

## **Summary of strategic planning phone survey with various leaders of angler groups**

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### **BACKGROUND**

Fisheries Division is currently engaged in writing a new Strategic Plan. Part of this process calls for the Strategic Planning Team to collect external and internal input on where the division should focus its efforts going forward. Below are the results of the phone surveys with leaders/representatives of various angler groups.

### **METHODS**

During the week of August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2012, Jim Dexter, Chief of Fisheries Division spoke with leaders/representatives of various angler groups by phone seeking input on the DNR strategic planning process. These leaders/representatives were asked nine questions about their opinions of division work effort.

Invitations to participate in the phone survey were sent to the following groups (listed alphabetically): Alger County Fish and Game Alliance, Anglers at Large, Anglers of the Au Sable, Bays de Noc Great Lakes Sport Fisherman, Bow-fishing Association of Michigan, Chippewa-Ottawa Resource Authority, Conservation Coalition, Conservation Resource Alliance, Escanaba River Association, Fly Fishing Federation, Great Lakes Council of the of the Federation of Fly Fishers, Hammond Bay Area Anglers Association, Huron Pines, Lake Erie Citizen Advisory Committee, Marquette Watershed Council, Michigan Aquaculture Association, Michigan Charter Boat Association, Michigan Darkhouse Anglers Association, Michigan Fish Producers, Michigan Muskie Alliance, Michigan River Guides Association, Michigan Steelhead & Salmon Fisherman's Association, Michigan Trout Unlimited, Michigan United Conservation Clubs, Resource Stewards, Sturgeon For Tomorrow, Upper Peninsula Sportsmen's Alliance, West Michigan Walleye Association and Wildlife Unlimited of Iron County.

### **RESULTS**

- 20 leaders/representatives agreed to participate in the survey.

#### **Question 1**

1. What two items would you say the Fisheries Division does well and why?
  - The number one response was that the division does an excellent job of managing the resource with sound science and competent staff, "*Good and effective science carried out by courageous, skilled and effective employees, underscored by high-caliber research*". Respondents indicated this was evidenced by well-managed fisheries, great emergency response protocols and varied opportunities for all anglers in the state.

- Multiple respondents also indicated the division’s communication and partnership efforts were extremely successful, *“The division does a great job of partnering with groups for projects across the state; your staff is incredibly responsive”*. Respondents indicated this was evidenced by increased transparency, the division’s trust in partners to execute tasks, engaging the public through surveys and meetings, involving stakeholders in decision making processes, getting information out to the public and leadership in intra-agency processes.
- Other items mentioned include: staff professionalism, *“your staff are professional and communicative and despite hard times continue to excel”*; and hatchery operations, *“other states look to you on how to model their hatchery operations”*.

## Question 2

2. What two items would you say the Fisheries Division should improve on and why?

- The number one response was that the division should improve on engaging the silent public, *“how do we get more voices involved? Most people do not understand the government, the division is perceived as aloof and adversarial”*. Respondents indicated this was evidenced by low ‘public’ participation, limited understanding of processes and protocols and always coordinating with the ‘same’ voices.

A subset of this viewpoint was the opinion shared by several members that Great Lakes anglers are more ‘recognized’ by the division than inland anglers, *“you have more fisherman and more fishing being done on inland lakes and streams, yet resources (research/stocking) continues to be Great Lakes focused”*.

- Multiple respondents also indicated that enforcement could be improved, as evidenced by too few conservation officers in the field.
- Other items mentioned include: poor internal organization and priority ordering, not being proactive enough, not working with the national aquaculture industry, a disconnect between research and management, not enough commitment to proper evaluation of management efforts, lack of innovative thinking, inadequate public relations, too much bureaucracy, negative relationship with the Michigan legislature and unresolved netting conflicts and overharvesting by tribal anglers.

