hours anglers spent fishing) and what they fished for, catch rates (the number of fish caught), and harvest rates. Creel survey can also provide information about anglers, such as demographics: examples would be age and gender of anglers, also anglers can be asked for their home zip code which can be used to determine how far they traveled to fish.

We can ask opinion questions on particular regulations like length limits or bag limits, and how important it is for an angler to keep what he or she catches. The Division of Wildlife has been collecting tournament results since 1975. To take advantage of today's technology, the Ohio Bass Tournament Database was created. It is an internet-based system that allows tournament organizations to voluntarily report their tournament results on-line. This database helps transform tournament results into fisheries data. The Division of Wildlife has 30 years of tournament fisheries data that can be used to track trends in bass fisheries in all major waters and individual lakes. Angler opinion surveys provide social information. An online survey was developed to gather angler opinions on fishing regulations for Ohio's Inland lakes and reservoirs. Results from the online survey can show opinion and attitude differences between tournament and non-tournament anglers. Together, this extensive amount of data will help fisheries personnel critically review and possibly propose revisions to Ohio bass regulations.

20 Questions: "Live" Angler Opinion Survey:

A PDF with results is attached.

Roundtable Questions & Discussions:

1) Why is 12" the standard for a "keeper" bass in tournaments?

Jim Doss – 12" limit is the way it's always been

Steve Coulter– 12" limit is a bench mark; people will be resistant to change due to social beliefs

Jim Siders – With a 12" limit it is easier to get more participants to advance to the next level whereas larger fish are harder for them to catch.

John Norris – If the limit changes there would be a lack of participation, participants would fish for hours with no results. Plus, there would be more fishing pressure on larger fish.

BobTownsend - Tradition, historical data suggested 12" was the length at sexual maturity

John Johnson - It would not be worth it to participants to spend the time and money

Larry Davis – 12" is the standard historical set limit

David Hagood (mailed in comment) -This came from states implementing length limits. Length limits have nothing to do with bass tournaments and was done because of anglers that take bass home to eat. As you know most bass tournament anglers practice catch and release. Bass anglers and tournament organizers like ABA are conservationist setting a minimum length for bass is consistent with protecting the resource.

2) How would changes in existing length limits and daily bag limits affect Ohio tournaments in general, and your specific circuit?

Steve Coulter –Tournament organizers set bag limits to reduce mortality, so Division of Wildlife limits would be unnecessary. If the length limits are increased and bag limits are decreased, tournament participation numbers would decrease.

Dan Klein – A bag limit would cause most family participants to lose interest

- Jim Doss – Bag limits are set on Lake Erie because a participant can catch more than in an inland lake. Without a bag limit on Lake Erie it would increase mortality and take too much time to weigh in.
- Bob Townsend – A three fish bag limit change would draw top anglers back to the middle of the field (83% catch 3 fish or less). Length limits would increase difficulty (28.9 % would like the limits to stay the same).
- Mike Schmeltzer -Proposed the idea of two separate sets of regulations – anglers and tournaments
- Steve Kirby – Changing the bag and length limits could have negative economic consequences on small towns – agrees with the separate regulations idea
- Rory Franks – Tournament participation is required to make the pay-outs. Participation increases with the 12" limit
- Barry Davis – Cutting back the limit would hurt participant's chances at qualifying for national championship. Instead of changing limits, increase structure.
- David Hagood (mailed in comment) - If after a full study of how tournament creel limits affect the size of Ohio's bass overall population then a correct length limit should be applied. Again this would be for anglers that take bass home and not bass tournaments. ABA would suggest OHIO DNR speak with officials from the Texas DNR because of their extensive studies on this subject. ABA can provide contacts to the right Texas DNR officials if requested.

Slot limits are bad and should not be used because they simply do not work on impoundments or rivers. To prove this can you name one lake in the south that has a slot limit that is considered a great fishery.

If any limits are set that are need to protect the resource that are severe the can adversely affect tournaments. Florida in these cases provides tournament organizations waivers for the day of the event because tournaments practice catch and release. The waiver allows each angler to transport up to 5 bass each over 12 inches for the event that will be released immediately after being weighed. This allows catch and release anglers to compete in bass tournaments and also protects the resource.

ABA believes more emphasis should be placed on fish care and training in fish care so tournament organizations and bass anglers in general practice quality fish care and catch and release. Proper fish care (starting with the angler) has more to do with protecting the resource than length limits dealing with bass tournaments.

Applying unreasonable length limits will not only hurt tournaments but the fishing industry in general. If negative impacts are created the first to suffer is typically the sale of fishing license which drains important funding from DNR.

3) What kinds of future changes in minimum length limits or daily bag limits might improve Ohio tournaments in general, and your specific circuit?

- Bob Townsend–Anglers don't always do what biologists think they will do. Instead of new regulations, try habitat improvement. The National Fish Habitat Action Plan states that stocking and limits do not work but better nursery habitat does.

