

## **Lake Superior Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee**

A citizen-based committee charged to review and provide input and advice relative to fishery goals, objectives and management plans for Lake Superior. Members assist Fisheries Division in charting the future course of fisheries management by providing voice to and for the diversity of citizens' interests in the Lake Superior basin.

### **April 2, 2020 (9:30 AM – 12:00 PM) Meeting Minutes**

Meeting conducted by members Joining via Microsoft Teams Meeting

#### **Welcome and Roll Call Committee members and Attendees:**

Patrick Hanchin starts the meeting with introductions.

Attendees (25): Patrick Hanchin, Rodney Markham, Ross Rinkinen, Larry Argall, Marv Gerlach, Brett DeLonge, Terry Short, Christian LeSage, Seth Herbst, Cory Kovacs, Shawn Sitar, Troy Zorn, Ed Baker, Randy Claramunt, Donna Wesander, John Highlen, Travis White, Martha Gerig, Brandon Gerig, Lauren Jescovich, George Lindquist, Floyd Dropps, Stephanie Swart, Kristi Dahlstrom, George Madison

#### **Agenda:**

See Attachment #1.

#### **Minutes**

Meeting minutes were recorded by George Madison. The minutes of each LSCFAC will be posted on the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) website ([link](#)).

#### **Review and approval of April 2019 meeting minutes:**

There were no suggested edits to the 2019 meeting minutes, therefore the 2019 spring minutes were approved.

#### **Michigan DNR Fisheries Division Covid-19 update (Patrick Hanchin):**

Attendees received an update about Fisheries Division's current plans with respect to the Covid virus. Most of the DNR staff are working from home, except for fish hatchery employees. Creel surveys are not being conducted at this time. Walleye, muskellunge, and steelhead egg takes have been cancelled. DNR has cancelled walleye and musky egg takes in the past due to an outbreak of a fish virus (VHS). Fish stocking will be expedited using only hatchery staff. Because of the fewer number of drivers, fish stocking sites will be consolidated greatly – many sites receiving a small number of fish will not be stocked this year. The reduction of stocking sites will allow for expedited stocking with less exposure of employees to public contacts. USFWS is making similar changes with no offshore stocking and no overnight trips. Fish marking (CWT, clips) will not occur unless marking occurred prior to the pandemic. USFWS has not identified sea lamprey treatments as essential or non-essential yet, but DFO has suspended all lamprey treatments in Canada for now. There is a hiring freeze for the State of Michigan. Current vacancies in the Lake Superior Basin include the Keweenaw Bay and Marquette creel clerks. Some popular fishing sites where people tend to congregate (piers, dams) are being closed. Most fishing tournaments are cancelled through May 15.

#### **Creel data overview (Hanchin, Kovacs, and Madison):**

We reviewed a creel data summary showing, in a graph-format, the angler effort for Lake Superior. Angler effort is 20% higher than 20-year average. Lake-wide harvest of lake trout and siscowet showed mild fluctuations from year to year with lake trout generally increasing since 2007. Splake and brown trout harvest has increased in recent years. The increased catch of splake might be attributable to recent splake stockings in Keweenaw Bay, and the increased catches of brown trout are likely the result of the WDNR stocking brown trout in Chequamegon Bay. Coho salmon harvest has been increasing recently and is well above the 20-y average. Chinook harvest is steady with an average of around 1,700 fish. A desire to see a return of Chinook stocking for Lake Superior was brought up. Staff reminded members of the committee that an assessment of returns of stocked fish consistently showed that 95% or more of chinook salmon were naturally produced and there are currently no plans for resuming stocking. **[Note: This was discussed at the April 6, 2016 LSCFAC meeting with general acceptance of the direction to cease stocking and continue monitoring the fishery.]** Both lake whitefish and cisco harvest have been variable, with cisco harvest very low and whitefish averaging about 13,000 fish lake wide. Finally, Hanchin showed the committee a website where creel survey data can be easily queried and visualized in graphic format ([link to creel survey portal](#)). A question was made on the potential use of angler apps or volunteer reporting to obtain data when/where creel clerks are not present. Staff will investigate options, but these produce more qualitative data as there is not a statistically valid design that includes randomization.