## Question 3

3. Is there any one item you think the Fisheries Division does not prioritize, but should? Please explain why.

- There was practically no consensus on this question. Paraphrased answers are listed below:
  - Need more habitat rehabilitation;

- Not enough law enforcement;
- No issues;
- Not doing enough to combat Asian carp;
- Fish health and disease policies are outdated;
- division should work from the ‘bottom up’ (public determines priorities) rather than ‘top down’ (division determines priorities);
- There aren’t species-specific management plans for every species;
- Inadequate inter-departmental cross-coordination/communication;
- No plan for facing funding shortfalls/not using volunteers enough;
- No clear consensus/communication of internal priorities so groups can match their activities to those priorities;
- No processes in place to recruit young anglers;
- Not utilizing adaptive management;
- Not enough stocking of walleye;
- Need to revisit policies on riparian vegetation;
- No stocking of lake herring;
- Out-of-state license fees are too cheap/not using volunteers enough/not protecting coldwater fisheries;
- Not enough engagement with the Federal government;
- Not aggressive enough against aquatic invasive species;
- No processes in place to recruit young anglers, poor netting regulations, not aggressive enough against aquatic invasive species.

#### Question 4

4. Can you list two issues that your organization believes are the most critical issues or challenges facing fisheries management in Michigan over the next five years? (please think of two issues other than funding).
- Aquatic invasive species (AIS) was listed at the most important challenge the MDNR Fisheries Division faces. More than half of the respondents spoke about AIS in general, Asian Carp specifically, sea lamprey, etc.
  - The second most prevalent theme was how division operations were going to have to explicitly start trading off priorities because of lack of resources and low staffing levels. Respondents who listed this also stressed the importance and expense of data collection and research.
  - Other common themes included: balancing biological ecosystem needs vs. social priorities, the importance of the division making inroads with the legislature, concerns about the declines of Great Lakes fisheries, limited law enforcement, failing dams, maintaining broodstock, recruitment of young anglers, not enough positive PR, groundwater extraction, water quality and climate change.

#### Question 5

5. For your organization, what two priorities should Fisheries Division focus on over the next five years?

- Preserving habitat was the number one theme listed by the groups (40%), as well as regulating dam operations, dam removal, prevention of AIS, and improving fisheries access sites (adding fish cleaning stations, developing kids' fishing ponds, etc.).
- Some group-specific items (paraphrased) were:
  - Communication with and about the aquaculture industry – Michigan Aquaculture Association;
  - Coldwater species management planning – Michigan Trout Unlimited;
  - Expanding the Atlantic salmon program – Anglers of the AuSable;
  - Simplify Brook trout rules and address milfoil – Upper Peninsula Sportsman's Association;
  - Restore walleye stocking to inland waters – Wildlife Unlimited of Iron County;
  - Special sturgeon license fee – Sturgeon For Tomorrow;
  - Liberalize gar regulations – Bow-fishing Association of Michigan

### Question 6

6. How would you rate Fisheries Division communications with your organization? (1 – 5, where 5 represents 'extremely well' and 1 represents 'extremely poor')
- The average rating was 4, with a standard deviation of 1.
  - Some comments included:
    - *“Extremely well! One of the division's strongest attributes is communication of field all the way up to the Chief's level”;*
    - *“Excellent relationship with central office, improving communication with field office”;*
    - *“While we don't always see eye-to-eye [with the division], we understand it's political”;*
    - *“The division has improved their communication with our group tremendously in the recent past”;*
    - *“Board members are really happy with communication”;*

- *“Your field staff are excellent, we couldn’t be happier”;*
- *“We feel we have a real voice”*

### **Question 7**

7. To what extent do you trust Fisheries Division to make recommendations and decisions regarding statewide aquatic resources? If your perception is good, why do you feel that way? If your perception is not good, what can we do to improve?
- 85% of respondents indicated that they ‘trusted’ the division to make recommendations and decisions. Reasons included: division staff use sound science to support their decision making, division staff have high competency and credibility, there is transparency in decision making processes, there are two-way communications between the division and partners and partners have access to division information/staff when needed.
  - The three respondents who did not trust the division to make recommendations and decisions regarding statewide aquatic resources said this was because: there are mixed messages coming from central and field offices, they believe politics rather than science drive management decisions, there aren’t enough resources to support fisheries management, field efforts and data collections and one respondent also said, the division has failed to prevent AIS from infiltrating Michigan’s aquatic ecosystems.

