

## **Warmwater Resources Steering Committee Meeting June 17, 2013 Meeting**

Attendees in Lansing: Todd Grischke, Tim Cwalinski (notes), Patrick Hanchin (chair), Linn Duling, Jim Felgenauer, Nick Popoff, Christian Le Sage, Kregg Smith, Dan Kimmel, Doug Dingey (call), Dean Molnar, Al Dood, Paul Sacks (guest - MI BASS Nation), Dave Rowe (guest), Mike Shewell, Jim Sprague (guest – K & E Tackle), Mary Bremigan, Will Schultz, Jim Diana, Randy Van Dam (guest - D&R Sports Center), Kelsey Schlee (guest – MSU)

Attendees via Crystal Falls teleconference: Mike Holmes, Benji Wood, Jody Johnston, Jacob McWethy, Dave Painter, Bill Ziegler

### **Welcome and Agenda Items**

- Hanchin introduced new representatives for the WRSC: Dan Kimmel for MI BASS Nation, Mike Shewell for Michigan Steelhead and Salmon Fisher's Association, and Bill Ziegler for the Upper Peninsula Sportsmen's Alliance. Also noted that Jim Bedford would be representing MUCC at this meeting.
- Hanchin welcomed guests: Paul Sacks (MI BASS Nation), Dave Rowe (guest), Jim Sprague (K & E Tackle), Randy Van Dam (D&R Sports Center), and Kelsey Schlee (MSU)
- Hanchin reminded the Committee of conference call and video conference etiquette and noted that the floor will be opened for each agenda item.

### **1. Presentation on yellow perch possession limits and discussion**

The discussion of the yellow perch daily possession limit (DPL) has gained some attention again in recent years with creel clerks hearing more about it and some organized groups asking for a reduction. This topic has been discussed internally at several Fisheries Division biologist meetings in the last decade but has not had any support due largely to the lack of biological justification. When introduced at the last WRSC meeting, a reduction in the DPL for yellow perch was not supported, though additional information was welcomed. Hanchin provided an overview of the topic and discussed the biological and social aspects behind this topic, and reminded the group that there has been a general push for simpler fisheries regulations, with fewer exceptions. There is some general support from the public to reduce the DPL for yellow perch, but it may simply be based on social perspective. A brief summary of information provided is below:

- 2012 Bay De Noc – 2.4% of anglers harvested more than 25 perch, and a DPL of 25 would have resulted in 8.5% less harvest
- 2012 Southern Lake MI (Southaven) – 7.1% of anglers harvested more than 25 perch, and a DPL of 25 would have resulted in 8.6% less harvest
- 2012 Les Cheneaux/Detour region – 1.5% of anglers harvested more than 25 perch, and a DPL of 25 would have resulted in 2.2% less harvest
- 2001/02 Higgins Lake – 0.6% of anglers harvested more than 25 perch, and a DPL of 25 would have resulted in 3.4% less harvest
- 2005/06 Lake Gogebic - 0% of anglers harvested more than 25 perch, and a DPL of 25 would have resulted in 0% less harvest (note that the current DPL for Gogebic was enacted largely due to social reasons)
- 2010 Indian Lake UP– 0% of anglers harvested more than 25 perch, and a DPL of 25 would have resulted in 0% less harvest

- 1996 Saginaw Bay - 4% of anglers harvested more than 25 perch, and a DPL of 25 would have resulted in 12% less harvest
- 2012 Saginaw Bay - 11% of anglers harvested more than 25 perch, and a DPL of 25 would have resulted in 12% less harvest
- Hanchin reminded that “saved” harvest is only truly meaningful if we have abundance data so that harvest can be evaluated relative to the population size.
- Population modeling for Lake St. Clair has shown that a DPL of 25 yellow perch would result in very minor (< 0.5%) increases to the total population and total catch, while harvest would be reduced over 20%.
- Creel data for Erie has shown that MI recreational harvest is minor relative to the harvest of OH and ON, which both have commercial fisheries for perch.

The results in general support the fact that few anglers harvest their daily limit of yellow perch, and that savings of perch would not be significant with a regulation change. However, information is lacking for smaller lakes. The Northern Lake Huron and Northern Lake Michigan Management Units did some basic surveys of anglers at various locations this winter and spring to gauge the public view on this topic. Results are summarized below:

#### Grand, Hubbard, and Long lakes as well as northern Lake Huron (N = 97)

- 47% interviewed thought the current limit of 50 fish is too high, 53% felt it was appropriate
- 63% felt inland perch limits should be 20-35, while 37% preferred 40-50
- 36% felt Great Lakes perch limits should be 20-35, while 64% prefer 40-50
- 30% supported a combined DPL with panfish, 70% did not
- 85% would support a minimum size limit (MSL) on yellow perch, 15% wouldn't (6" = 16%, 7" = 11%, 8" = 62%, 9" = 3%, 10" = 8%)