Steve Coulter – Habitat restoration will help everything up the food chain. The Division of Wildlife should partner with tournament organizers for this.

John Norris – Draw downs in reservoirs kills the vegetation. Build a new reservoir due to increased population and water needs.

Steve Coulter –There should be a fish handling standard. Also, there should be a standard tournament permitting process between the Division of Wildlife and Parks where you are required to report your catch.

David Hagood (mailed in comment) - 5 bass in possession over 12 inches is more than anyone needs. This would protect from anglers taking too many bass for food reason. ABA would like to work closely with Ohio DNR to help gather data and do our part to protect both the resource and the Marine and Fishing industry.

Closing Remarks (Ray Petering): We will need to look at what the science says as well as how regulations impact the tournaments. We will also need to look at how to balance the two without negative impacts. A possible direction might be separate regulations for anglers and tournaments. Another option is focus on habitat improvement with the cooperation of the Army Corps of Engineers and surrounding agriculture. However, regulations are still one of our most important tools for managing fisheries.

Anonymous Comments:

- Bass Regulations Forum should be an annual event with tournament circuits
- Habitat restoration, reporting of fish, lake's length limits should be lifted for tournaments, more days of free fishing for families (1 day per month), charge for a tournament permit and use the money for habitat restoration, only have one tournament per lake per day, limit 40 boats only
- 15" should be dropped for tournaments to take the pressure off of some of the other lakes
- 10HP limit should be lifted and changed to MPH
- Minimum catch handling, mandatory fish report results, permits-shared responsibility between parks and wildlife
- Offer tournament exemptions to regulations and require tournament organizations within their permitting to provide insurance, report status, require standard handling practices, encourage state park assistance
- No blanket regulations, use science for each body of water

Parking Lot:

- Habitat restoration
- Fish handling standards
- Mandatory reporting requirements
- Tournament pressure on reservoirs
- Include post tournament mortality as harvest
- Tournament removal of spawners

Attendees

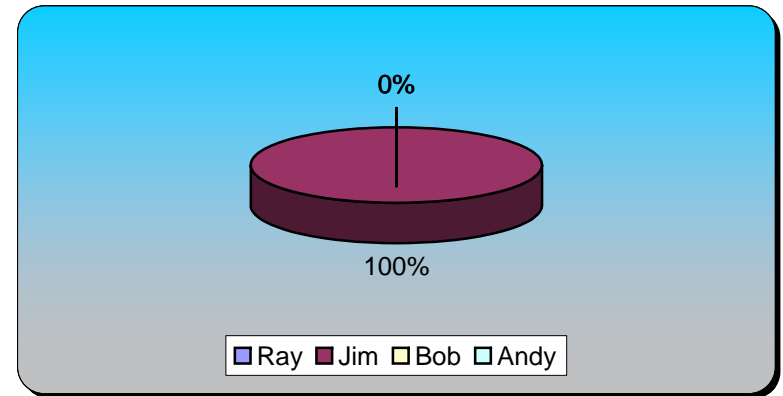
Representative(s)	Organization	E-mail
Jim Doss	Ohio Bass Federation	jsdoss@zoomnet.net
Steve Coulter	Ohio Bass Federation	scoulter@heathohio.gov
DJ Plotner	Ohio BASS Federation Nation	skeeter250zx@aol.com
Rod Pullins	Ohio BASS Federation Nation	rupull@ctcn.net
Bob Townsend	Ohio BASS Federation Nation	rtownsend6@woh.rr.com
K. Barry Davis	American Bass Anglers Association	kbd73@aol.com
Dan Klein	Bad Bass Champs Tournament Trail	badbass1@sssnet.com
Steve Kirby	Central Ohio Tournament Anglers Association	venompromo@insight.rr.com
John Norris Jr.	Hooked on Jesus Tournament Trail	jrbass@calledtofish.com
Rory Franks	LaDue Bass Series	FBFP2008@aol.com
John Johnson	USA Bassin	jjohns64@cinci.rr.com
James Siders	USA Bassin	jassiders@verizon.net
Mike Schmeltzer	Bad Bass Champs Tournament Trail	mschmeltzer@neo.rr.com
Scott Hale	Ohio Division of Wildlife	Scott.hale@dnr.state.oh.us
Ray Petering	Ohio Division of Wildlife	Ray.petering@dnr.state.oh.us
Rich Carter	Ohio Division of Wildlife	Rich.carter@dnr.state.oh.us
Don Swatzel	Ohio Division of Wildlife	Donald.swatzel@dnr.state.oh.us

