

Summary of the 2023 Paddlefish Archery and Snag Seasons

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The following is a summary of the 2023 paddlefish archery and snag season statistics for angler information and to be used to guide anglers in a planning effort to pursue paddlefish. Kirk Steffensen compiled the angler statistics through the use of information obtained from the survey cards successful paddlefish applicants receive with their permits. Anglers are asked to fill out and return the cards even if they ended up not participating in the seasons. Because an angler creel is not conducted during the archery or snag seasons, the only way to collect data is with returned angler cards. Thank you for your participation in returning cards and please continue to fill out the angler cards in the future if you are successful in drawing a permit.

Permit Draw and Demand:

Archery and snagging permits are limited and demand exceeds supply. Therefore, a preference point system is in place for paddlefish permits. The archery application period is March 1-14, and the snagging application period is July 1-14. In addition, anglers have the opportunity to purchase a preference point while not entering the draw process, this was implemented two years ago at the request of many anglers. This is an important option if an angler wants to acquire a preference point to improve future drawing odds but does not wish to have a chance of drawing a permit for the upcoming season.

The total number of resident applicants for **archery** paddlefish in 2024 was 1,092 (regardless of preference points). A total of 262 permits were awarded. There was a total of 165 non-residents that applied for 13 permits, State Statute requires 5% of the permits to be allocated for non-residents. In addition, 32 residents and 5 non-residents purchased preference points only. Further analysis indicates that all resident archery applications with 2 or more preference points were successful in the drawing. Those applicants with 1 preference point had a 21.3% chance of drawing and those who did not have a preference point had no chance to draw. It took at least 1 preference point to even have a chance to draw a permit.

For nonresidents in 2024, it took at least 3 preference points to have a chance to draw a permit and all with 4 or more preference points were successful in drawing a permit. There was a 71.4% chance for a nonresident to draw an archery paddlefish permit with 3 preference points while those with less than 3 points had no chance to draw.

Since the 2024 **snagging** application period is in July, we looked at the snag permit drawing statistics from 2023. There were 3,362 resident snagging applications for 1,512 permits awarded. A total of 276 non-resident applications were received for 79 awarded permits. Drawing odds for snagging permits are higher than archery applicants because more snagging permits are available.

In 2023, all resident snag permit applicants with a preference point drew a permit while 14% of those with 0 preference points drew a permit. Therefore, if you have no intention of participating in the upcoming snagging season, don't apply for a permit because you may draw! Rather, apply to just buy a preference point to increase your chance of drawing a permit for a future year when you plan to participate in the snag season.

2023 Archery Paddlefish Season Results

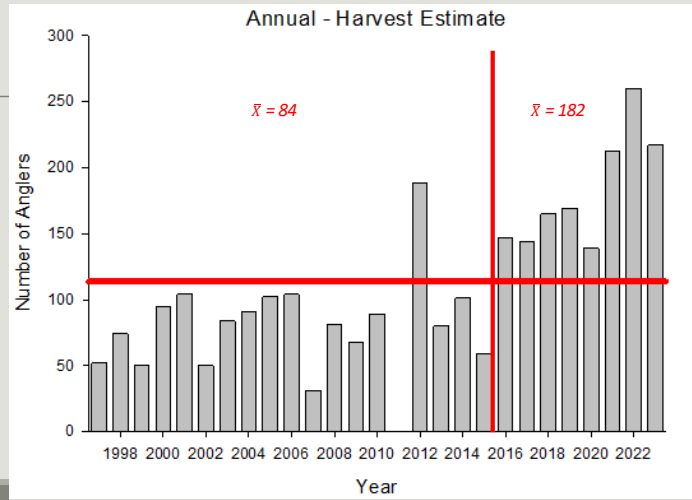
Note:

New for 2024, the closed area for archery and snagging seasons are now the same. The Stilling Basin below the Gavins Point Dam spillway gates is now open for all archery fishing during the month of June including archery paddlefish. However, the north wall is closed to ALL archery fishing during the month of June while the archery paddlefish season is underway.