#### Lakes Antoine and Groveland Mine ponds, bays de Noc (N = 140)

- 84% interviewed thought inland perch daily limits are too high, 16% thought appropriate
- 76% felt Great Lakes perch limits are too high, 24% thought appropriate
- 83% think inland DPL should be 10-35, 17% desire 40-50
- 82% think Great Lakes DPL should be 10-35, 18% desire 40-50
- 62% supported a combination possession of perch with panfish
- 81% would support a MSL on yellow perch, 19% wouldn't (6" = 4%, 7" = 56%, 8" = 43%, 9" = 1%)
- WI anglers fishing in MI opposed combination with panfish, while most Michigan anglers supported (WI has a combined possession limit for perch and panfish)

The majority of members believed that this issue was not pressing and that there was little or no biological evidence to make a change. A minority of people supported either a lower DPL for yellow perch or combining yellow perch and panfish into a 25-fish limit. The U.P. Sportsmen's Alliance has been pursuing the issue for inland lakes as they believe that the reduction is warranted, especially with the recent increase that allows two additional day's possession limits (processed/frozen). Several members noted that there was strong support from the western U.P. (based on the limited interviews) and it appeared to be more of an issue for the U.P. and more of an issue for inland lakes as opposed to the Great Lakes. Hanchin noted that we could use the creel program to investigate angler opinions further. It was also noted that the Lake Erie CAC did not support further investigation of this topic, at least not for its waters. The issue will be discussed internally with the Chief and the WRSC will be apprised of how we intend on moving forward.

## **2. Proposal from MI BASS Nation on black bass seasons**

Dan Kimmel presented a proposal to the group prior to the meetings to essentially turn the closed season for largemouth and smallmouth bass into a catch-and-immediate-release (CIR) season. MI BASS Nation (MBN) believes that bass populations in MI can take the additional pressure without having any negative consequences, noting that MI is one of only four states that still have a closed season on bass. MBN supports decisions based on biology rather than social-based regulations, and after twenty years of posturing and learning on this topic they feel the time is right for this move. He also believes that there will be a positive economic impact (license sales and fishing trip expenditures) associated with such a regulation change. Guests of MBN spoke on behalf of the proposal and stated that:

- bass anglers are conservation minded and want to take care of the fishery
- negative impacts on the fishery would be noticed since MI bass populations are so strong
- positive impacts to local economies would likely result
- would like year-round CIR fishing, but at the least would like to see a significant increase in the CIR fishing period
- support among the angling public, particularly bass fisherman, is there.

Hanchin and Popoff noted that the proposal was well done and it should serve as an example of the type of proposal we would like to receive from members of the WRSC. That is, it was well thought out and a considerable amount of time was taken to research the topic in the scientific literature as well as with angler groups. Members of the committee provided initial feelings on the proposal, which are summarized as follows:

- The majority of members supported the proposal or at least had no strong feelings on it.
- Several commented that anything to increase participation is welcomed.
- Some stressed that the least restrictive regulations should always be used, if they are biologically sound
- There was some concern on how such a change would impact other fisheries such northern pike, walleye, and muskellunge since their seasons would remain closed.
- There was some concern that a change such as this would prompt people to want CIR seasons for other species such as walleye and northern pike, for which there was concern.
- It was noted that U.P. anglers generally support closed seasons.
- There was some concern about the genetic implications of fishing on spawning populations since research has shown that the harvest of or lost reproduction from more aggressive bass can result in population with less aggressive fish.
- There was some concern about whether the ice fishing season should be opened since it is largely a bait fishery, which does not lend itself to CIR.
- There was some doubt as to how much of an effect this would have on license sales

It was stated by many of the bass anglers that catch and release is prevalent among bass fisherman. While this may be true, it was also noted that harvest of bass does occur, especially in the northern L.P. and U.P. and that harvest should be recognized as a viable part of the fishery. Biologists also noted that high exploitation has been documented for SW L.P. populations.

In a summary from Popoff, Chief Dexter applauded the proposal and suggested moving this proposal internally to a DNR staff workgroup, with an eventual white paper/recommendation to be derived. The earliest this proposal could be realized is in 2015, with a public review process potentially scheduled for 2014.