Ohio Bass Regulations Forum: November 15, 2008

Session Name: Bass Regulations Forum
 Created: 11/15/2008 11:02 AM

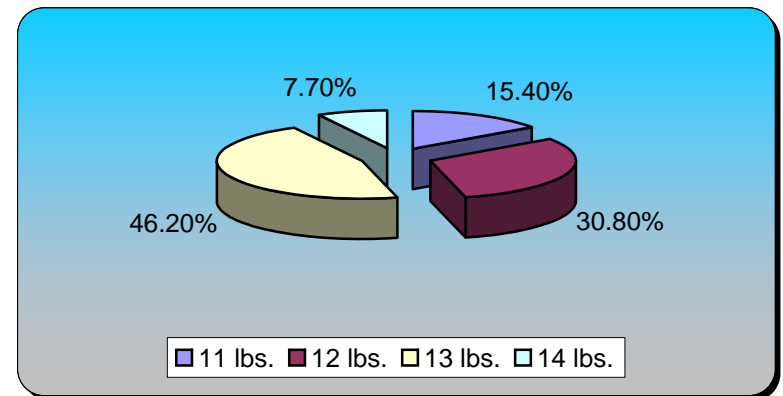
Test Question: What is the first name of OSU Coach Tressel?

	Responses	
Ray	0	0%
Jim	13	100%
Bob	0	0%
Andy	0	0%
Totals	13	100%



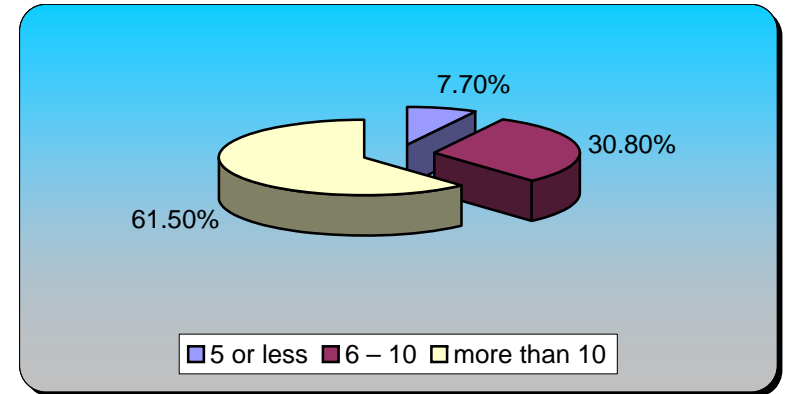
Test Question: How big is the state record largemouth bass?

	Responses	
11 lbs.	2	15.38%
12 lbs.	4	30.77%
13 lbs.	6	46.15%
14 lbs.	1	7.69%
Totals	13	100%



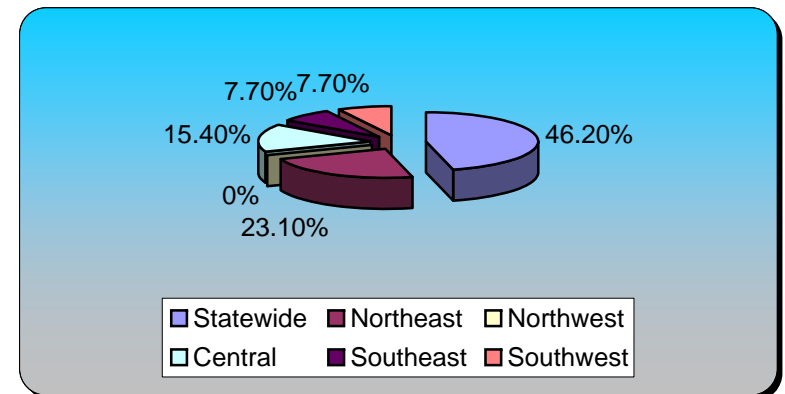
1) How many tournaments does your organization typically hold in Ohio each year?

	Responses	
5 or less	1	7.69%
6 – 10	4	30.77%
more than 10	8	61.54%
Totals	13	100%



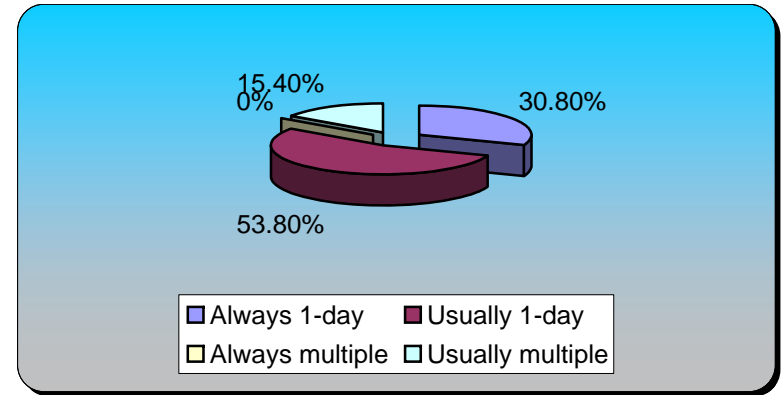
2) In what region of Ohio are your tournaments primarily held?

