

Mike Veine indicated that the wording of any survey (or law) for liberalization of walleye regulations on the Saginaw River (or the Bay proper) should only be considered if the resource comes first. If we have bad year classes of walleye recruitment and the population declines, then I would like to see assurances that the liberalized regulations be rescinded quickly to protect the resource. This is the only way I, or the Arenac County Walleye Club would support any more liberalization of walleye regulations in surveys or if law changes are proposed.

Randy Terrian said that part of this effort is to better understand the walleye population and to better understand how risky some of the potential actions would actually be. Is this situation similar to the Lake Erie situation? Will recruitment be affected by the recent flood? Is taking no action worse than taking actions?

Thomas Heritier talked about access issues on the river, the private property involved and that you need to know the structure of the river bottom to catch fish. He supported Dan Manyen's views treating the Bay and River as separate entities.

Dave Fielder talked about the process. This current discussion has focused on the opening of the river, but that is only part of the Workgroup's focus, so please keep that in mind. Dave talked about the level of risk opening the river might present, but emphasized that there is still a lot of uncertainty around this point. He thought the decision making process shouldn't be entered into lightly.

Jeff said they will revise the survey, perhaps within the month, and try to get it out to the licensed anglers. Then there will be data collection and analysis of the information gathered from the survey. Perhaps we'll have some information to share by the fall to have a discussion, and if appropriate have regulation changes in place for the following spring. Randy Claramunt concurred with this approach.

Progress report on developing a uniform version of the Great Lakes Citizens Advisory Committees' Terms of Reference that might be adopted by all of the Great Lakes Citizens Advisory Committees. (Randy Claramunt and Frank Krist).

Election of Chair and Vice Chair. Frank introduced the terms of reference discussion, saying that there is a movement among DNR Fisheries Basin Coordinators (BCs) to have common Terms of Reference, including 3 year terms for Committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs. Frank said that because a conflict of interest he would have Randy Claramunt conduct the elections for Chair and Vice-Chair. Randy explained that the BCs had a discussion about the form and function of the Committees, and the need for Vice-Chairs to allow for better transition if the Chair changes. He invited nominations for Chair from the Committee members.

Tom Heritier recommended Frank Krist for Chair. **Captain Dan Manyen** agreed.

Jim Johnson nominated Randy Terrian for Vice-Chair. No other nominations for Chair were introduced. Frank said this was a chance for a change of leadership if they wanted to change directions. Frank stated he was willing to continue and appreciated everyone's support and that it was a privilege to represent the Committee. Frank said he will work closely with the Vice-Chair, and asked if there were any other nominations for Vice-Chair. None were forthcoming. Tom Keerl asked if Randy Terrian is willing to serve. Randy said he spends a lot of time working on stocking decisions, and has spent over 2400 volunteer hours working on behalf of Lake Huron issues. He is worried about his ability to do the job justice while undertaking all his current pursuits, saying he couldn't do the same job that Frank does. Randy said he is willing to help Frank manage the Committee, and will accept the Vice-Chair position if the Committee wants him to serve. Randy Claramunt asked for a thumbs-up from committee members, and said that the majority were in favor of having Frank serve as chair, and Randy Terrian as Vice-Chair. Their 3 year terms begin now. March 2024 will be the next time for choosing Chair and Vice-Chair.

Ken Merckel expressed his support for Frank and Randy, and thanked them for their service.

Tod Williams appreciates Frank and Randy's work and willingness to serve.

The new rule for the Cormorant control program, what does it mean? (Randy Claramunt).

Randy Claramunt described the **new cormorant rule and permit system** effective Feb. 12, 2021. MDNR will be requesting a permit under the new system. This will require coordination between the DNR and USDA-Wildlife Services, USFWS, wildlife managers and stakeholders. The DNR will identify areas where conflicts exist, prioritize sites, and have the consumptive model provide target levels. We will still likely need the avian predator network, and harassment efforts. Randy showed a link to the Fish and Wildlife site that provides a lot of information on this subject, <https://www.fws.gov/regulations/cormorant/cormorant-permit-information>.

