



Northern Inland Lakes Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee

Established by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to improve and maintain fishery resources through better communication and partnership.

Approved Minutes

Northern Inland Lakes Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee
Thursday, April 18, 2013
Littlefield-Alanson Community Building
7631 US 31 Alanson, Michigan
12:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Attendees: Brenda Archambo, Wayne Blomberg, David Bock, Dawn Bodnar, David Borgeson, Loretta Cwalinski, Tim Cwalinski (DNR Facilitator), Irvin Dedow, Jim Dexter, Kevin Donner, Neal Godby, Patrick Hanchin, Dan Hayes, Seth Herbst, John Hutto, Rick Johnson, David Kolar, John Kolar, Frank Krist (Committee Chair), Theresa Krist, Ryan MacWilliams, Dudley Marvin, Dan Myers, Kevin Osantowski, Kevin Prediger, Brad Silet, Virgil Smith, Roy Tassava, Alan Terry, Terry Weber.

Frank Krist called the meeting to order at 11:57 a.m. Attendees introduced themselves.

Reference was made to one of the handouts – a DNR press release on the Inland waterway survey.

Survey and project goals for the third and final year of the comprehensive walleye study in the Inland Waterway. Where did we come from and where do we go from here? (Dave Borgeson, Tim Cwalinski and Patrick Hanchin, DNR; and Seth Herbst, Daniel Hayes, Ryan MacWilliams, Michigan State University)

Dave Borgeson reviewed the effort to understand populations of walleye in the Inland Waterway, the creation of Tribal Coordination Unit, and to what the data show and best ways to share that information with the assistance from all the groups involved. Locating spawning locations have been a focus for electrofishing. Scheduling personnel day and night can be a challenge, and obviously the weather this year is crowding the work into a small time period. This will be the last year of the study. One caveat is that nets will probably be out during walleye opener. It is important to get the message out to anglers that there will be gear in those walleye hotspots.

Understanding the whole system including learning walleye spawning habits, what walleyes are eating and their migration patterns is key. Identifying the problems and developing an action will assist in improving the fishery. One of the challenges is definitely the large size of some of the lakes.

Tag returns can be very problematic due to inaccuracy. It is critical that both the date and specific location where each tagged fish was caught are noted on the label or the information is not usable. .

Over 7300 walleye were tagged in the waterway in 2011, while another approximate 1500 were tagged in 2012. The more the better for the population model that is being developed for the system. For the final year, tagging more than 3000 walleye would be ideal. The number of recaptures is very important because that data show movement patterns, growth rates, fish size etc.

It was asked if the walleye study summary information is being shared through associations, bait shops and other groups. MSU still needs stomach samples. Sample bags and labels etc. could be made up ahead of time to hand out to anglers. Anyone wanting to be on the mailing list can e-mail Frank, and he will make sure that information is shared, kristis@speednetllc.com.

It was requested to see each year how many walleye were tagged, and how many were returned back with information. The percentage would be good to see. Frank will get those numbers back out again and resend. There is a need to get more tags returned, but what has been returned so far is a reasonably good. It is critical that the tag returns contain the date and location of the capture.

Movement of walleye fitted with digital transmitters within the inland waterway – Seth Herbst, MSU

MSU is still collecting diet information from stomachs this year. Forage information was completed last year. The key objective is to discern walleye movement rates in each of the four lakes in the Inland Waterway. Initially, the only method used was marking walleyes with jaw tags by all cooperating agencies. The recapture methods were electro-fishing and angler tag returns.

In 2011 and 2012, of roughly 600 tagged walleye in the Cheboygan and Black rivers, 57 were recaptured. The focus was narrowed down to the lock and dam in Cheboygan. 21.9% made it past the dam.

In 2012, 10 male and 10 female walleyes were implanted with acoustic transmitters. Each unit transmitted a unique pulse so that each fish could be recognized as it passed any one of the five hydrophone receivers in the Waterway.