### **3. Proposal from MI BASS Nation on catch-and-immediate-release seasons statewide**

MBN provided another proposal on CIR essentially for all species wherever fishing was open in some manner. Exceptions would still prohibit fishing for a species with no harvest season, prohibit fishing in areas that are closed to all fishing, and allow special regulations (e.g. MI-WI boundary waters, Sylvania Wilderness). MBN acknowledged that they did not have the time to fully flesh out this proposal. Hanchin recommended that MBN try to garner support from other groups represented on the WRSC before this proposal is considered. This proposal would affect many more sectors of the angling public and more organized groups and thus the proposal would have more merit if those groups were backing the proposal from the start. It was also noted that the black bass proposal alone would take considerable time for Fisheries Division to review, though the Division will certainly discuss the fact that CIR are desired for species other than bass.

### **4. Michigan-Wisconsin boundary waters regulations relative to northern pike and musky spearing**

Hanchin provide a brief history of the issue of pike and musky spearing in MI-WI boundary waters. MI and WI meet annually to discuss regulations for the boundary waters. Esocid spearing has been prohibited in MI-WI boundary waters since 1986. In 2006 the Michigan Darkhouse Angling Association (MDAA) asked the MDNR to open these waters to spearing. The request was reviewed by the lakes Michigan and Superior Basin Teams (internal) and was not supported. The proposal was also not supported by the WDNR. In 2012 the Western U.P. CAC made a request to the DNR Director to open the lakes to spearing. The DNR response was that we would consider opening some lakes to spearing if the new esocid regulations were approved, but that we would not consider MI-WI boundary waters due to the reciprocal arrangement with Wisconsin. Both the DNR and WUPCAC (9-17-12 minutes) consider the issue closed. Holmes stated that MDAA will continue to work towards opening all lakes to spearing. MDAA believes that if fishing for a species is open, then equal use by all methods should be allowed (i.e. winter spearing through the ice). Holmes noted that spearing for Esocids was prohibited in 1986 as an agreement between the states, but at one time you could spear in Michigan even though you could not in Wisconsin. Also, at one time the minimum size limits and opening dates differed between the states without issue so why can't we have different regulations now? MDAA would like to allow spearing on the Michigan side of the boundary waters. MDAA believes that a change is well supported by many groups and anglers and does not understand why the DNR is resisting a change. MDAA also noted that previous fisheries managers (retired) supported the change. MDAA believed that the reduction in the muskellunge possession limit to 1 per year would open the door to spearing on more lakes. Jim Diana stated that the WRSC should at least review biological data on this subject so that the issue could be adequately considered.

Statutes related to this issue: Under the authority of section 49102 of 1994 PA 451, MCL 324.49102, the Director of the Department of Natural Resources on October 11, 2012, ordered that for a period not to exceed five years, the following regulations shall apply on the Michigan-Wisconsin boundary waters to provide uniform regulations for common waters shared with Wisconsin. The following rules and regulations govern fishing in the waters which form a common boundary between the States of Michigan and Wisconsin. These rules and regulations supersede all others governing fishing on Michigan-Wisconsin boundary waters that in any way conflict. Where regulations of Michigan and Wisconsin differ, persons shall comply with the regulations of the state in whose territorial waters they are fishing.

### **5. Threatened and endangered species list review**

The DNR has established a team with representation from all Divisions to review the current list of threatened and endangered species. This could take many years to review and it involves all species of fish, mammals, and vegetation. The WRSC will be apprised of the issue as it develops.

## **6. Update of muskellunge harvest tag**

As of June 31, 639 muskellunge harvest tags were issued to anglers. It is difficult to use this as a gauge of muskellunge anglers as many anglers may obtain a tag for incidental catch/harvest. Very few comments have been received on tags or musky fishing. Some Lake St. Clair anglers had concerns that they didn't know about the regulation and tag system, although DNR outreach and comment periods were extensive. LSC anglers are also concerned about what "possession" means (in boat, in livewell?) and wonders how tournaments will work. These issues were discussed before changes and there are certainly options for tournaments to use lengths, observers, or digital photos for verification. Some anglers thought the tag was not promoted well enough and some experiences that it was not presented as an option at the point of sales (it has to be requested). These are issues that will be less of a problem in the future years as people and vendors become more familiar with the tag system. The tag is not available via online purchase as this would potentially allow multiple "purchases" as well as additional cost to the Department for mailing and postage. There was a reporting system set up on the DNR website, and 800 "hits" were recorded on this site (that does not mean 800 musky reported caught), but some information has been lost due to a website connectivity/linkage problem (problem has been fixed).

## **7. Other issues**

- Popoff commented on the recent legislation allowing NRC purview of fisheries orders (used to be Director). The main difference will be that the NRC will be notified much earlier. Fisheries Division is working with wildlife division to develop a new regulatory cycle for the NRC and the WRSC will be updated during the next meeting.
- Hanchin reminded the WRSC of future meeting dates
  - September 16, 2013 – placeholder for conference call
  - December 16, 2013 – Lansing, MI
  - Meetings/calls will only be held if there is enough information to warrant doing so.