



Department of Natural Resources Fact Sheet



2008 POLICY FACT SHEET

Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia (VHS) Fish Health Initiative

It is needed because

Viral hemorrhagic septicemia (VHS) is a contagious fish virus that has caused fish kills in the Great Lakes and in inland lakes in Wisconsin and Michigan. In the Great Lakes, it has affected a wide variety of species, including muskies, walleye, lake whitefish, freshwater drum (sheepshead), yellow perch, gizzard shad, redhorse and other game and nongame fish species. The virus has been known in Europe for decades and has been present in the U.S. on both the Pacific and Atlantic coasts. In the Great Lakes region it has been spreading westward and there is a high likelihood that it will be found in Lake Superior, the Mississippi River or other Minnesota waters in coming years. Additional fish health requirements are needed for cool and warm water fish species to help prevent introduction of this disease and slow the spread if it is found in Minnesota.

Major elements

(1) Amend current language to include VHS susceptible species (as determined by USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)), as requiring a transportation permit for intrastate transportation, stocking, and sales in the state. This change will limit the movement of fish that require a DNR Bill of Lading.

Background: There are over 160 licenses issued for aquatic farms or private hatcheries in the state that buy and sell fish as part of their daily business activities. Some of the VHS susceptible fish species on the current APHIS list are being transported from one facility to another and stocked in nonpublic waters without any fish health testing. The change will allow the DNR to require testing for VHS susceptible fish species.

(2) Remove the exemption from a transportation permit for fish species on the VHS susceptible list. This change will require that VHS susceptible fish can only be moved with a transportation permit.

Background: Currently, the license-to-license transfer of fish and the stocking of non-public water can take place without any fish health testing requirements. This change will remove this exemption for any fish on the official APHIS list and require fish health testing for any such movement.

(3) Include fish health certification for fish on the list of VHS susceptible species as part of the application requirements for transportation permits. This will allow DNR to check for VHS when reviewing and approving any importation, transportation, and stocking permits.

Background: Currently, DNR issues around 300 transportation permits for the movement of fish in and around the state. Due to the potential impacts of VHS, the ability to check the fish for this disease is needed. This will allow DNR to require testing of VHS susceptible fish species, which will reduce the risk of introducing certifiable fish diseases in the state.

(4) Require that fish imported or stocked in Minnesota be certified as VHS free, except into areas where the disease has been identified. This will allow DNR to check for VHS or other certifiable diseases when a person applies to bring live fish into the state or to stock fish.

Background: Currently, there are no requirements for VHS testing except for trout, salmon, and channel catfish. This change is necessary due to the number of identified VHS susceptible species that are imported, transported, and stocked within Minnesota. This will reduce the risk of introducing certifiable

diseases into waters of the state that are now considered disease free.

(5) Aquaculture facilities. Require that fish imported or stocked in Minnesota be certified as disease free for VHS except into areas where the disease has been identified. This will allow DNR to require VHS susceptible species to be disease free prior to importation to an aquaculture facility. This provides options for approval if the fish in question do not have a disease-free history.

Background: Aquaculture facilities import fish for rearing and stocking purposes. An important part of fish production includes fish health testing and monitoring and managing against any certifiable diseases.

(6) Include VHS susceptible fish species under requirements for time needed for fish to be certified as disease-free to meet certain fish importation and intrastate transportation requirements. This change identifies the requirement for the time frame needed to establish a disease-free history for fish that are susceptible to VHS.

Background: The holding, transport, and movement of live fish can increase the stress on fish and may initiate outbreaks of fish diseases. Many of the certifiable fish diseases can be passed on from adults to progeny through reproduction. This is called vertical transmission. The progeny can be carriers of the diseases but not exhibit symptoms of the disease until the population becomes stressed. The time frame established to identify a disease free population is necessary to ensure that any fish in the lot are not carriers of the disease.

(7) Allow consideration of transportation permit approval for the import, transport, and stocking of fish with bacterial kidney disease or viral hemorrhagic septicemia into waters where the disease has been identified. This would allow the agency to consider the importation, transportation, and stocking of VHS infected fish into areas of the state where this disease is documented as being present.

Background: This change would allow consideration of importation; transportation and stocking of VHS infected fish in areas where the disease has become established.

(8) Allow certain inspection fees to be set through publication in the State Register to recover costs. This would allow DNR to recover costs for required inspections of new waters and types of facilities and for testing fish health.

Background: DNR is required to inspect new waters and buildings that may be added to aquaculture licenses. These activities may require the setting and removing of nets, checking for inlets and outlets, and categorizing buildings as to the type of facility: standard, containment, or quarantine. DNR also conducts disease inspection and testing. Currently, fees are set in statute, but changing inspection requirements and costs have not kept pace with fees.

(9) Include VHS susceptible fish species under species that need to be certified as disease-free before being sold for stocking or for transfer to another aquaculture facility. This change would require that any of species on the official APHIS list would be required to certified as disease free to be moved to from one aquaculture facility to another, unless VHS has been documented.

Background: Currently the sale and transfer of fish only requires the testing of trout, salmon, and channel catfish.

(10) Restrict the taking of minnows on the list of VHS susceptible species, except on waters that have been tested for VHS. Also, restrict the import of minnows for feeding hatchery fish without disease certification. This would allow DNR to restrict the taking of minnows on the VHS susceptible list unless the waters have been tested for VHS and would restrict import of minnows without fish health testing for the feeding of hatchery fish.