	Responses	
Statewide	6	46.15%
Northeast	3	23.08%
Northwest	0	0%
Central	2	15.38%
Southeast	1	7.69%
Southwest	1	7.69%
Totals	13	100%



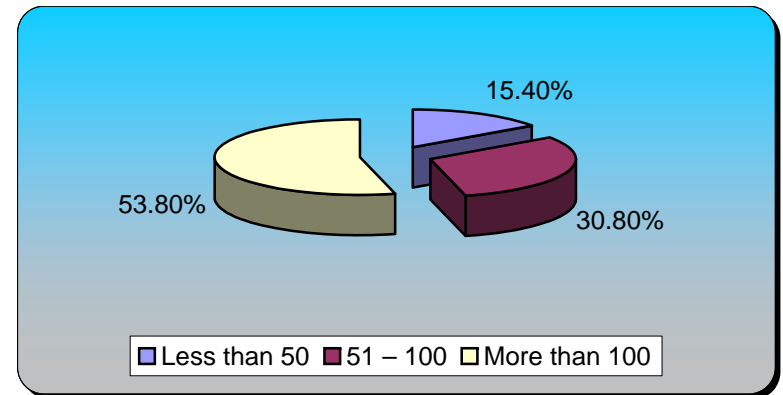
3) Are your tournaments typically one-day or multiple-day events?

	Responses	
Always 1-day	4	30.77%
Usually 1-day	7	53.85%
Always multiple	0	0%
Usually multiple	2	15.38%
Totals	13	100%



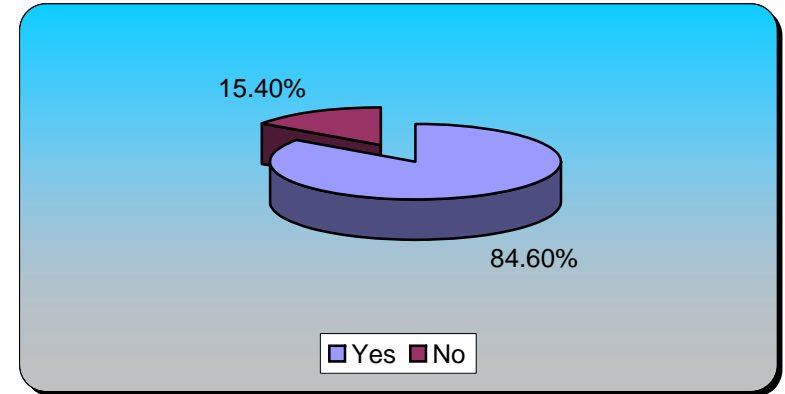
4) How many anglers (not teams) typically register for each of your tournaments?

	Responses	
Less than 50	2	15.38%
51 – 100	4	30.77%
More than 100	7	53.85%
Totals	13	100%



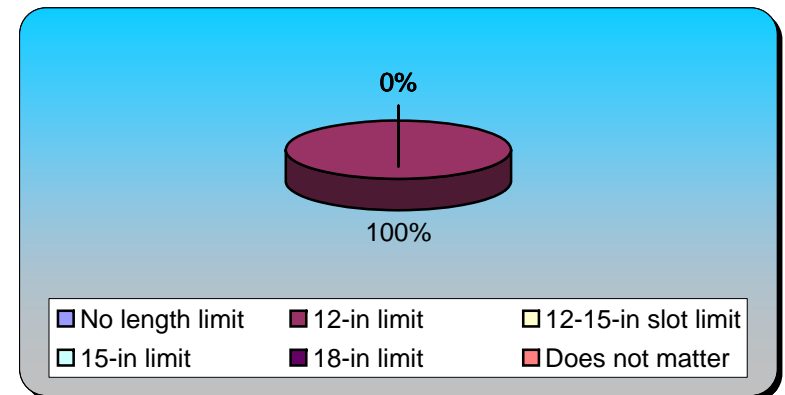
5) Does your tournament circuit lead to qualification in a national event?

	Responses	
Yes	11	84.62%
No	2	15.38%
Totals	13	100%



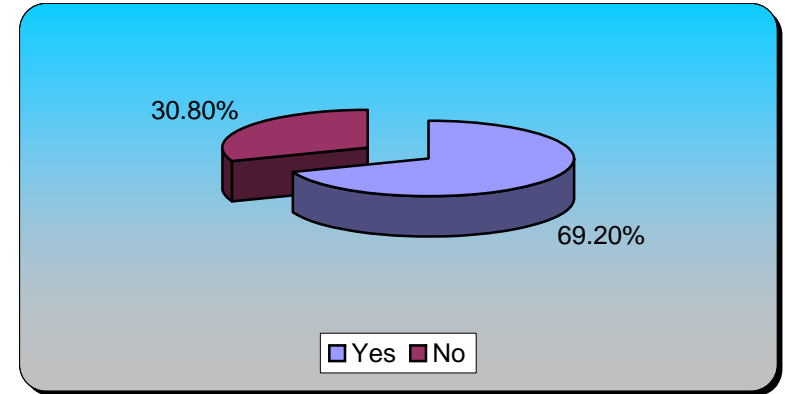
6) Do you prefer to hold tournaments on lakes with...