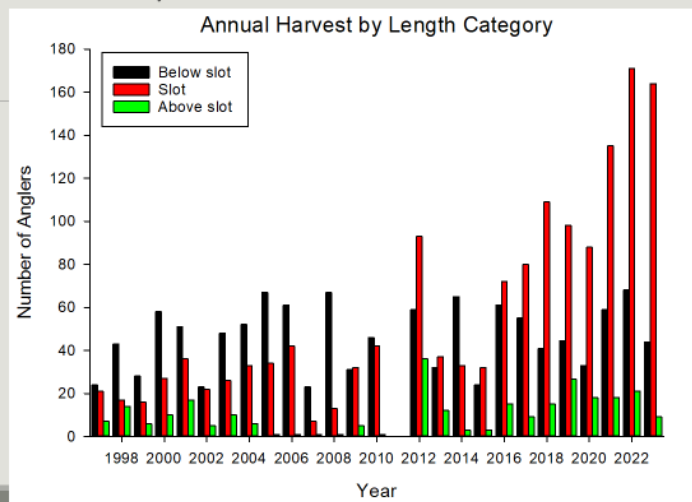
About 53% of the archery permit holders in 2023 returned the reporting cards received with their permits. Since we rely on these reporting cards to gather effort and harvest data, we would like to see a higher number of cards returned. Please complete and return the cards if you draw a permit. About 5-10% of the permit holders do not participate in the season for a variety of reasons. In 2023, of those who did participate, about 81% were successful in harvesting a paddlefish.

Paddlefish Archery Season:



As can be seen in the above graph, success has increased since the archery season was moved from July to June in 2016. Another factor leading to increased success for archers is the clearer water in the Missouri River and Lewis and Clark Lake since zebra mussels became established in 2014.

Paddlefish Archery Season:



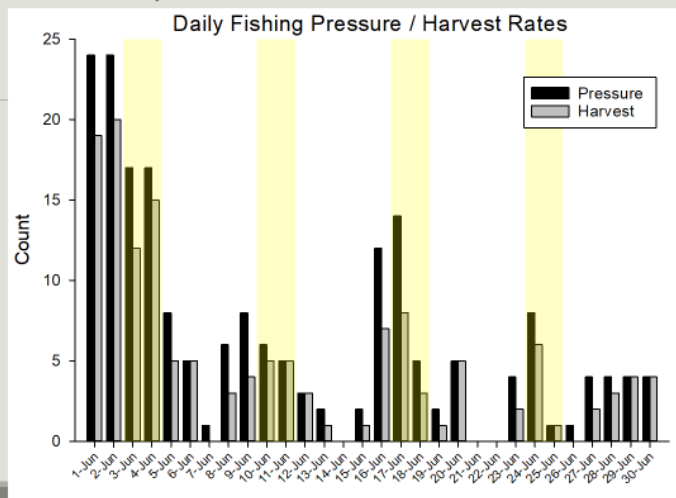
The percentage of “slot” sized fish taken by archers has also been on the increase in recent years. The “slot” fish are those in the 35-to-45-inch eye to fork length that are protected during the snagging season and must be released. It is felt that an increase in the number of slot fish present in the population leads to the increase in slot fish harvested by opportunistic archers. Obviously catch and release is not an option during the archery season.

Paddlefish Archery Season:



Over half of the participating archery paddlefishers exclusively utilize the Gavins Point Dam tailwaters with very few anglers fishing downstream of the dam.. The trend in recent years has been toward more pressure in the tailwaters where success is generally high, and paddlefish are more predictable.

Paddlefish Archery Season:

