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Moosehead Lake Togue Derby attracting new anglers and families

by Mike Lange
GREENVILLE – The annual Moosehead Lake Togue Fishing Derby has been drawing bigger crowds in recent years; but like every other winter sport, the size of the turnout depends on the weather.

This year's event takes place Jan. 27-29 and includes a Wild and Tame Dinner at the Columbia-Doric Masonic Lodge on Saturday, Jan. 28.

Last year's marginal ice conditions on Moosehead Lake prompted derby organizers to add a second weekend of competition for the first time.

While the major events took place in mid-February, the original dates were kept on

the calendar because many participants book lodging up to a year in advance.

"In 2015, we estimated that there were 3,260 angler-days of fishing on Moosehead Lake during the derby weekend," said Tim Obrey, president of the Natural Resource Education Center. "This was the first year that we offered the big door prizes and we sold around 700 tickets. The weather was just okay. These anglers are fishing multiple days and bringing others with them to the lake."

Obrey said that last year, "We had poor ice all winter and it was marginal weather on both weekends we held the derby," he said. "As a result, use

dropped a little to 2,640 angler-days during the 2016 derby weekend."

Obrey pointed out that the figure "would not account for other members of the party who came to the area and did not fish. I'm sure there are a lot of snowmobilers or people just hanging out at camp."

But those who do show up seem to make the best of it and many businesses benefit from the extra traffic.

Cheri Goodspeed and her brother, Randy Coulton, operate Kamp Kamp and the Indian Store in downtown Greenville. "There is an uptick in walk-in business for people that bring families," Goodspeed said. "However, the fishermen are never in town that we can see, other than to buy bait. They are here at the crack of dawn and leave at 'oh-dark-thirty,' it seems."

But Goodspeed said that with the introduction of the bigger raffle, it could be a lot busier in town this year. "Lots of people like me have participated in that way," she added.

More than 70 prizes were offered last year including vacations to Las Vegas, Orlando, or Pennsylvania Dutch country; firearms, several weekend getaways, gift certificates, and cash.

While you don't have to fish in order to be eligible for the prize drawings, those who do will be competing for bragging rights and a lot of cash. The person who hauls in the biggest togue gets \$1,500; the second-biggest fish earns \$500; and third largest, \$250.

"Basically, we get people from every county in Maine," Obrey said. "This doesn't include anglers from out of state. We always have some participation from New Hampshire, Vermont and Massachusetts. We also had some from Connecticut, Florida, Louisiana, Texas, New Jersey, Virginia and Quebec last year. Most of these people actually came to the area and fished."

Obrey said that the goal of NREC is to reach 1,000 ticket sales in the next few years. "We are searching for the right mix of prizes and marketing, he said. "Of course, the weather plays a huge role in ticket sales and there is nothing we can do about that."

Tickets for the derby are on sale right now at www.NRECmoosehead.org or at Indian Hill Trading Post, Lucky Bait and The Stress-Free Moose in Greenville, Moosehead Bait and Tackle in Rockwood, Mountain's Market in Dover-Foxcroft, and Van Raymond Outfitters in Brewer.

Updates on the derby will be posted on the NREC Moosehead Facebook page.

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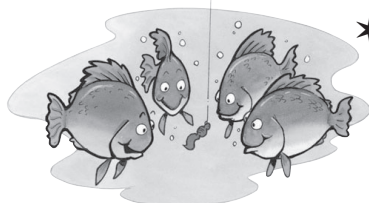
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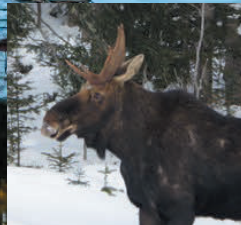


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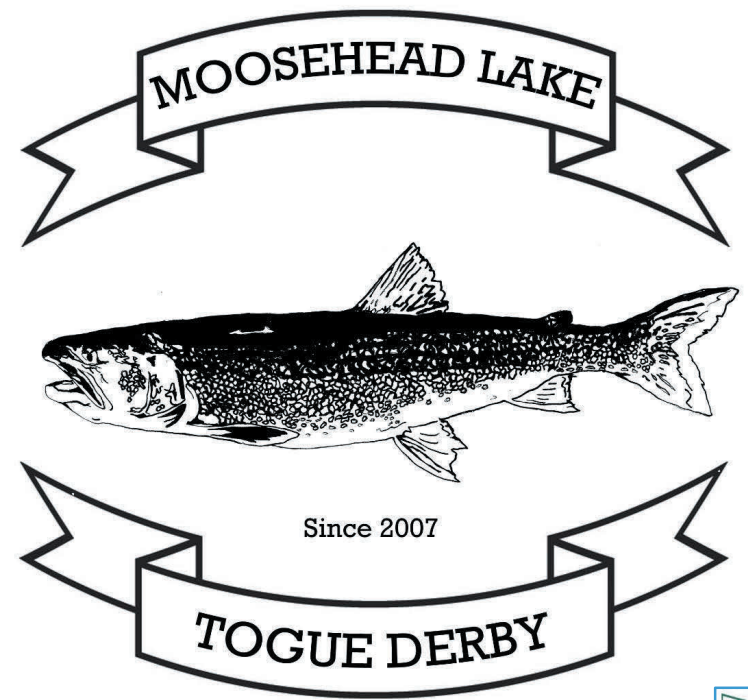
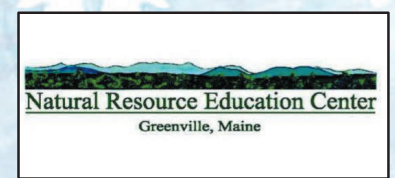
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