

To whom it may concern,

My name is Elena Hansen and I had the unique opportunity to be involved with the 2023 Rough Fish Work Group as a representative for anglers & as a member of the DNR Catfish Work Group. I am writing from the perspective of someone who is non-native Minnesota, relatively new to the world of fishing, and who does not work in environmental sciences – I am writing as a concerned citizen who supports protecting our native fish for generations to come. This state has an amazing number of natural resources available to its residents – and it would be devastating to lose our native species due to lack of protection.

A little about me, my introduction to native fish was all by happenstance. I fell in love with everything that Minnesota had to offer, especially the fishing when I moved here in 2020. Although I did spend time chasing the typical game fish, my true love and calling ended up being sturgeon. Last year I spent over 1600 hours on the water including over 20 nights sleeping in my boat; this year I hope to hit 1800 hours. Sturgeon share the same habitat as many of the native fish in question for the HF4420/SF4142/SF 4898 bills. Two years ago I was in awe when I caught my first smallmouth buffalo as a bycatch. It was amazing to see these fish and feel their strength at the end of a rod, and fascinating that some of these fish can live nearly as long as my beloved whiskered friends, over 100+ years. That being said, I was then quickly informed about the plight these fish are facing; with no limits or regulation and with an increase in interest to kill these fish by parties that see them as a nuisance, we are in danger of losing an essential part of our ecosystem. Long lived fish can be difficult to replace when they are hunted without regulation, considering some of these fish can live nearly as long as lake sturgeon, which are still recovering decades later from years of overharvest & waste, I find it abysmal that these fish have receive little to no protection or even research. To add, unlike sturgeon, I was informed that buffalo and suckers are difficult to spawn in hatcheries – once they are gone, there is a good chance that they will never come back.

As an angler, the loss or significant decline of any species should be avoided – already some lakes are showing decreases & we have barely scratched the surface. One of the repeated statements in the DNR Rough Fish Work group was that there is very little research done on the population dynamics of these fish – but even some of the base numbers were showing a decline or statistically significant decline in these fish populations. I strongly believe we should be taking a conservative approach to this issue.

These fish historically have never received any protection – in fact many Minnesotans are unable to tell a common carp (naturalized but invasive) from the native bigmouth and smallmouth buffalo. At one of my favorite fishing spots last summer, I had the opportunity to see this lack of knowledge in action – a child ~8 years in age was shooting fish off of a bridge. Although I'd never want to take away a sport from somebody, it was extremely difficult to watch them drag helpless fish over the bridge or onto the bank into the bushes behind. Although they were shooting common carp – many of the fish they were bringing up and “disposing” of were our native species too. It got to the point that I was holding one of the trophy sized fish in my hands for a photo, and he pointed his bow at me and asked if he could shoot the fish after I was done – this was a buffalo that potentially had age spots (indicating she may have been over 50+ years old) and probably was a strong member of the breeding population in that area. I told him no, and he proceeded to shoot at the fish while I was trying to let her swim off. Afterwards (and after calming down), I approached him to let him know that these fish are native and that in my opinion, ethical bowfishing really should be for the invasive or naturalized species – I explained that they are not in fact “Buffalo Carp” but are a completely different species all together & are native. It was really enlightening to hear him say “oh I thought they were all bad,” so my hope is that this bill will help change this age old perspective & lack of respect for native fish. I returned to that same spot a month later and nearly was unable to fish – there were maggots & dead fish carcasses left across the rocks and in the grass, it was heart breaking.

I am writing to express my strong support for bills HF4420/SF4142/SF 4898. I believe these fish deserve protection especially through the creation of limits and allowing for a restitution value to be given. Although I know the opinion of someone who has only been involved for a few years may not matter much in the eyes of the law, I hope that the fact that someone like me, with little to no background in fisheries, can support these fish & their needed protection will help convince you and your committee members to support them too.

Thank you for your time,

Elena Hansen