#### Status of Lake Trout in Lake Superior (Shawn Sitar):

Fisheries Division's Marquette research biologist Shawn Sitar presented information on the status of Lake Trout in Lake Superior. Shawn's presentation reviewed the past and current position of lean lake trout (referred to as "Leans"), trends in adult populations, trends in juveniles, sea lamprey wounding, trends in total mortality, and a map-picture of the locations of netting sampling stations. Leans at many Lake Superior ports are showing population abundances that are below the long-term averages. The lowest abundances of leans are seen west of the Keweenaw Peninsula; however, this area is not the best lake trout habitat due to sandy nature of the shoreline, offering lower spawning habitat. Western basin trends are at a low level, but overall are at status quo. MI-4, which is the area East of the Keweenaw Peninsula, is the most productive lake trout unit, largely due to a good forage base. MI-4 is showing a bit of a decline over past 10 years. MI-5, which is the Marquette area, is in a pretty steady state. Munising, MI-6, is also steady with the fishery trending close to the long-term average. Most areas are experiencing a resurgence in recruitment. Sea lamprey wounding rates are higher than target level and lamprey are highest source of mortality on lake trout. Munising and Grand Marais are showing to be the areas with the highest sea lamprey wounding rates. Total mortality rates for lake trout fluctuate, but overall are well below target levels. In summary, lake trout are abundant in Lake Superior, they are healthy, we're seeing good survival, and a resurgence in recruitment. Lake trout populations at Stannard Rock, Isle Royale, and Big reef, are also abundant and healthy.

Questions from the meeting attendees: What's the plan for the US Fish and Wildlife Service sea lamprey control program this summer? **[Per a 2020-04-08 call of the GLFC-Council of Lake Committees the USFWS is planning for the field season to potentially begin in May, June, or July. For each month they will re-evaluate treatment plans. Some traps will not be operated this year. A worst-case scenario is for them to only treat 2 Great Lakes. Further discussion will occur with the CLC.]** What age is a 20-inch lake trout? Likely in the range of 8-11 years old. The minimum size limit for lake trout is 15 inches, which is usually an age-5 fish.

### Continued discussion of Lake Trout reef protections (John Highlen & Travis White):

This discussion topic was a continuation of a similar agenda conversation from the 2019 Lake Superior Citizen Fish Advisory Meeting. John Highlen and Travis White discussed a summary of their work on opportunities to collect angler effort data from offshore reefs, with emphasis on Stannard Rock where there is a lighthouse that could be used as a facility to mount cameras. John Highlen visited Stannard Rock last summer and he reports that the lighthouse has limited power using marine batteries with a solar charger. Travis is reviewing cameras that are used at Michigan Technological University (MTU), which have good image resolution but would require an upgrade to batteries since they require 25 amps. The Conservation group, Superior Watershed Partnership, manages the lighthouse and they are okay with mounting a camera(s) on a rail of the lighthouse. John and Travis will be looking for a funding source for purchasing cameras and will be doing further research on power-source options for running these cameras. Other discussion on whether cameras could be placed at ports to potentially evaluate boats heading to the reef. Staff will also investigate whether we could ask anglers during creel surveys if they fished at Stannard Rock.

### Law Enforcement Division update (Terry Short):

Terry Short gave an overview of Law Enforcement Division's Great Lake activities on Lake Superior. Terry states that the Great Lakes Enforcement Unit is now fully staffed, and they have stationed a 40-ft patrol vessel in Marquette. The Unit is gearing up for the summer season which includes activities such as public safety, resource protection, and commercial fishing oversight. The Department is engaged in legislative processes to modernize commercial fishing statute, which has passed the House of Representatives and is currently in the Senate. Law Enforcement Division now has a smart-phone app to track nets in the Great Lakes. If boaters come across an abandoned net, or become entangled in a net, they are encouraged to contact the Law Enforcement Division.

### New sportfishing regulations for this year (Patrick Hanchin):

- Lake whitefish, cisco, and Menominee now have a combined possession limit of 10 for Great Lakes and 5 for inland (Menominee previously had an unlimited daily possession limit). This regulation change is due to the threatened status of many inland cisco populations as well as issues associated with difficulties in identification between the species.
- The season on Types A and D trout lakes was extended to the month of October (the season previously closed September 30). These lakes are largely put-and-take fisheries managed for trout where there is little natural reproduction. This season extension will allow for more recreation opportunity for trout anglers.
- Beginning with the 2020 fishing season, there will be changes on Michigan-Wisconsin boundary waters whereby the muskellunge minimum size limit has been changed to 50 inches to match the Wisconsin muskellunge regulation. Also, the season for bass and muskellunge was extended through December 31 (previously ended Nov 30).
- In the Portage-Torch waterway (Houghton County) and the St. Marys River, a catch-and-immediate-release season from July 16 to March 15 was added for lake sturgeon.