Dennis Gulau asked about the number of birds likely to be asked for removing, and Randy agreed it will likely be around 10,000 birds. However, a lot of location specific variables are in play. A total of 78,000 birds were allocated to the Interior Region with 24 states requesting a share of that amount. Dennis feared the USFWS would set numbers for different areas, but Randy has learned the USFWS does not dictate numbers per area but will consider agency input on needs and react to those instead of a hard number at this point. Randy is unsure about all the hurdles we will encounter, but this system should help getting control at a lot of our priority sites.

Randy Terrian thanked Randy Claramunt and Dave Fielder, and committee members who have been active on this front for a long time. He talked about how Michigan's portion might be disproportionately higher compared to other states, but Randy Claramunt said we should be justified in taking a larger share because of Michigan's needs, and our past efforts. The funding issue will need to be addressed, and Randy Terrian asked about how people can get their priority sites on the list. Randy Claramunt asked that members connect with their area fisheries managers to provide the needed information for making these decisions. Randy Terrian asked about funding for harassment efforts (bangers, etc.), since these initial efforts are a critical first step in control efforts, and help determine if lethal efforts are needed. Randy Claramunt replied that we are at a starting point, and the state will need to show the ability to manage our end of the issue, and work to optimize the effort in the future.

Frank commented that it will take time to determine if the new cormorant permit system will be adequate. For example, removing birds on federal property is not permitted and this could slow the control of birds in Saginaw Bay where many of the cormorants nest on the Charity Islands that are mostly owned by the United States. Frank stated this subject will continue to be on the agenda in the future and stakeholders must remain vigilant to ensure a balanced population of cormorants results.

Break.

Agency Updates.

Nick Torsky DNR Law Enforcement Division said things are pretty much status quo for the Great Lakes Enforcement Unit. Wind prevented a lot of commercial netting effort after seasonal closures, although water was open in many areas. Right now, only the Straits proper will likely be limited by ice. He says Law Enforcement is currently gearing up for the upcoming season, and we will get boats in the water soon. He said they will be hiring 25 officers and are looking to get people with previous enforcement experience, which might help expedite things. The first group will begin training in late April. Frank thanked Nick and all their efforts in doing a difficult job.

Ed Eisch DNR Fish Production Manager said that health inspections and the fish allocation process is ongoing as they prepare to get stocking activities started for this year. They are looking to obtain the Federal Coded Wire Tag trailer for marking of Chinooks, while Atlantic salmon will be marked by DNR personnel. The construction effort at Thompson Fish Hatchery is getting close to completion, and they hope to have walleye produced this year, as well as muskellunge in the new cool water facilities. It has been tough getting some equipment across international borders, causing delays (in addition to wet conditions last year). Lots of major maintenance projects are ongoing for the Fish Production Section. Many of these projects have timing restrictions in place dictating when funding has to be spent. Ed explained the solar energy effort at Oden was funded by donated dollars. The visitor center will be powered by solar energy which is a positive approach that will be expanded to other hatcheries. Fish production will now only have 2 area managers, instead of 3 with both VanAmbergs (Jan and Martha) retiring. Dan Sampson will be the northern area manager (Oden, Thompson, Marquette), and Aaron Switzer will be southern area manager (Wolf Lake, Harrietta, Platte River).

Dan Manyen asked if the flood in the Midland area affected the walleye egg take. Ed said that the Tittabawassee River is not used for egg take anymore, but Randy Claramunt said the DNR will continue to survey the river for walleye.

