

Issue: Potential lake trout regulations changes in Lake Michigan

Overview: Fisheries Division is proposing changes to the regulations for the harvest of lake trout by state anglers (recreational anglers and charter boat anglers) in Lake Michigan. The primary objectives of these proposed regulation changes are to ensure that valued recreational angling opportunities are provided for while keeping recreational lake trout harvest levels under the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) as defined under the 2000 Consent Decree. State wide there is also a strong desire to simplify regulations wherever it is feasible and to encourage lake trout restoration.

Public meeting process: Public meetings were held in four locations; Charlevoix, Leland, Traverse City, and Frankfort. All of the public meetings used a similar process to solicit public participation in the discussion as well as verbal or written comment regarding potential lake trout regulations in MM123, MM4, and MM5. The Charlevoix meeting discussed MM3, the Leland and Frankfort meetings discussed MM5, and the Traverse City meeting discussed MM4. At each meeting a PowerPoint presentation was given, where we presented a general overview and history of lake trout regulation and harvest in each of the management unit, discussed lake trout management objectives and complication, discussed the Chinook/lake trout harvest interaction, outlined a timeline for implementing any proposed regulation changes, assessed potential regulation scenarios using a projection model based in the Statistical catch-at-age modelling process, and solicited recommendations for potential regulations. As part of the discussion the groups were asked to define two things; 1.) The level of risk they were willing to take for the potential of overharvest, and 2.) What potential regulation or regulations could the group live with? If the group could reach 100% consensus on a regulation (Charlevoix), no additional comments were gathered. If the group could not reach 100% consensus (Leland, Traverse City, Frankfort) then paper was distributed to the group and written comments were gathered.

Similar discussions were also had with anglers in MM's 6-8. Since angling pressure for lake trout is much less in these areas, and the TAC for state anglers is higher in these areas, it was decided that opportunity in these locations could be opened up. Therefore, the proposed regulations for MM6-8 are a 3 fish bag limit, 15" MSL.

Options for changing recreational size and harvest limits: During the public meetings one regulation was derived by each group to move forward with;

MM123: 3 fish bag limit, 20-25", with one fish over 30"

MM4: 2 fish bag limit, 15-30", with one fish over 34"

MM5: 2 fish bag limit, 15-28", with one fish over 34"

After reaching these regulations with the public, the lake trout regulations working group met on several occasions to determine if these proposals would in fact keep state anglers under the TAC and out of any potential penalty situations. We also looked at considerations and uncertainties to determine what other factors could influence these proposed regulations. Based on all of these factors Fisheries Division is proposing the following regulations;

MM123: 2 fish bag limit, 15-27", with one fish over 34"

MM4: 2 fish bag limit, 15-27", with one fish over 34"

MM5: 2 fish bag limit, 15" MSL

MM6-8: 3 fish bag limit, 15" MSL

Under these regulations one important achievement is that of a uniform 15" MSL for lake trout across all of Lake Michigan. Dropping this MSL down also opens up harvest opportunity, encourages anglers to potentially harvest smaller fish (thus reducing the average weight of harvested lake trout), and gives

Fisheries Division the opportunity to collect information on sizes of lake trout that we have not been able to harvest in the past.

We are also proposing the following change when it comes to publishing lake trout regulations in the Michigan Fishing Guide. Now that the Division is moving to a two-year fishing guide, it is more likely that regulations may have to change outside of the normal cycle as a result of (or in order to avoid) a penalty. An option that will alleviate concerns about having an inaccurate regulation printed in the fishing guide is to simply print language that conveys the idea that **“Lake Trout are a shared resource managed under a quota system as established by a Federal Court. Size and bag limit regulations are set once quotas are established. For current regulations consult www.michigan.gov/laketrout or call 517-284-xxxx.”** This language need not replace all printed Lake Trout regulations, only those where harvest is near or predicted to be near quotas (MM3, MM4, and MM5). This is method is consistent with other areas where quotas determine our regulations (Lake Erie walleye).

Finally we are proposing these regulations as part of a framework that includes triggers if overharvest or regular under-harvest of lake trout occurs. **If state anglers overharvest lake trout in a given year, the following year the bag limit for that particular lake trout management unit would decrease. If harvest is consistently low relative to the quota the bag limit for that particular lake trout management unit could be increased.** These changes in bag limits would not be accompanied by changes in length or season limits. This could increase compliance and simplify not only the regulations but the process by which they are set, as public meetings would not need to be held on a regular basis.

Proposal:

The proposed lake trout regulations for state anglers contain three components, all of which must be agreed upon;

- 1.) **MM123: 2 fish bag limit, 15-27”, with one fish over 34”**
MM4: 2 fish bag limit, 15-27”, with one fish over 34”
MM5: 2 fish bag limit, 15” MSL
MM6-8: 3 fish bag limit, 15” MSL
- 2.) **Removal of the lake trout regulations language for MM123, MM4, and MM5 from the fishing guide; anglers will be responsible for calling a phone number or visiting the DNR Webpage at www.michigan.gov/laketrout to get the current regulations for lake trout in their area.**
- 3.) **Fallback Regulations for MM123, MM4, and MM5; If the combined recreational and charter harvest of lake trout exceeds the established harvest limit in a management unit by 10% or more in any one year, or 5% or more in any two consecutive years, the daily bag limit of lake trout will be reduced by 1 fish.**
OR,
Once the combined recreational and charter harvest of lake trout is lower than the established harvest limits (TAC) in a management unit, the daily bag limit of lake trout can be increased by 1 fish, assuming it is in balance with the projected fish community for the upcoming year.

BUT, if the angling public does not agree upon the suite of proposed regulation changes listed above, the following regulations would then be put into place:

MM123: 3 fish bag limit, 20-25", with one fish over 30"

MM4: 2 fish bag limit, 15-27", with one fish over 34"

MM5: 2 fish bag limit, 15-28", with one fish over 34"

MM6-8: 3 fish bag limit, 15" MSL

In this scenario the regulations would stay listed as they currently are in the Michigan Fishing Guide, and no fallback regulation policy would be initiated. A round of stakeholder meetings and public input would be required each year that a penalty situation was present, as was done in 2014.

Please direct all comments on this proposal to Fisheries Biologist Heather Hettinger at hettingerh@michigan.gov

Comments will be taken from August 8 through August 22, 2014.