

Charter Boat Catch and Effort from the Michigan waters of the Great Lakes

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Background

Charter fishing data are used by Fisheries Division to help evaluate fish population trends throughout Michigan's Great Lakes waters. Reporting of sport catch and fishing effort by the charter fishing industry is required under Public Act 451 (Part 445) of 1994 and is commonly known as the Charter Fishing Reporting Program. The charter fishing industry provides Michigan with significant economic benefits to coastal communities including gross sales of at least \$14.9 million and 343,845 labor hours in 2009 (O'Keefe and Miller 2011; Michigan Sea Grant).

Michigan's charter boat industry increased from 250 operations in 1979 to nearly 900 in 1989. During the 1990s and through the early 2000s, the number of charter boats used for sport fishing excursions on Michigan's Great Lakes waters declined to approximately 500. During a charter fishing season, new charter boats may enter into the charter business while some others will depart; at present, there are 550-600 charter boats fishing Michigan waters annually (Photo 1).

The Charter Fishing Reporting Program (administered by Charlevoix Fisheries Research Station staff) collects monthly charter fishing activity reports to summarize annual charter fishing effort and charter catch and harvest of Coho Salmon, Chinook Salmon, Rainbow Trout (steelhead), Brown Trout, Lake Trout, Yellow Perch, Walleye, Smallmouth Bass, and Muskellunge. The survey design involves a census of all Michigan charter operators and a charter operator must fill out a monthly report for each boat and each lake fished. The report provides information on the lake fished, port of origin, area where a majority of the fishing occurred, hours fished, total number of anglers, numbers harvested and released of major fish species, and number of sea lamprey seen attached to Chinook Salmon and Lake Trout.



Photo 1. Charter boats at Chinook Pier in Grand Haven.

Data is summarized annually to describe trends in fishing effort and catch of major Great Lakes sportfish. Fisheries Division staff use this data in presentations at Michigan Sea Grant workshops, Michigan Charter Boat Association meetings, fisheries workshops, citizen advisory meetings, and other public and agency meetings. The data are key pieces of information used fisheries analyses by Fisheries Division staff, university collaborators, and multi-agency working groups.

Key study results

- During the 2014 charter fishing year, there were 566 charter fishing boats operated by 508 businesses. There were 16,150 charter excursions during which 64,956 anglers spent 366,612 angler hours fishing on the Michigan waters of lakes Michigan, Huron, Erie, Superior, and the St. Clair system (including the major tributaries) (Figure 1).

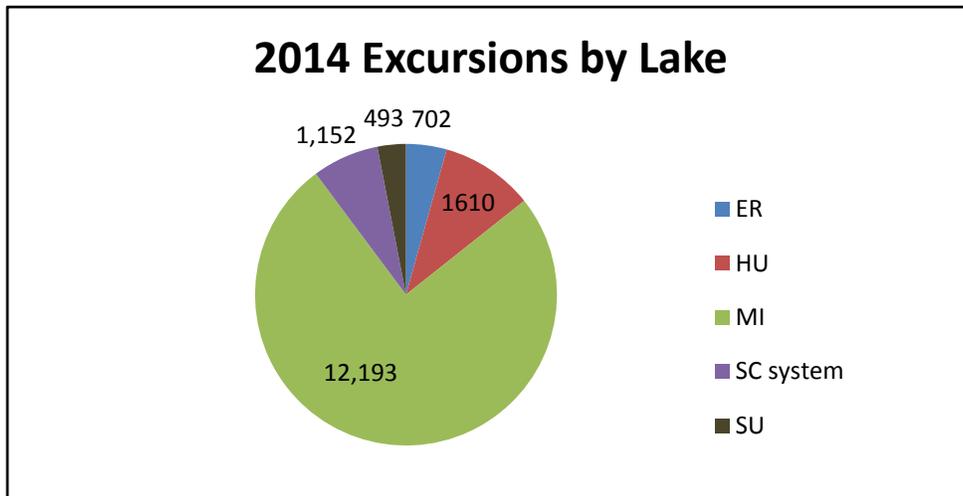


Figure 1. Numbers of charter boat trips by Great Lake.

- In 2014, charter operators reported a total 196,600 fish caught from the Michigan waters of the Great Lakes and select tributaries; 152,254 of those fish were harvested. The most numerous species in the harvest was Chinook Salmon (38,118), followed by Lake Trout (37,687), Walleye (25,642), Yellow Perch (20,746), Rainbow Trout (13,961), Coho Salmon (8,679), and Brown Trout (894). Smallmouth Bass and Muskellunge (“musky”) are popular species caught but not harvested; in addition to 2,412 Smallmouth Bass harvested, 18,473 were released. Charter anglers caught and released 1,333 musky.

Study Details

Complete study information and the annual charter boat harvest report are available at http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-153-10364_52259_47568---,00.html. Additional information is available at http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-153-10364_52259_19056-333302--,00.html.