Jeff Jolley, DNR Southern Lake Huron Management Unit along with Addie Dutton and Jason Gostiaux, Unit Biologists. Jeff said they have been writing reports, and getting inland stocking and survey efforts planned. He mentioned grass carp efforts initiated last year will be continuing this year. Jason Gostiaux mentioned lots of reported small walleye in Saginaw River, as well as quite a few small sturgeon reported caught in the Saginaw River this year. Jason indicated that the public can assist in providing important information to the sturgeon rehabilitation program by reporting any sturgeon that they catch and release or see caught at this DNR link, <https://www2.dnr.state.mi.us/ORS/Survey/28>. They will be tagging walleye again this year in the Tittabawassee River this spring. Addie said Jason and she will be trying to get a handle on northern pike populations in Lake Huron waters, and the Saginaw River gear regulation changes will come in effect this year, with a goal to simplify regulations and provide expanded fishing opportunities. She is working with sea lamprey control personnel to see how the flood might have impacted sea lamprey production (model vs. reality) in the absence of some of the barriers in the system. Addie is working on the angler on-line diary effort to encourage anglers to provide their valuable steelhead catch information. The following link was provided to learn more about the steelhead reporting program, <https://www.michiganseagrant.org/topics/fisheries-and-aquaculture/angler-citizen-science/great-lakes-angler-diary/>.

Dave Borgeson, DNR Northern Lake Huron Management Unit along with Neal Godby and Tim Cwalinski, Unit Biologists. Neal Godby, and Tim Cwalinski mentioned some of the happenings in the Northern Lake Huron Management Unit. Dave said they are also aging fish, writing reports, and planning field season activities. They are also working with the Southern Unit on the making sure the walleye rearing and stocking effort this year is efficient. Neal emphasized need for people to participate in the steelhead diary program. Tim said we have an aggressive survey schedule planned for this year and are planning to again clip brown trout for the Au Sable River below Mio to evaluate natural reproduction versus stocked fish.

Dave Caroffino has been promoted to manager of the DNR Tribal Coordination Unit. He said the current 2000 Great Lakes Consent Decree has been extended through June 30th and negotiations are ongoing. Brian Newland of Bay Mills has resigned his role of President at Bay Mills, and an election will occur soon to fill that position. All things are status quo through June 30th, since no new Decree is in place yet. Challenges due to reduced survey efforts last year because of the Pandemic will make some things difficult for modelers this year.

Donna Wesander, DNR Manager of Charter Fishing Reporting Program, indicated there was a decrease in charter efforts last year in Lake Huron of 400 trips compared to previous years. Walleye harvest decreased, because of the additional Covid restrictions. Lake Erie walleye harvest was

reduced much more due to the restrictions. Perch harvest in Lake Huron increased somewhat, while lake trout remained consistent. Most staff are still working remotely, so pay attention to contact information and voicemail messages to ensure that you are able to make contact with someone you wish to talk to.

Dave Fielder, DNR Biologist and Modeler at the Alpena Fisheries Research station, mentioned Jeff Diamond will be retiring as captain of the RV Tanner, and will be missed. It is uncertain when that position will be filled, but they will be able to operate in the interim. Cruise schedule will be full this year. Analysis of 2020 data is ongoing and should be wrapped up soon. New imaging cameras for the lab have been purchased by the station for fish aging, etc., and will be installed soon to upgrade the older equipment.

Christian Lesage, DNR Aquatic Species and Regulatory Affairs Unit in Fisheries Division, said that the majority of hatchery fish have been allocated, and this activity should be completed by next week. This is a prerequisite to getting the hatchery fish stocked in waters of the state.

Julie Shafto, DNR Creel Clerk, said the creel season starts April 1st, and she is looking forward to starting on time, and said that they are now able to collect biodata. Rogers City and Rockport will be her ports this year.

Lee Martin, DNR Creel Clerk said most anglers have been ice fishing, but occasionally fished the Au Sable River. Atlantic salmon have been hanging around the River, and some have been caught. In the Rifle River, lake-run browns have been caught, and the East Branch of the Au Gres has been producing steelhead. Some smelt have been caught through the ice in the Thunder Bay River.

Randy Claramunt, DNR Lake Huron Basin Coordinator announced that creel clerk Mike Ferguson (Detour, Les Cheneaux Islands) will be retiring, and noted that anglers have always appreciated Mike's efforts.

Dan Sampson DNR Northern Area Fish Hatchery Manager which includes Oden, Thompson, Marquette Hatcheries, reiterated that he will be taking Jan VanAmberg's position as the northern area fish production manager. He said the coolwater facility at Thompson is substantially complete and hopefully the entire facility will be online this spring. Oden will be producing larger Eagle Lake rainbows this year.