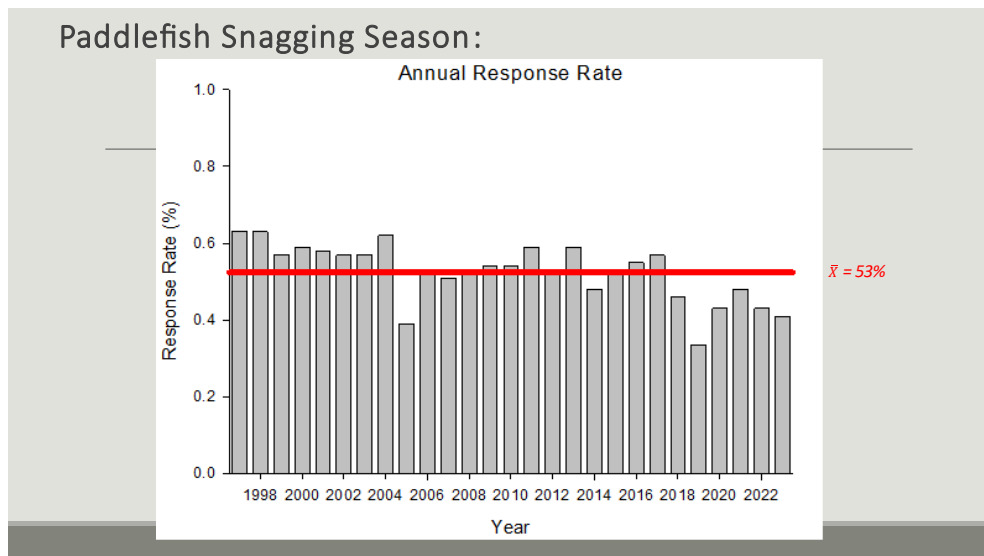


Archer participation is highest early in the season and diminishes later in the month of June with increased pressure during the weekends (yellow bars). However, the success rate remains high throughout the month, so it is not imperative to participate in the first few days of the season. Success is more weather-dependent than time of the month.

2023 Snag Paddlefish Season Results

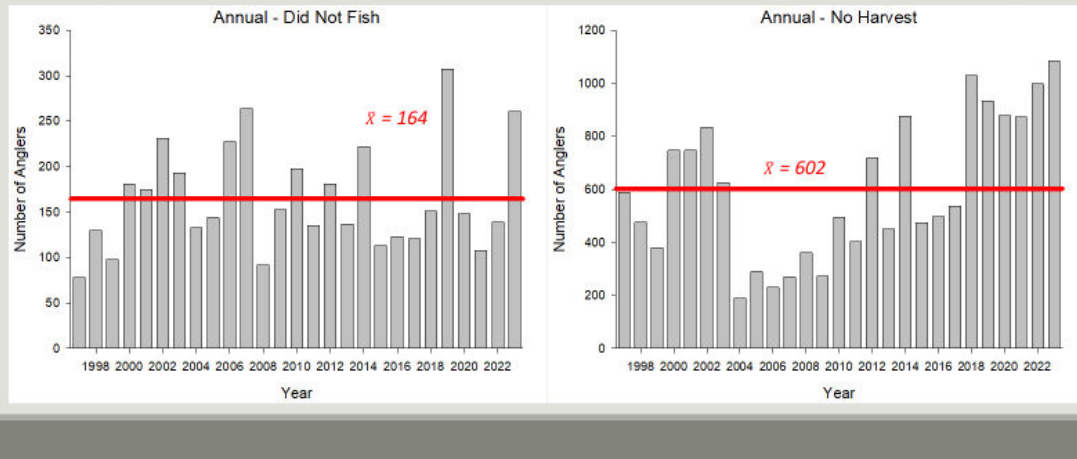
Snagging success was low during the 2023 October season. The spillway gates were open which limited access to the stilling basin for boat anglers. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers regulations restrict boats in the spillway when gates are open, so boats are crowded below that line. The exact reasons for poor snagging success and paddlefish catch area not clearly known, speculation is that paddlefish were concentrated in the area closed to boats and therefore were not available to anglers. Flows were low coming through the gates which may have allowed fish to concentrate in eddy currents near the discharge site. Snagging success and paddlefish harvest did increase in the last few days of October when the spillway gates were closed.

The following charts are the long-term trends from the response cards that snag anglers are provided with a permit and asked to fill out and return. The following results are for Nebraska licensed snag anglers only.



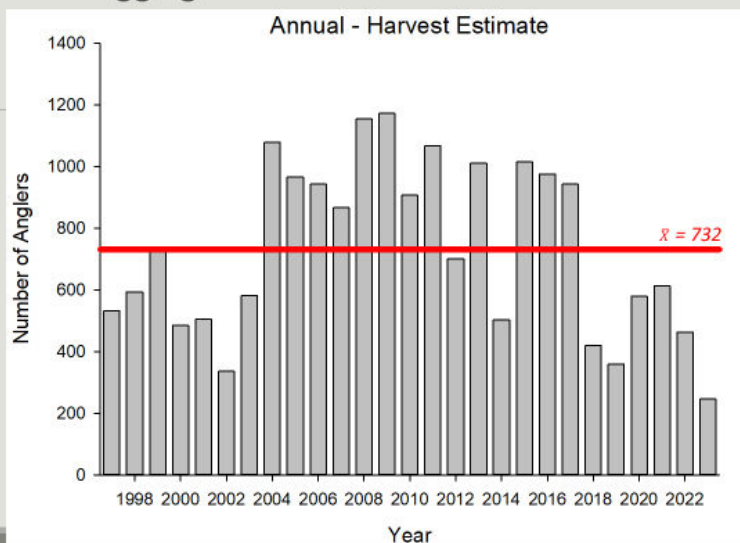
As you can see from the above graph, card return rates have been declining in recent years. Please continue to return the reporting cards (whether you fished or not) as that data is critical to the management of the snag fishery.