	Responses	
No length limit	0	0%
12-in limit	13	100%
12-15-in slot limit	0	0%
15-in limit	0	0%
18-in limit	0	0%
Does not matter	0	0%
Totals	13	100%



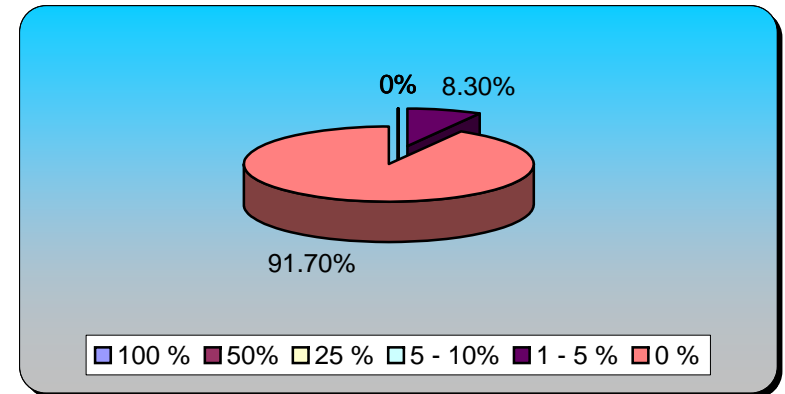
7) Do you believe that minimum length limits improve bass fishing in Ohio?

	Responses	
Yes	9	69.23%
No	4	30.77%
Totals	13	100%



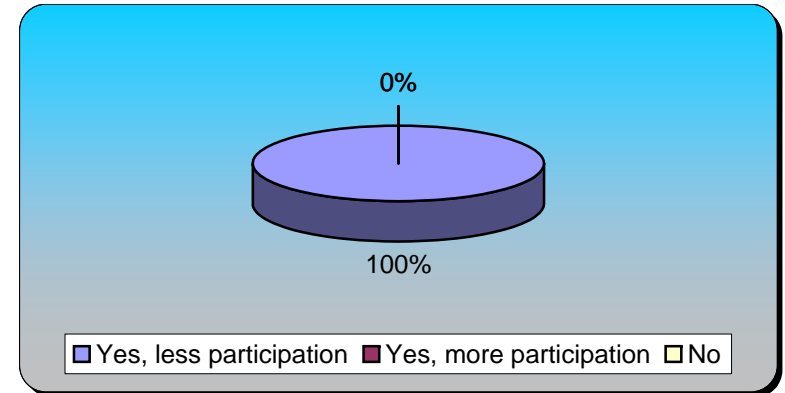
8) What percentage of anglers that you know keep "sub-slot" bass in lakes with 12-15 inch slot limits?

	Responses	
100 %	0	0%
50%	0	0%
25 %	0	0%
5 - 10%	0	0%
1 - 5 %	1	8.33%
0 %	11	91.67%
Totals	12	100%



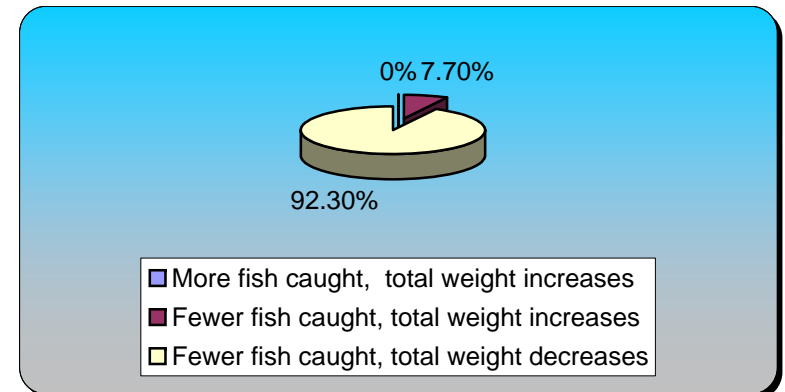
9) Do you believe that an increase in a length limit on a lake that has a 12-inch limit would affect tournament participation?

	Responses	
Yes, less participation	13	100%
Yes, more participation	0	0%
No	0	0%
Totals	13	100%



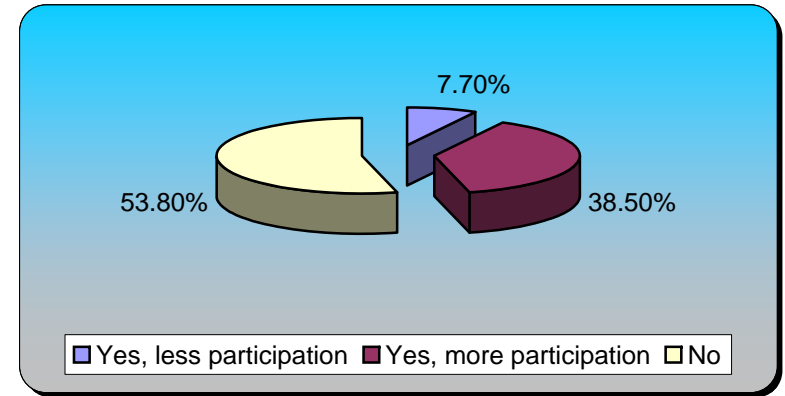
10) How do you think an increase in a length limit from 12 to 14 inches would change weigh-in results?