Background: An aquatic farm may take minnows from public waters for aquaculture purposes. This would require that facilities have any species of minnows on the VHS susceptible list tested prior to bringing them into to their hatchery facility. Aquatic farmers also can import minnows to feed their hatchery fish. A transportation permit would require testing of listed minnows and a finding that they be VHS free prior to import to the aquatic farm or private hatchery facility.

(11) Restrict the use of commercial nets, traps, and equipment. This change will require that any

commercial gear used in waters that contain fish with certifiable fish diseases be restricted to use in waters with the same certifiable fish disease. This change would allow DNR to require that commercial netters, turtle sellers, and commercial crayfish permit holders be limited to only using equipment in water where the same certifiable fish disease is present.

Background: Current language requires that commercial netters, turtle sellers, and commercial crayfish permit holders limit the use of equipment in designated infested waters. This restriction would be expanded to include waters that contain certifiable fish diseases. This is necessary to prevent the movement of these fish diseases in waters of the state.

(12) Restrict DNR disposal and sale and purchase to those fish that are certified disease free and limit the stocking of diseased fish into waters to only those that already contain the same fish disease. This requires DNR to dispose of or exchange only fish that are certified as disease free.

Background: DNR can sell, exchange, or transfer fish to other governmental agencies, aquatic farms or private hatcheries, and educational institutions. The fish provided for these sales, transfers, or exchanges should be certified as disease free to prevent the spread of any certifiable fish diseases.

(13) Repeal the transport of fish by persons 16 years old or younger for use in home aquariums. Adults cannot currently transport live fish, but there is an exception for youth. This change would remove the exemption allowing movement of live fish by children 16 and under for home aquarium purposes.

Background: Currently, children 16 and under, can angle for certain fish species and transport them live for use in a home aquarium. In many cases, the fish are then released back into the lakes when the fish get too large for the home aquarium or the aquarium is no longer used. This change will remove the only unregulated movement of live game fish that is allowed under existing law. It is intended to slow or prevent the movement of certifiable diseases such as VHS.

(14) Restrict the import or possession of live, frozen, or processed bait from known waters with viral hemorrhagic septicemia. This broadens the definition of bait to include insects, amphibians,

and various invertebrates used as bait. This would allow DNR to restrict the taking and processing of bait from waters that contain VHS and would restrict the import of processed or frozen baits from VHS waters outside the state.

Background: Currently, anglers collect minnows, amphibians, and purchase fish for freezing and processing for future use as bait. Some of the baits may be taken from waters that contain VHS and freezing does not kill VHS.

(15) Provide authority for rules on the buying and selling of fish that would prevent or slow the spread of certifiable diseases, as defined in chapter 17, and invasive species. This would allow DNR to promulgate administrative rules on the buying and selling of fish to prevent the spread of certifiable fish diseases and invasive species.

Background: Currently, fish can be bought and sold without any restrictions. With the potential of VHS being introduced into the state, DNR needs to implement measures to slow or stop the spread of certifiable fish diseases.

(16) Provide that the taking of minnows may be restricted once a waterbody is listed as a designated infested water by Commissioner's order. This is a technical change to link one statute to another.

Background: DNR restricts the personal harvest of minnows in designated infested waters and the commercial harvest of minnows requires a permit in designated infested waters. This change would link the two statutes.

(17) Restrict transporting minnows through the state so that VHS susceptible minnow species may be required to have a disease-free certification. The change would allow DNR to require that certain minnows transported through the state be required to be certified disease free as part of the permit condition.

Background: A 12-hour permit is required for transporting minnows through the state. There are VHS susceptible minnow species that are transported through the state.

(18) Allow the commissioner to require disease certification for minnows that are being imported for the purpose of processing or to feed hatchery fish. This would allow DNR to restrict the import of minnows without fish health testing for the feeding of hatchery fish.

Background: This would require that facilities have any VHS susceptible species of minnows tested prior to bringing them into to their hatchery facility.

(19) Allow the commissioner to require disease certification for minnows that are being imported for the purpose of later export. The change would allow DNR to require fish health testing for VHS susceptible minnow species imported on special permits to allow import for later export.

Background: DNR issues several permits to allow import of minnows for later export. This would allow DNR to require additional VHS testing for VHS susceptible minnows.

(20) Allow the commissioner to restrict the movement of live fish harvested by commercial netters from waters that contain certifiable diseases. This change would allow DNR to restrict the movement of live fish taken under a commercial fishing licensee from waters that contain invasive species or any certifiable fish disease.

Background: Commercially harvested fish are transported live in large trucks to markets in outside of Minnesota where in turn they are resold live for food.

(21) Restrict the import of minnows for home aquarium use. The change will restrict the importation of live minnows to home aquariums.

Background: Currently, a person can purchase or collect minnows in any nearby state and transport to their home aquariums for display. This change will slow or minimize the introduction of any fish diseases or invasive species that might be transported with minnows and released in waters of the state.

(22) Enactment date Sections 1- 21 are effective the day following enactment.

Priority-setting

The priority for implementing this policy change is based on the Division of Fish and Wild “Summary of Actions Recommended to Control the Spread of VHS in Minnesota.” These recommendations include the necessary actions to conduct surveillance for VHS in lakes and streams statewide.

Key measures and outcomes

- ◆ Prevent or slow the spread of VHS and other certifiable fish diseases in the state by restricting the movement of fish without fish health certification.
- ◆ Increase the public awareness of VHS and reduce the risk of introducing the disease into new waters by requiring that all fish imported or stocked by fish health tested and disease free.
- ◆ Provide measures to deal with lakes and rivers that have become infected with VHS.

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