In Summary, approximately 40% (small sample size) of tagged walleye moved out of the Waterway to the Lake Huron side of the Cheboygan lock and dam. Approximately 35% of the walleye move into Mullett Lake following spawning, while 25% of those fish were harvested either by tribal or recreational anglers. Keep in mind that the sample size was only 20 fish.

Spending more time sampling and tagging walleye in the lower Cheboygan would be a good idea this spring. Batteries in the transmitters should still be working in the spring of 2013. Costs associated with the transmitters and hydrophones are high, so additional tracking in Burt or Mullett probably will not happen.

Zooplankton and larval walleye trends in the Inland Waterway – Ryan MacWilliams, MSU

Walleye abundance from 1998 to 2009 has showed a small decline, but it should be noted that methods between the surveys were different and are not completely comparable. Harvest is not the problem. Larval walleye survival was reviewed, and the factors that are influencing survival include predation, water temperature, and food availability. Large-bodied zooplankton is very important for their survival, and a high density is critical at the walleye fry stage. MSUs field work consisted of taking zooplankton samples at sundown, along shorelines in typical spawning areas for walleye. Burt Lake clearly has the largest relative population of large-bodied zooplankton, also the highest density of larval walleye recently, but neither number is incredibly high, just higher than the rest of the system.

In Summary, the size of Daphnia, a major zooplankton organism, in the Waterway, is smaller than that seen in other quality walleye lakes. Natural reproduction of Daphnia is likely low. Zooplankton of a suitable larger size and density is critical to a healthy walleye population. By filtering out phytoplankton, zebra-mussels are probably one of the factors in this low recruitment of zooplankton, but zebra mussels are not being studied as part of this study. The question is can zooplankton populations be increased?.

Frank will share the links to all the water quality data that Dan Myers with Tipp of the Mitt Watershed Council has available.

Initial conversations to map current walleye spawning habitat in Mullett Lake with the potential goal of future enhancement – Roy Tassava, Mullett Lake Area Preservation Society

Walleye prefer to spawn in gravel, cobble and boulders, but will still spawn in sand. Gravel presence is beneficial, but there is no protection of the eggs and fry by the adult. In looking at data from other lakes, in particular Lake Gogebic, both clean and aerated shorelines is critical spawning habitat. Possibly the algae in Mullett Lake is fouling the breeding grounds for walleye, and the lack of good gravel surfaces for breeding could be limiting wild reproduction. Is there suitable gravel? Would the addition of gravel substrate help improve zooplankton density? To this end, this summer Roy and Kevin Prediger will do a preliminary survey of gravel abundance and quality in Mullett Lake.

Seth feels zooplankton probably would not be affected by increased gravel bottoms. Patrick pointed out that the spawning habitat is the same as it was in 1998 when there were slightly higher walleye populations.

Monitoring mercury levels in Crooked and Pickerel lakes – Kevin Donner, Little Traverse Bay Band of Odawa Indians

Study goals were to determine concentrations of mercury in walleye and yellow perch, and identify the cause of the differences. Five inland lakes (Burt, Pickerel, Crooked, Walloon and Lake Charlevoix) were tested on fish that were approximately 3-4 years old. Yellow perch had fairly low levels while walleye concentrations are considerably higher, particularly in Crooked Lake. Another observation was that the concentrations go up in older/larger fish, so it is recommended to eat in lesser amounts of these fish.

Crooked Lake has not changed much, Pickerel Lake samplings showed mercury in 2012 to have gone down. What is causing those differences? Not a lot of point source pollution, but the mercury arrives through the air from combustion facilities where it settles in the water systems and becomes incorporated into bacteria and algae, and eventually ends up in the top predator fish. Observation - In lakes where walleye grow fast, the mercury levels appear to be lower. Higher concentrations were in Crooked, Pickerel and Walloon lakes. Overall mercury in walleye is declining or at least stable over time. Some data show that sulfur increases mercury levels.