Paddlefish Snagging Season:



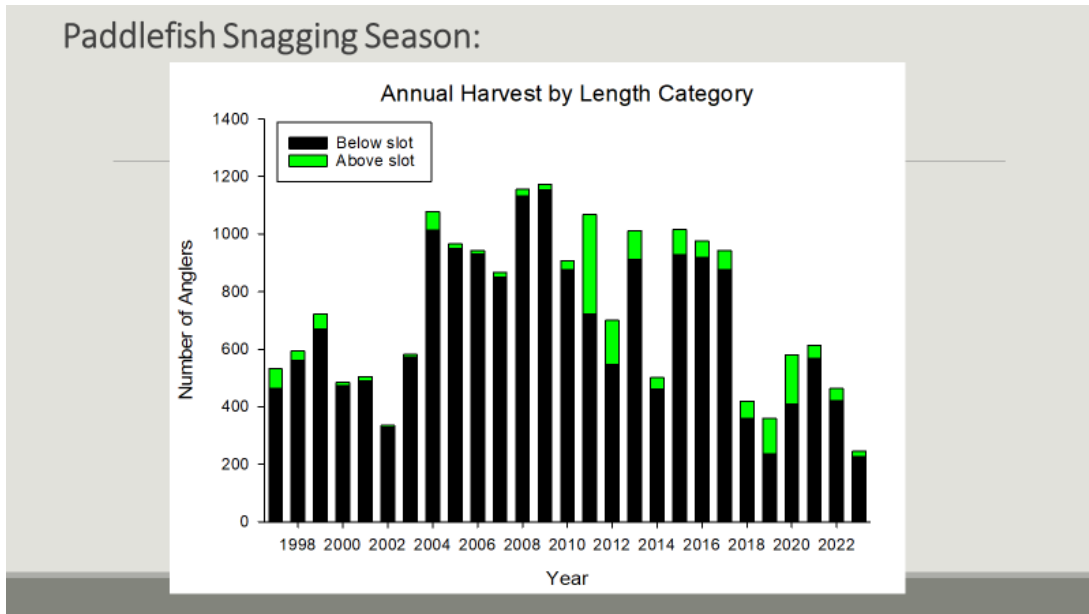
Higher than average numbers of snag anglers that had a permit did not pursue a paddlefish in 2023. A majority of snag anglers once again did not harvest a paddlefish in 2023. There has been an increasing trend of anglers not harvesting a fish and the reason for that can be varied. Obviously snag success can vary greatly from year to year depending on water releases from Gavins Point Dam among other things. Also, some anglers prefer to catch and release paddlefish but do not wish to harvest one or were perhaps unlucky to catch a fish under or over the protected slot. All fish from 35 to 45 inches front of eye to fork in the tail must be released.

Paddlefish Snagging Season:

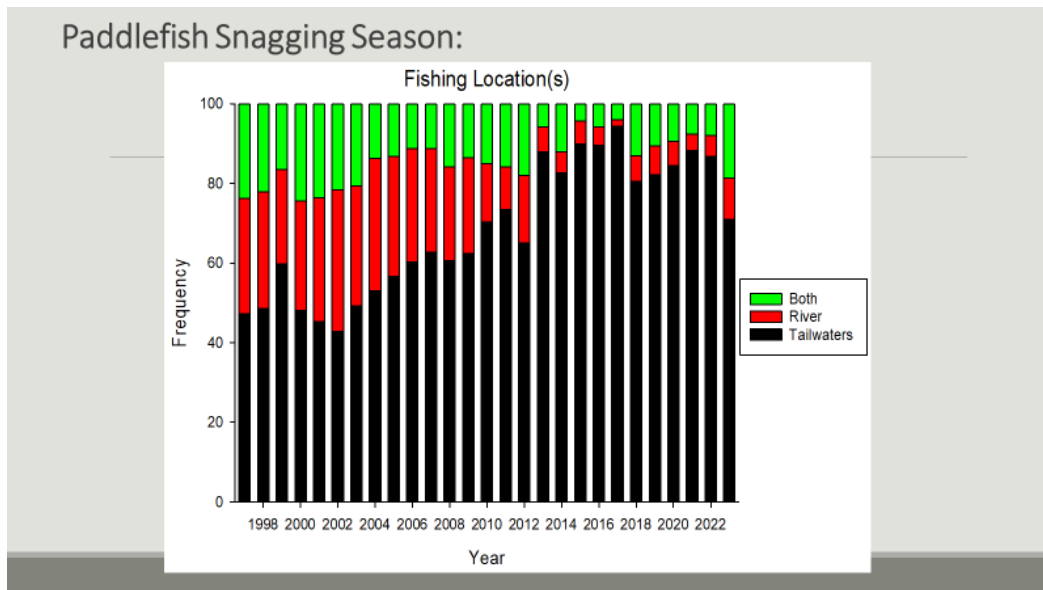


As depicted in the above chart, paddlefish harvest in 2023 was well below average and may have been the lowest since 1997. Reasons for this were discussed above and speculation is the spillway gates flow

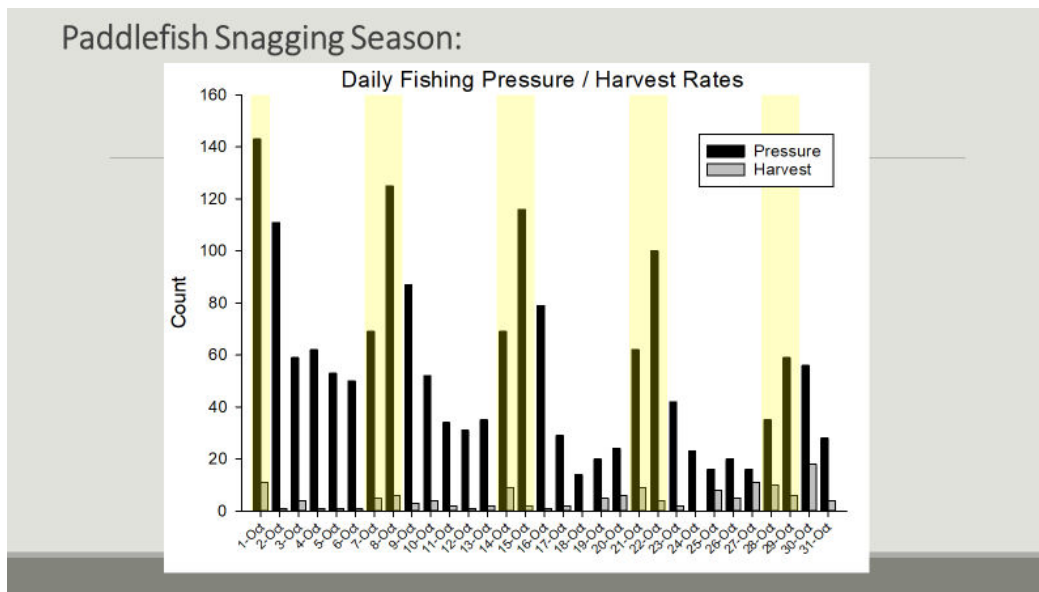
releases and configuration may have been the major factor in poor paddlefish overall success and harvest. About 200 fish were harvested by Nebraska licensed snag anglers.



The majority of paddlefish harvested by snag anglers are under the protected slot. Years where some larger fish over the slot are harvested usually corresponds to a high water event or year. Obviously the most abundant fish available for harvest will be those under 35 inches.



There has been an increasing trend for snag anglers to spend more effort in the Gavins Point Tailwaters. This trend decreased some in 2023 likely due to the restricted boat access in the tailwaters and poor success as anglers tried to locate paddlefish in other areas.



Fishing pressure is fairly consistent over the month of October with the usual high effort during the opening week of the season and weekends (yellow bars). Note the uptick in reported harvest of paddlefish the last week of the season when spillway gates were closed. Anecdotal information indicated those fortunate enough to fish late in the month had a good chance to hook a paddlefish when the gates closed.

Please understand that the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission does not regulate flow and discharge from Gavins Point Dam. The river flows are controlled by the US Army Corps of Engineers outlined in the Missouri River Master Manual and from late-March to late-November are for navigation from Sioux City to the confluence near St. Louis. Gavins Point Dam discharge during the June archery season and October snagging season are dependent on tributary inputs throughout the lower Missouri River. Basically, during dry seasons, more water is released through the mainstem dams to meet navigation targets.

Finally, as emphasized above, if you successfully draw a permit, please return your response card.

We hope you find this summary useful. For more information contact:

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