	Responses	
More fish caught, total weight increases	0	0%
Fewer fish caught, total weight increases	1	7.69%
Fewer fish caught, total weight decreases	12	92.31%
Totals	13	100%



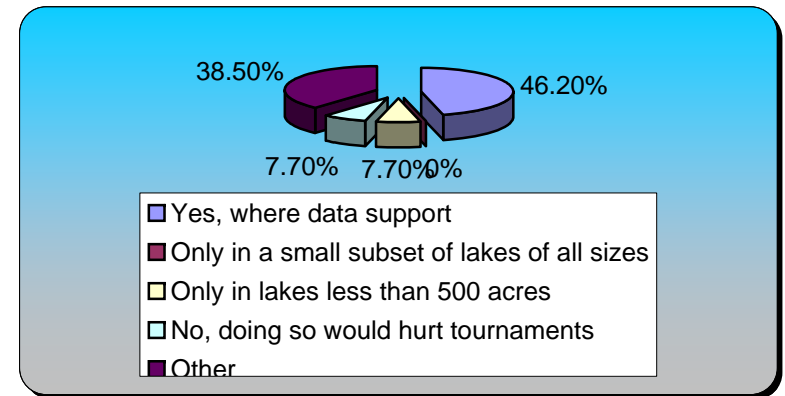
11) Do you believe that removing a 12- inch length limit on a lake would impact tournament participation?

	Responses	
Yes, less participation	1	7.69%
Yes, more participation	5	38.46%
No	7	53.85%
Totals	13	100%



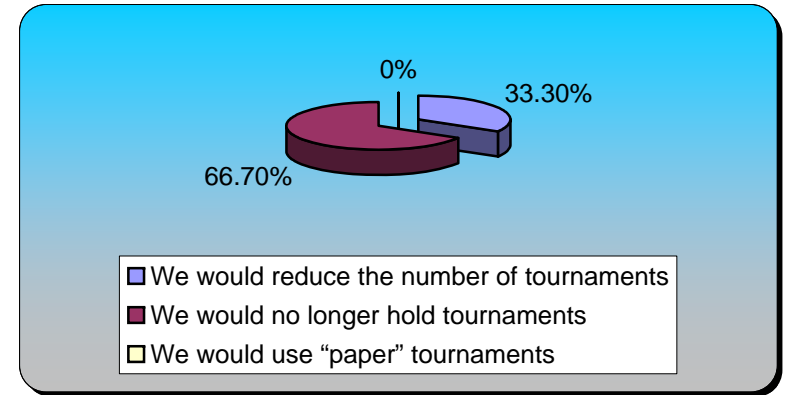
12) If biological data indicated that removing some 12-inch limits would not affect the quality of fishing, would you favor removing the 12-inch limits?

	Responses	
Yes, where data support	6	46.15%
Only in a small subset of lakes of all sizes	0	0%
Only in lakes less than 500 acres	1	7.69%
No, doing so would hurt tournaments	1	7.69%
Other	5	38.46%
Totals	13	100%



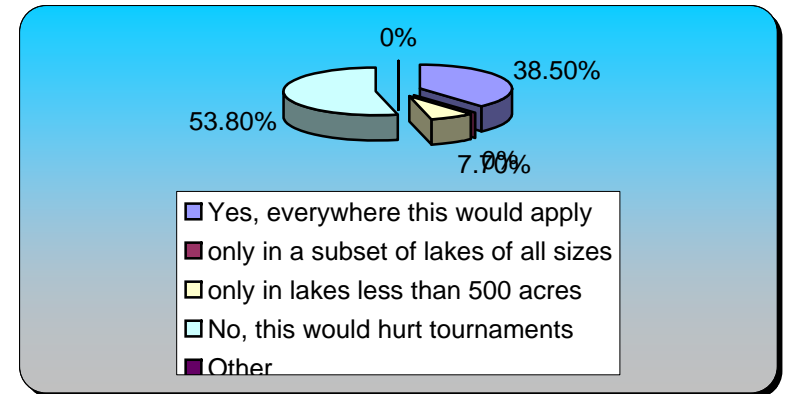
13) How would a 2-3 inch increase in a 12-inch minimum length limit at a popular tournament lake change how your circuit conducts tournaments at that lake?