Management of cormorants in Michigan and how that relates to the Inland Waterway – Dave Borgeson, DNR

Recently there was a Depredation Order for cormorants approved by the federal government (USDA Wildlife Services), DNR, Tribal units and the public, for managing cormorant populations. With a limited amount of money available, the locations chosen for cormorant control management were critical. In areas where fish stockings occur, there are lists of available approved people to coordinate harassment activities of cormorants to protect the newly stocked fish. Before management controls can be implemented the scope of the problem, amount of birds, what they are eating, and other information must be determined. Many persons do not want the cormorants to be managed so care must be used to accurately document a problem or strong opposition could result.

DNR would like to have cormorant observations reported on the DNR's Wildlife Division's website at <http://www.dnr.state.mi.us/cormorantobs/>. Location, how many, time of day etc. need to be recorded This would be the first step in determining if there might be a problem.

Recording numbers and keeping data on mergansers and cormorants would be helpful. Contact Fisheries biologists in Gaylord if there is concern about excessive numbers.

Management updates – DNR and LTBB

Jim Dexter, Chief of Fisheries Division - He made mention that he is very impressed with the cooperation between all the members of the group, and what the group has accomplished since inception. It is remarkable how informed the members of the Committee are and the high level of discussions taking place.

Kevin Donner, LTBB – said they are currently building a hatchery with walleye ponds, and an indoor facility. This project should be completed mid-summer.

Brad Silek, Sault Saint Marie Tribe reported they will be helping with the Inland Waterway assessment. They have been working in the UP on five streams doing an experimental review on the newly implemented brook trout bag limits.

Updates and Comments from the advisors and public

Black Lake fishing report – varied from limiting out every day to terrible; walleye have been small. Black Lake Association is working with Onaway Sate Park to improve the boat launch there. The boat launch will hopefully have an extended pier, more launching slips and additional parking spots, which would lead to less congestion. Keith Cheli, Parks and Recreation Division will be involved and an update will be provided at the fall meeting. The Association is hoping to develop a plan for the lake from the various users and homeowners.

Steelhead stocking in the Ocqueoc River went really well. Anglers are reporting catching a lot of spawning steelhead up and down the river.

No recent outbreaks of VHS reported, so this year there will be less testing.

Mullett Lake fishing has been better than reported based on past reports and overall fishing there has been great for diversity. Some anglers that have adapted are doing very well while others are hoping to learn more about the successful techniques.

Gobies are being caught in Crooked Lake, and also Eurasian water milfoil has appeared in the lake.

The boat launch at Maple Bay on Burt Lake will be improved starting this spring but the project may be completed later than expected due to ice. Efforts are made to get the word out in newsletters about fisheries surveys.

There will be a walleye tournament on June 21st originating from Indian River. An effort will be made to collect walleye stomach samples. The Mullett Lake newsletter will be made available.

A question was asked if the results of the sturgeon survey were available and what additional work is planned.

Is walleye traveling ten miles typical in other water systems? They are recorded going 40-50 miles in some water bodies in just a few days. A study currently being conducted in Lake Huron shows that some walleyes move from Saginaw Bay to the Straits and beyond in just a few weeks while others never leave the Bay. When the study is completed we will invite one of the researchers to provide an update to the Committee.

If there was more funding, perhaps through donations, there could be more transmitters available for the movement patterns study. Transmitters are \$200. If there is interest, contact Seth as soon as possible. The hydrophones are approximately \$1500. Female walleye are much more difficult to capture as the male walleyes spend much more time at the spawning sites and are easier to catch in survey gear.

The Sturgeon for Tomorrow guarding program is taking volunteers. Visit their [website](#) for more information.

Frank will also share lamprey catch information for reporting and collecting, krista@speednetllc.com.

Next Meeting will be Monday, October 14, 2013