Update on coordinating stocking dates of steelhead and Atlantic Salmon to avoid predators (Randy Claramunt, Tim Cwalinski DNR Fisheries Biologist, Neal Godby DNR Northern Lake Huron Fisheries Biologist, and the DNR Fish Production Staff.).

Randy Claramunt introduced the subject of the efforts to improve post stocking survival of newly stocked salmonids. Neal then began his presentation, thanking Fish Division management and Fish Production personnel for their contributions. He outlined concerns around factors that could be contributing to reduced survival of stocked fish including:

- Cormorants
- Walleye
- Lake Trout
- Other predators
- Other factors (e.g., temperature, high flows, food availability)

Lots of past efforts have helped inform our current stocking practices, and we are looking to build off those efforts to better utilize our fish into the future. To do this, we need to keep in mind the constraints inherent within our Fish Production Section; there are logistical, staffing, timing issues that must be

addressed. Fish Production staff provided needed input to help produce a draft plan. Steelhead were a major focus for this effort since we had undergone a vigorous review of Atlantic salmon stocking timing at the various sites recently.

For simplification, three groupings were developed for stocking locations. Those amenable to early, mid-season, or late stocking windows as shown below.

- Group 1 (early) – first group stocked, through mid-April
- Group 2 (mid-stocking period) – late April through early May
- Group 3 (late fish stocking) - after early May

This provides flexibility for Fish Production Section to stock fish when appropriate. Neal presented a spreadsheet that shows the preferred timing for the various stocking locations which is included at the end of the minutes. Besides the groupings above several columns outlining considerations are in the spreadsheet as shown below.

Prescription Level 2

This is the target number to stock at this location. Our prescriptions include a range of stocking numbers, but Level 2 is the preferred or target number.

Hatchery

This identifies which hatchery typically supplies the steelhead to be stocked at this location. For steelhead, hatcheries are Thompson State Fish Hatchery (Thompson) and Wolf Lake State Fish Hatchery (Wolf Lake). Eagle Lake strain rainbow trout come from Harrietta State Fish Hatchery (Harrietta). Atlantic salmon are raised at Platte River State Fish Hatchery (Platte) and at Harrietta.

Management Biologist

Identifies which management biologist has this stocking location in his/her area of responsibility. Dutton and Gostiaux are from Southern Lake Huron Management Unit, while Cwalinski and Godby are from Northern Lake Huron Management Unit.

Preferred Stocking Site / Site from Rx

This is the preferred stocking location (e.g., bridge or boat launch) from the prescription.

Alternate Stocking Location

This provides an alternate location for the hatchery driver to stock the fish in circumstances where the preferred stocking site cannot be used (e.g., high water or ice cover).

Preferred Stocking Time Frame

This is potentially the ideal time frame to stock, considering cormorants and fish predators, water temperatures, and other parameters. Hatchery managers indicate that the early fish stocked are generally the largest, but they try to get the later fish up to better size before stocking as well.

Acceptable Stocking Time Frame

Self-explanatory.

Smolting Fish

This is whether we want to stock fish at the site that have smolted (or are in the process of smolting). This is a tradeoff and may be difficult for the hatcheries to time. Fish that haven't smolted yet may spend more time in the river and may be more likely to imprint to that river. Fish that have smolted are more likely to leave the stocking site quickly, thereby minimizing the time they are vulnerable to predation by other fish or cormorants.

APN

This column indicates if this is an Avian Predator Notification (APN) site.

Management Comments

Additional comments, if any, by management biologists.

Hatchery Comments

Additional comments, if any, by hatchery personnel.

The main outcome for this exercise is to come up with acceptable windows for stocking for each stocking location. Some sites have one acceptable time frame, some two, and some are fully flexible for when the fish could be stocked. Neal explained how the flexibility worked, showing differing numbers in each category. This document may be modified since it is a living document and will be adjusted as needed. Please provide input and feedback on any aspect of this plan so we can adapt in an informed manner. When implemented, this should improve survival and hopefully the return of stocked fish. Tim said this is a pretty big step for us by better incorporating a big picture approach that can make sense for everyone.