### Regulation proposals for 2021 (Patrick Hanchin):

- Party fishing - A discussion of possession limits & party fishing started with some law enforcement issues regarding walleye on the Detroit River. Party fishing is the activity of

anglers pooling their catch into one group, such as a single live well, where the combined possession limit is viewed as the daily possession limit multiplied by the number of anglers. Party fishing is currently not allowed though in practice occurs in some situations, such as on Charter boats where multiple anglers put their fish into the same cooler. This issue is not clear cut as considerations must be made for sharing a live well on a boat, sharing a stringer on a pier, and fish perhaps strewn about on the ice near holes. Internally within the DNR there is not consensus on this issue. One way it could be interpreted if it moves forward is that possession limits for anglers fishing together would be enforced as a party, but when anglers leave the water they could only possess a single limit for an angler.

- There was discussion if party fishing should be allowed for all species. A concern was stated that this would affect the current brook trout daily possession limit, which was just recently reduced from 10 fish back to 5. The majority of members of the LSCFAC supported the idea of party fishing for certain fishing (charter boats, Great Lakes fishing, yellow perch) but there was concern noted by several members regarding party fishing outside of a boat such as wading or bank fishing streams. Michigan United Conservation Clubs currently has no policy on this issue, so they did not weigh in on the issue at this time.
- Northern Pike catch-and-immediate-release proposal - When Michigan Bass Nation originally requested consideration of a catch-and-release season for bass, they recognized that it would affect enforcement and proposed catch-and-release for northern pike, walleye, and muskellunge as well; however, Fisheries Division did not want to take all species at that time. Now that bass and muskellunge have catch-and-immediate-release (CIR) seasons the Michigan Musky Alliance proposed that northern pike should have a CIR season as well. The MMA believes that allowing CIR for northern pike would increase opportunities, lessen the burden on Conservation Officers making judgement calls on angler intent, and follow the regulatory framework described in the Management Plan for Northern Pike in Michigan. It is also believed by MMA, that aligning northern pike CIR with largemouth bass and muskellunge makes sense to anglers and helps to simplify regulations. Fisheries Division committed to the NRC that we would have more discussion on the issue so it went to the internal biologist meeting (biologists were split on issue), and is going to be brought to Coffee & Conversations, and the Warmwater Resources Steering Committee.
  - One concern noted by a member of the LSCFAC was the potential effect on walleye as they frequent areas similar to northern pike in the spring. Another comment included the possible consideration of barbless hooks during this time or artificial lures only. The majority of members commenting on this issue were in support of a CIR season for northern pike.

#### Draft Inland Walleye Management Plan (Patrick Hanchin):

Fisheries Division is in the process of developing an inland walleye management plan. An inland trout plan was recently developed, and musky and northern pike are already done. The first draft is still in the process of development with the writing team. At some point the draft will be made available to public and various angling groups to review.

#### Keweenaw Waterway walleye movement study (Troy Zorn):

Marquette fisheries research biologist Troy Zorn gave an overview of an upcoming Houghton County Portage-Torch waterway acoustic telemetry study. Acoustic receivers are already in place for sturgeon movement studies. The goals of study are to quantify the amount of time that walleye use various waterbodies in the Keweenaw Waterway, to quantify use of habitats by adult walleyes during the spawning season, to quantify the amount of time that walleyes

use Torch Lake and are potentially exposed to higher levels of contaminants in the AOC, and to determine what proportion of walleyes tagged in the Portage-Torch Lake system seasonally migrate into Lake Superior. This is a collaborative project involving numerous stakeholders which include resource management partners and universities. Troy would hope to acoustically tag 40 walleyes this year. The existing “stay at home” policy for DNR staff and partner groups will delay this project for a future date.

Buffalo Reef activities (Patrick Hanchin):

This summer there was to be over-land and over-water borings to determine depth and composition of stamp sands on Buffalo Reef; however, all Buffalo Reef activities related to the \$3 million appropriation from the State of Michigan are on hold for now. Partners are working on designing a study to determine the Reef’s contribution toward local and lake wide whitefish and lake trout production. The first step is to evaluate whether the reef produces a unique chemical signature in the otoliths of fish hatched there.

Partners for Watershed Restoration (John Highlen):

John described this multi-agency and multi-stakeholder partnership that aims to protect brook trout habitats and to improve degraded coldwater habitats. The Partners for Watershed Restoration group just recently met, and they have developed several project ideas that would benefit brook trout in the western Upper Peninsula of Michigan. The Partners group will be looking at grant opportunities to hopefully implement some tangible projects this summer or next year.