### **Question 8**

8. How would you describe Fisheries Division as a partner or collaborator? Why do you feel that way?  
(1 – 5, where 5 represents ‘extremely well’ and 1 represents ‘extremely poor’)
- The average rating was 3.5, with a standard deviation of 1.5.
  - Some comments included:
    - *“The division excels at collaborating”;*
    - *“Lots of room for improvement, Fish Division has been an obstruction at times”;*
    - *“The division has been excellent, some examples include support for ‘catch-and-cook’ and total communication about salmon bag-limits”;*
    - *“There are huge differences in communicating at the local level between field staff, some work closely with their local chapters and some do not;*

- *“Fish Division is an excellent communicator when you agree with us, but when you don’t agree, there isn’t any open communication”;*

### Question 9

9. Is there anything you would like to add for our consideration as we revise our strategic plan?

- Identify overarching strategies, especially for dealing with major changes (examples, new AIS, environmental disasters, etc.). Consider benchmarking and be willing to adapt or revise your strategic plan. Dream up a list of issues the division would take on if they had additional resources, in addition to what you are doing.
- You must deal with the changing nature of fishing/fisherman that harvests less and a public that thinks fishing is a barbaric activity.
- You are on the right track and doing an outstanding job!
- You must get more money/funding! Revisit the fishing license fee increase or beef up penalties.
- Alleviate the fear that the aquaculture industry managers do not know what they are doing. The industry has been accused of not being professional and doing anything for a buck. Our objectives are the same.
- I know you don’t want to talk about budget, but you cannot operate under the budget situation you are currently working with.
- Think about active management rather than passive, and communicate the science behind decision-making. Do less field work, write more timely reports and follow your own recommendations. We appreciate the time you give us and don’t forget to make a ‘what-if’ list, because that is what we use when we lobby for more money for the division.
- Get connected (with other divisions, with other partners, with the rest of the world), people think in terms of ‘either/or’ but that’s not accurate. We need fish biologists with more expanded skill sets for dealing with the changing nature of their field. Interact with the universities and tell them your needs so they can train students for these jobs. Relook at the budget, it’s not working. Take a fresh look at your public engagement efforts and work to get your information standardized and in one place. Look at what you do for the K-12 education; this is a model that is already paid for but under-utilized.

- Look to private groups to fill your gaps. You need a fee increase or get on the tax return form. Why aren't we asking for additional fees for out-of-state anglers?
- Really need to work on recruiting kids and after-work anglers. They aren't on the Great Lakes, they are on inland lakes and if they are out there for a few hours and don't catch anything they don't come back. There are a lot more fish than walleye.
- Funding is your major issues. Stay positive but make your 'what-if' list.
- We need to increase the number of young people introduced to fishing. For this to be successful a reasonable number of fish need to be available in waters with public access. This means more fishing piers, and areas with shore fishing. It also means inland lakes for boat fishing. We are losing our tourist dollars to MN and WI. These dollars should be coming to the U.P. and our residents should be enjoying fishing closer to home as they did in the past.
- Consider the landscape approach that was used in the Wildlife Plan. There is no substitute for good leadership; you have to have the nerve to provide it.
- You need a well for the Thompson Fish Hatchery. Continue to monitor the phosphorous issues at the Platte. Think about an initiative to keep county road endings, we don't want the private land owners to fight for the loss of lake access.
- Start measuring success in the quality of experience as opposed pounds harvested.
- The preponderance of PERM positions belong to MSU and all Michigan Universities professors should have equal ability to become PERM staff. Because the PERM unit is decentralized, there should be more accountability put in place to assess/recognize their efforts.
- Continue valuing stakeholder concerns and going down the road of simplicity rather than special interests.
- Increase winter fishing opportunities by planting smelt in inland lakes, which will also provide food for walleyes.