Even though the spreadsheet for stocking ATS was not discussed during the meeting it was compiled and is also included at the end of the minutes.

Frank said there are likely comments and question that members have on the stocking topic.

Dennis Eade, asked about another stocking window for Atlantics, extending into June. Ed Eisch said the Harrietta hatchery may be able to hold fish a little longer, but it would be difficult to do this at the Platte River Hatchery because the warming surface waters require them to stock the fish while healthy. The Platte fish the last few years were transferred to the St. Marys River turbine bay early to get the fish out of the hatchery into cooler waters until stocking.

Randy Terrian commended the DNR on collaborating and putting the stocking spreadsheet together. Randy realizes the hatchery constraints, predation concerns, etc., and applauds the effort so far. He has one issue he would like to talk about, the Au Sable River. This is a good test site to focus on. He is happy to see the events occur in the mid- to late time frame. Could the index marked steelhead be move to the later time frame? Currently, they are scheduled for the early time frame, and Randy would like to see those coded wire tagged (CWT) fish moved to the late time frame. Neal mentioned that we would have to work with Fish Production personnel to see if this is viable or makes sense. Tim said the CWT tagged fish should provide information regardless of when they are stocked since all the steelhead stocked are marked with CWTs. If steelhead planted in the Au Sable River are split between Index marked fish and non-Index marked fish, the early and late stocked fish will have different marks. A lot of this will come down to hatchery logistics, and Ed Eisch says that since no steelhead will be stocked this year, there is time to adjust if needed. However, once mass marking allotment are made, flexibility within a year becomes more difficult. Ed Eisch said they will continue to do all they can to improve survival of stocked fish.

Randy Claramunt said it was 1:00 P.M. and if people wanted to hang on, we could go a bit farther on this topic.

Meaghan Gass introduced **Dan O'Keefe from Michigan Sea Grant**, who asked if a combination mark could be used, like what is done on the Manistee, so anglers could see these externally and report their relative catches. He said he would like to have more participation on the steelhead angler diary program for Huron tributary streams. As mentioned above more details are provided by the following link, <https://www.michiganseagrant.org/topics/fisheries-and-aquaculture/angler-citizen-science/great-lakes-angler-diary/>

Dan Manyen asked about past studies of stocking survival, and how different temperature and water conditions affect survival and how long they stay within the stream before moving out. Addie says that she has seen some studies about varying returns based on upstream or downstream stocking locations, and that she has changed some locations to see if better survival will occur.

Frank said that the steelhead webinar organized by Dan O'Keefe has a lot of good information in it and discusses the results of many studies that have been done. Dan mentioned that the presentation was recorded and is being prepared for viewing on the Sea Grant website. Once the presentation is ready for public viewing, Dan will send the link to Frank to send out.

Tim Cwalinski said that often he wants stocked steelhead to be quickly smolting and getting out of the river systems to avoid predation. Neal and Addie say there are a lot of variables to consider depending on the river system.

Jim Johnson recognized the need for multiple marking batches to answer the question of the results of stocking at different times of the year, but also he recognized the logistical constraints. Tim agreed that getting enough information on returns can be problematic.

Roger Bergstedt remembered a lot of past discussions on Lake Ontario, with every raceway having a different tag lot. We need to know the amount of flexibility when marking fish to know how to best apply this methodology. Randy said that one raceway may supply several different sites, or a site may take more than one raceway. He also said that there are many difficulties with different levels of resolution, both on the stocking end and processing end (fish heads). There are lots of considerations that come into play in the stocking and marking discussion. Ed Eisch says we have some limited flexibility that can help with some specific questions.

Lee Martin asked if OTC chemical marking can be successfully used. Randy said we wouldn't know externally if these fish were marked, requiring a lot of effort to get information, as opposed to using an AD fin clip and Code Wire Tags..

Frank said that if there any additional questions or comments, please forward to Frank or Randy Claramunt and they will get those to the appropriate person.