2020 Consent Decree for 1836 Territory Great Lakes Waters (Patrick Hanchin):

Negotiations with tribes began in September 2019. Some progress was made but parties recently decided to utilize a mediator to further progress. Face-to-face meetings are on hold due to the pandemic, but we are hopeful that negotiations will continue remotely.

Advisor round-table report (All):

- Upper Peninsula Sportfishing Alliance: In addition to supporting party fishing, it was mentioned that we should allow family fishing whereby parents could help youngsters.
- MUCC: This group is currently entertaining the following resolutions.
  - encourage the use of non-lead alternatives (ammo and fishing),
  - encourage State of Michigan to work on providing more boat wash facilities,
  - encourage biological input on aquatic vegetation treatment permits
  - encourage a change in the restricted hours for access sites to allow night bow fishing
  - Commercial fishing bills, MUCC would like to receive more stakeholder written support.
- Isle Royale Boaters Association: This group is pursuing projects in partnership with the Isle Royale National Park. The Park is currently closed but might open later this June, or even later. The US Army Corps of Engineers is reviewing a project proposal to upgrade and enhance the Eagle Harbor harbor boat launch, and there are talks of getting an improved marina at Eagle Harbor.
- Copper Country Walleye Association: Willing and interested to partner with Troy Zorn on walleye work and any boat washing facility locations.
- Fred Waara chapter of Trout Unlimited: This group is working on projects in the Iron River area. Their annual spring banquet/fundraiser has been rescheduled to October which could affect some funding of projects.

- Central Upper Peninsula Sportfishing Association: This group was the fiscal agent for funds that were used for the Marquette County Deer Lake Area of Concern (AOC). There was \$12,000 of remaining monies in the Deer Lake AOC finances. Now that Deer Lake has been delisted as an AOC, the monies needed to be dispersed. The \$12,000 was split to 50-50 to the Ishpeming High School and the Westwood High School for future scholarships.
- Keweenaw Charters: Observing highest catches for past 10-15 years. Splake and brown trout appear to be about 24% of annual creel under modest stocking. These species are very important for nearshore fishery. If WDNR is looking for a Superior brown trout broodstock, there may be some opportunities in Michigan streams.

Attachment #1



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**April 2, 2020 (9:30 AM – 12:00 PM) Meeting Agenda**

Co-Chairs Rodney Markham & Ross Rinkinen

Alger County Fish and Game Alliance  
Bay Mills Indian Community  
Black River Harbor Boating Club  
Central Upper Peninsula Sport Fishing Association  
Copper Country Trout Unlimited  
Copper Country Walleye Association  
DNR Fisheries Division  
DNR Law Enforcement Division  
Fisher Price Charters  
Fred Waara Chapter Trout Unlimited  
Grand Marais Sportmans Club  
Isle Royale Boaters Association  
Keweenaw Charters  
Keweenaw Splake Anglers  
Lake Superior State University Aquatic Research Laboratory  
Michigan Sea Grant  
Michigan United Conservation Clubs  
Office of the Great Lakes  
Ottawa Sportsmen's Club  
Sand Point Charter  
South Shore Fishing Association  
Thill's Fish House, Inc.  
Upper Peninsula Sportsmen's Alliance

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1. Welcome and Roll Call
2. Review and approval of April 2019 meeting minutes
3. Creel data overview (Hanchin, Kovacs, and Madison, 15 min)
4. Status of Lake Trout in Lake Superior (Shawn Sitar, 15 min)
5. Continued discussion of Lake Trout reef protections (John Highlen & Travis White, 15 min)
6. Law Enforcement Division update (Marv Gerlach, 15 min)
7. New Regulations in 2020 (15 min)
  - a. Whitefish, Cisco, & Menominee combined possession limit
  - b. Season on Type A & D Lakes
  - c. Michigan-Wisconsin boundary water regulations
8. Potential Regulations for 2021 (15 min)
  - a. Possession limits & party fishing proposal
  - b. Northern Pike catch-and-immediate-release proposal
9. Draft Inland Walleye Management Plan (Patrick Hanchin, 5 min)
10. Keweenaw Waterway walleye movement study (Troy Zorn, 5 min)
11. Buffalo Reef activities (Patrick Hanchin, 5 min)
12. Partners for Watershed Restoration (John Highlen, 5 min)
13. Advisor roundtable reports (10 minutes)

❖ Documents sent prior to the meeting for review

- April 2019 meeting minutes
- Creel Survey Summary