

History of the Moosehead Lake Togue Derby with Ricky Craven

The first togue derby was held in January of 2008. The creation of a winter derby focused exclusively on togue (lake trout) was a strategy put forth by the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (IFW) to help increase winter angler use and harvest on a burgeoning population. The first derby was a cooperative effort between the Moosehead Region Chamber of Commerce, the Natural Resource Education Center at Moosehead (NREC), and the IFW. The first derby was a huge success with nearly 500 tickets sold. The weather was perfect and total use for the weekend was over 1,000 angler days. The cash prize for the largest togue is \$1,500 and second place has varied from \$750-\$500 and \$375-\$250 for third place. In addition to the cash prizes for the largest fish, prizes were also awarded from a "fish pool". As mentioned, the goal of the derby was to control/reduce the togue population. Therefore, a raffle ticket was given for each smaller fish brought into the weigh station. The top prize for the fish pool includes an ice fishing package donated by Indian Hill Trading Post and consists of an ice auger, Jet sled and cover, fishing traps, and other miscellaneous ice fishing gear. In the first year, the second door prize was a deck donated by Moosehead Log Homes, and another prize was a 2-night stay at a local B&B. Many other smaller prizes are given each year ranging from \$250 cash, various gift certificates, 2-way radios, t-shirts and hats, etc.



Ticket sales have declined since the first year. This is due to several reasons. First, in 2008 the weather was ideal. It was above freezing with little wind and plenty of sun. Several Moosehead derbies have occurred where the weather was absolutely brutal, including 20+ mph winds and subzero temperatures. Second, while the cash prizes and ice fishing package are excellent, many other derbies have larger prize packages which attract more people, including people that may not even be interested in angling but just winning a prize. Also, we know that there are many anglers "party" fishing on one ticket. One angler will buy the \$25 entry ticket and if someone in the party catches a big fish then the entrant could register the fish. While this violates the rules, it is difficult to police. We know this occurs because, as an example, in 2014 we sold approximately 250 tickets, yet an angler count on the lake estimated nearly 700 anglers on the Saturday of the 3-day derby.

We would like to attract more people to the derby, provide a winter festival weekend for the Moosehead Lake Region, encourage the anglers



that are already coming to buy their own entry ticket, and attract more people who may not want to fish but would be interested in winning a terrific prize. This will help local businesses by bringing more people to this remote area in the winter and assist NREC in its fundraising goals.

To accomplish this, NREC plans several modifications to the derby:

1. Instead of awarding prizes from a fish pool, draw all door prizes from the entry tickets. The IFW goals for togue removal have been reached so this will not impact the fishery.
2. Include some higher value prizes like those awarded in other large derbies, such as an ATV or snowmobile, trip to somewhere warm in the winter, and perhaps a firearm. These types of prizes will attract more people to the derby.
3. Solicit sponsorship from 5-6 large businesses to donate cash or in-kind values greater than \$2,000. Offer exclusive advertising to this group.
4. Solicit cash donations and other smaller prizes from the local businesses.
5. Create a Kid's derby with separate prizes and tickets (\$5) to maintain the family attraction.
6. Have a banquet on the Saturday night of the derby and award the door prizes at the banquet. Partner with another local non-profit (American Legion/Masons) to use their facilities and split the proceeds. (Note: we are already in the planning stages of a wild game dinner/award banquet with the American Legion in downtown Greenville for the 2015 derby).



If NREC can raise \$10,000 in prize money/in-kind, we feel we can increase tickets sales to 700 in 3-5 years. At that point the derby will be self-sustaining.