	Responses	
We would reduce the number of tournaments	4	33.33%
We would no longer hold tournaments	8	66.67%
We would use "paper" tournaments	0	0%
Totals	12	100%



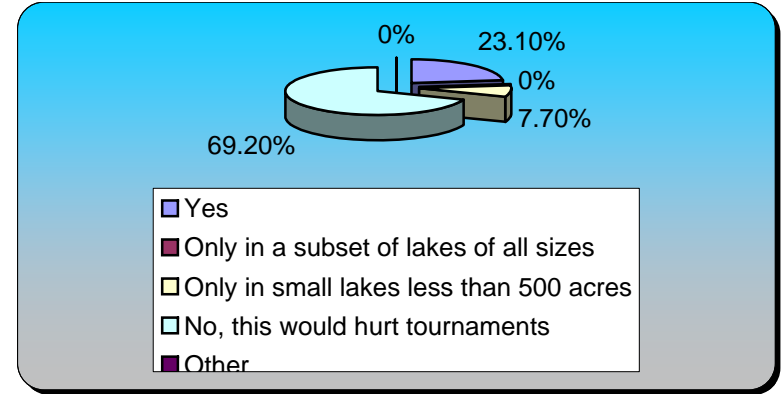
14) ...would you favor an increase from 12 to 14 inches in lakes where the increase was supported by data?

	Responses	
Yes, everywhere this would apply	5	38.46%
only in a subset of lakes of all sizes	0	0%
only in lakes less than 500 acres	1	7.69%
No, this would hurt tournaments	7	53.85%
Other	0	0%
Totals	13	100%



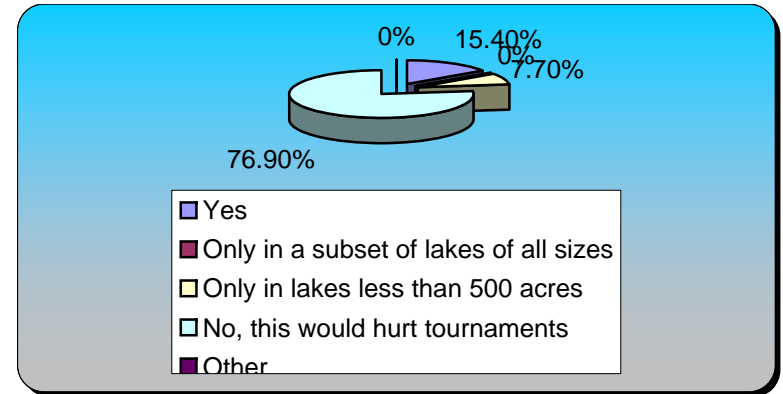
15) ...would you favor an increase from 12 to 15 inches where the increase was supported by data?

	Responses	
Yes	3	23.08%
Only in a subset of lakes of all sizes	0	0%
Only in small lakes less than 500 acres	1	7.69%
No, this would hurt tournaments	9	69.23%
Other	0	0%
Totals	13	100%



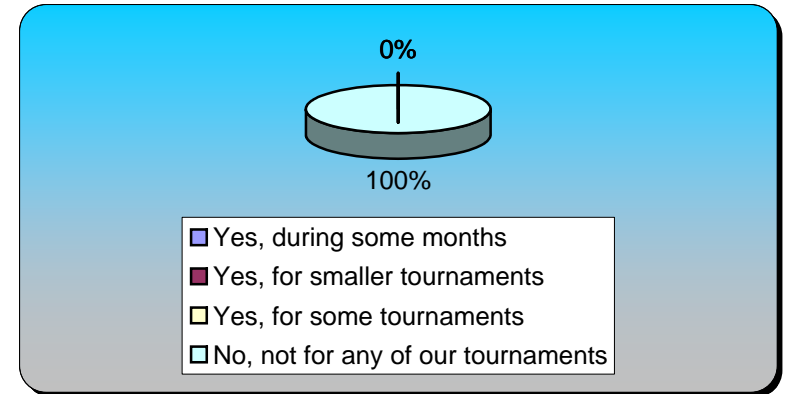
16) ...would you favor an increase from 12 to 18 inches where the increase was supported by data?

	Responses	
Yes	2	15.38%
Only in a subset of lakes of all sizes	0	0%
Only in lakes less than 500 acres	1	7.69%
No, this would hurt tournaments	10	76.92%
Other	0	0%
Totals	13	100%



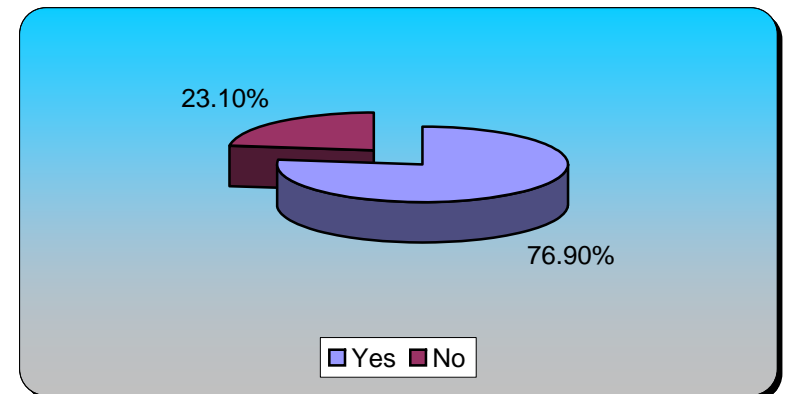
17) Would you be in favor of using paper tournaments in your tournament trail?

