

Group pushing for fishing as a high school sport

Students could have a new opportunity to compete for their schools if a group of anglers and educators can convince the Missouri State High School Activities Association to approve

us their e-mail addresses to get updates on our proposal," Neporadny said. "We never had any principal say that it wouldn't work at their school once we explained the program. One of them said he wanted to be the coach of the fishing team."

With enough support from principals, fishing could be brought to a vote by the MSHSAA next spring. If approved by a simple majority, the state association would sanction sectional qualifying tournaments and a state championship.

"During these tough economic times, this is a low-cost activity high schools can start to get more student participation and get them involved in an outdoor pastime they can enjoy the rest of their lives," Neporadny said. "Not everyone can throw a football with a tight spiral or smash a fast ball over the fence, but nearly every student can cast or at least hold a rod and reel to catch a fish. Fishing provides an equal opportunity for all kids to compete for their school in a state championship."

Large and small schools could all compete on an even basis, and because the sport is co-ed, it would offer opportunities for boys and girls.

"An all-girls Catholic school in Chicago had 19 girls sign up for the program and their four-member team made the state championship," Neporadny said. "In Missouri, students will be able to compete on some of the best lakes and

rivers in the country and receive help from top-notch anglers and bass clubs willing to provide boats, tackle and knowledge about fishing to help the schools start their own teams."

Teams could compete in bank-bound tournaments during the regular season and hold events for catching species other than black bass including catfish, crappie or all-fish contests.

"The state sectionals and championship will be set up as bass tournaments, but during the year the kids can also learn about any kind of fishing," Neporadny said. "They could have casting contests and fishing quizzes to determine their fishing skills, but obviously the schools that do have the kids go fishing will have an advantage going into sectionals."

In the state sectionals and finals, anglers would compete as four-person teams with two boats per school. The total weight of all fish caught by all four team members counts for that school in the team competition. The angler with the heaviest overall catch would be crowned as the individual state champion.

Illinois found that most schools had staff members who were anxious to help a local team, Neporadny said. The first-year program attracted 199 schools and 2,496 students, including 269 girls. The program offers teaching opportunities in biology, meteorology and math.

Students would not operate the boats,

which are driven by a boat captain who would follow the directions of the students to the desired fishing location. A strict speed limit of 25 mph would be enforced. Once at the location, the students could take over control of the boat via a trolling motor.

"Boat captains can be any angler who volunteers to serve," Neporadny said. "Each school board could hire the boat captains to the school staff as unpaid volunteers. In Illinois, the boat captains had to be fingerprinted and had a background check done."

Helping Neporadny lead the charge are a former school superintendent, a teacher, a high school principal, and two bass fishing association leaders, he said.

For more information about the program check out Neporadny's Web site, www.jnoutdoors.com, or send him an e-mail at john@jnoutdoors.com.

The site includes printable forms for students to circulate in their schools to support the proposal and a list of bass clubs and businesses that supports the activity.

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Outdoor Outlook

John J. Winkelman

fishing as a competitive sport.

Illinois held the first-ever high school fishing championship in 2009.

Angler and outdoor writer John Neporadny Jr. of Lake Ozark had high hopes to make Missouri the second state to offer the activity as a sanctioned sport, but Alabama appears poised to beat the Show-Me State to the punch, he said.

Jefferson County students who might be interested in helping the cause can ask their high school principal to pick up information next week, Oct. 4-5, at the Missouri Association of Secondary School Principals meeting in Columbia. Neporadny and his group will have a display at the meeting and answer questions about the proposal.

"We attended a principals' meeting in the spring at Lake of the Ozarks and talked to about 70 principals who gave

Hayes: Scroggins making positive impression with Jefferson High gridders

Continued from Page 35

its second game and gave Crystal City all it could handle last week. I'd say the

and were lucky to escape with a win.

2. It was obvious in watching about 20 seconds that Festus, only 4-7 starting the week, still is so much better this year

to be Jefferson's top starters next spring.

2. **Cody Stites**, Matt's older brother who was part of the Festus Legion coaching staff the past summer and who

intriguing recruits like two players from Latvia and two coming from four-year programs, the season is sure to be successful. If anyone ever put them