Tom Andris asked about the **cisco program** in Lake Huron, the last he heard they weren't showing up in the stomachs during the diet study. Randy said that 1,000,000 ciscoes are targeted to be stocked in Saginaw Bay annually. The fish seem to be surviving initial stocking well, but how long they are persisting is still unknown. Dave Fielder said that the bait fishers have seen some cisco within days or weeks of stocking. Some of the fish seen in fish stomachs may have been bloaters, so we don't have great evidence yet of survival. This fall should be the first big test to show if any cisco will come back to spawn this year? It will probably take a full 10 years of stocking to evaluate this program. Brandon offered to share Chris Olds' presentation regarding cisco at this link, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DSKATC9T1Lw>. The Cisco presentation is about 1 hour and 5 minutes into the recording.

Ed Blissick complemented Randy Terrian on his stocking monitoring efforts and highlighted the Great Lakes Salmon Initiative's program to increase head turn-ins and wanted Randy to keep his reward for turning in heads and winning a drawing. He also asked about the potential impact of cisco on the overall fish community, perhaps preying on young fish of other species. Randy Claramunt said that it would be hoped that cisco could provide alternate prey for predator species when young, but they may grow out of that prey window later and provide a fishery. He said we don't want to introduce more risks, hence keeping the egg source of ciscoes within Lake Huron. If we don't see fish in a couple years, we will get a better idea of survival. If they do show up, a lot of work will ensue to see what they are eating (stable isotope work, etc.). Ed just wanted to urge caution.

Randy Terrian told Ed Blissick not send him the reward money for winning in the Great Lakes Salmon Initiative drawing program for turning in **steelhead heads**. Randy indicated he wanted to donate the reward back to the group to put towards future work. Randy also mentioned some properties located along the Saginaw River system may become **parks** which would be a plus for anglers.

Dan Manyen wondered how cisco would compete with **lake whitefish** and mentioned the declining whitefish situation. Randy said a lot of diet work has been done on cisco, which are eating a lot of non-native species including spiny water fleas. The lake whitefish problem is occurring in areas where no cisco occur, and he doesn't think cisco interactions are a great player in whitefish population levels. Dan said anglers have caught some whitefish and their diet includes some invasives, especially gobies. He said north of Caseville near Pinnebog River he once saw lots of juvenile whitefish in his past bait collection efforts.

Dave Fielder said we have seen **good walleye year classes** the past few years.

Dave Borgeson mentioned the upcoming Great Lakes Fishery Commission Lake Committee meetings, which will have a lot of Lake Huron presentations, might be of interest to Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee Members. Also, if you are interested in discussions of the other Great Lakes, each day during the week of March 22 will be devoted to a different Lake. You may register for these free online meetings at this link, <http://www.glfsc.org/lake-committee-registration.php>.

Roger Bergstedt indicated that there are a lot of proposals for research coming in, one with whitefish telemetry involving both Ontario and Michigan. Frank said there is a lot of interest in rehabilitating the whitefish populations in Lakes Huron and Michigan among the various agencies the recreational stakeholders.

Ken Merckel asked about lake trout in southern Lake Huron, and said they are disappearing in this area unless you go very deep toward the middle of the lake. Randy Claramunt said that there wasn't support across the Great Lakes Fishery Commission Lake Huron Committee for increased lake trout stocking, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (the agency that stocks lake trout) wasn't supportive of increased stocking if the Lake Committee was not supportive. Frank said he and Randy have been talking about this and will put this issue on a future agenda. Lake trout recruitment may not be sufficient to offset the lake trout that are being harvested in southern Lake Huron. Ken said he and Judy Ogden will participate in the Great Lakes Fishery Commission Advisor meetings in March. Randy said that the Ontario advisors are the lynch pin to this, since they have not been supportive to date of increased lake trout stocking, and it may be worthwhile for Ken and Judy to touch base with the Ontario advisors. Ken asked about the cisco program and the proposed stocking on the reefs, and why stocking has varied from the initial plan. Randy says the evaluation plan has evolved, and may continue to evolve when some of the initial questions have been answered. There is concern that transferring the hatchery fish to boats and traveling out on the lake may induce unnecessary stress to the cisco.

2:00 pm Adjourn.

Please see the next two pages for the Steelhead and Atlantic Salmon stocking spreadsheets.