	Responses	
Yes, during some months	0	0%
Yes, for smaller tournaments	0	0%
Yes, for some tournaments	0	0%
No, not for any of our tournaments	13	100%
Totals	13	100%



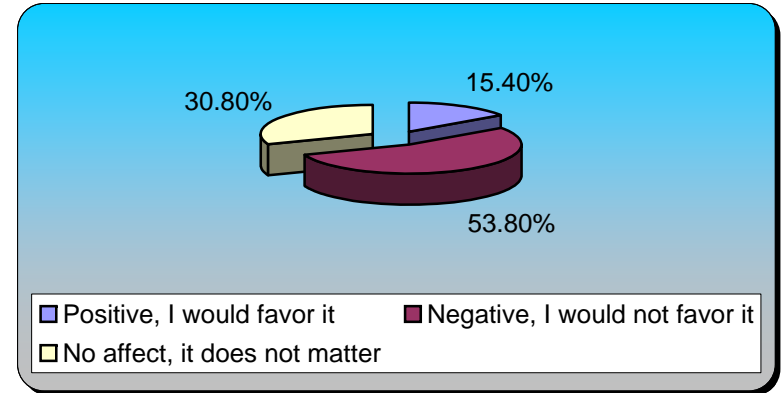
18) Do you believe that daily bag limits improve bass fishing in Ohio?

	Responses	
Yes	10	76.92%
No	3	23.08%
Totals	13	100%



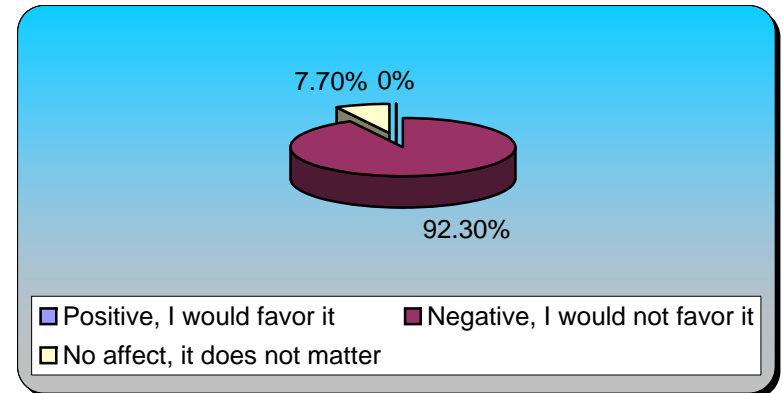
19) What would be the affect on your tournaments of a reduction of the daily bag limit from 5 fish to 4 fish?

	Responses	
Positive, I would favor it	2	15.38%
Negative, I would not favor it	7	53.85%
No affect, it does not matter	4	30.77%
Totals	13	100%



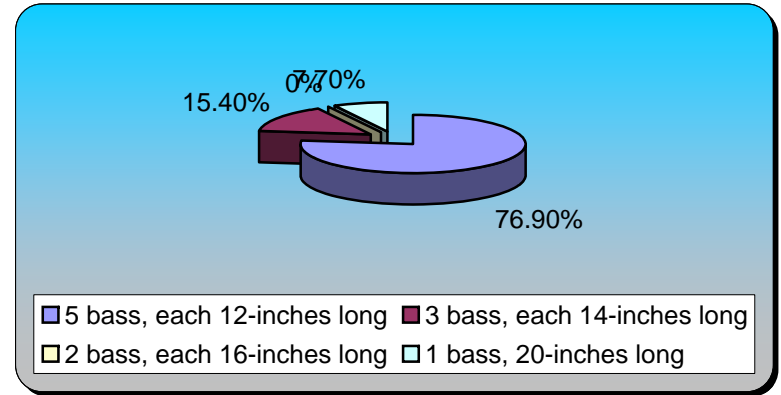
20) What would be the affect on your tournaments of a reduction in the daily bag limit from 5 fish to 3 fish?

	Responses	
Positive, I would favor it	0	0%
Negative, I would not favor it	12	92.31%
No affect, it does not matter	1	7.69%
Totals	13	100%



21) If you are fishing a tournament, would you rather catch a total of 4.5 pounds of bass that were...

	Responses	
5 bass, each 12-inches long	10	76.92%
3 bass, each 14-inches long	2	15.38%
2 bass, each 16-inches long	0	0%
1 bass, 20-inches long	1	7.69%
Totals	13	100%



22) If you are NOT fishing a tournament, would you rather catch a total of 4.5 pounds of bass that were...

	Responses	
5 bass, each 12-inches long	11	84.62%
3 bass, each 14-inches long	1	7.69%
2 bass, each 16-inches long	0	0%
1 bass, 20-inches long	1	7.69%
Totals	13	100%

