



Lake Superior Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes

Location: Virtual meeting

Date: Sep. 29, 2021

Present for the Lake Superior Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee:

- Rodney Markham (chair)
- Stephanie Swart
- Ross Rinkinen
- John Highlen
- Travis White
- George Lindquist
- Tim Gasperich

Present for the Department of Natural Resources:

- Patrick Hanchin, Lake Superior Basin Coordinator
- George Madison, Western Lake Superior Management Unit Fisheries Biologist
- Cory Kovacs, Eastern Lake Superior Management Unit Fisheries Biologist
- Ed Baker, Marquette Fisheries Research Station Manager
- Shawn Sitar, Fisheries Research Biologist
- Donna Wesander, Charter Program Specialist
- Cpl. Brett DeLonge, Commercial Fish Specialist

Meeting minutes

Opening Comments:

Chair Markham welcomed everyone and took roll call. Seven of the nineteen official members of the Committee were present along with seven staff members from the DNR. The agenda was approved as provided prior to the meeting. Following the meeting it was discovered that the meeting invitation was not sent to new member Dennis VanLandschoot as he joined the committee after the meeting invitation was initially sent.

Basin Coordinator Update

Patrick mentioned that the DNR has delayed the mandatory return to office date for staff to Oct 31. Remote work is also now an option for some classifications though staff at Customer Service Centers will be required to work some number of days per pay period (yet to be determined). The Buffalo Reef Task Force continues to work toward a long-term solution to the stamp sands deposited at Gay, Michigan. Soil borings were completed this summer on the beach and in the water to determine the volume of stamp sands and to map the depth to native sand. Soil borings were also made in a potential upland disposal site. Removal of stamp sands that accrete at the Traverse River breakwall continue and will need to continue until a long-term solution is reached. DNR Fisheries is developing a climate change action plan that will be shared when completed. Wisconsin DNR has a similar document that has been published and will be shared with the committee. These documents are valuable for communicating with the public about changes that should be expected. People working on climate change issues have developed a framework for decision-making on ecosystems undergoing change that describes the ways managers may respond. It boils down to Resist, Accept, or Direct. Finally, Patrick reminded the committee to let the DNR know about unique observations (e.g., abnormal stomach contents in fish) made while hunting/fishing as hunters and anglers can be the “eyes in the field”.

Discussion regarding observers from other States/Provinces

This concept was approved in April 2012 by the committee. Unsure extent of invitations that were sent but did not appear to be much external attendance based on minutes. Wanted to revisit to make sure committee is okay with this. Hanchin would possibly extend offer to partner agencies on Lake Superior Committee (Great Lakes Fishery Commission). Members of the committee could suggest people to invite as well from other states. The committee was in support of this idea.

Potential for angler collection of stomachs for diet studies

A Fisheries Division fish diet study is ongoing for fish collected during Great Lakes vessel surveys (lake trout, lake whitefish, burbot). Minnesota DNR is engaging their anglers with collecting fish stomachs for diet studies. Shawn Sitar discussed the diet study idea using a brief PowerPoint. Vessel surveys do not capture many salmon, brown trout, steelhead, and shallow-water fishes due to depth of vessel survey nets. Michigan DNR's Marquette research station has an ongoing program to collect stomachs from fish collected during survey efforts. The diet study is a tool to assess population health, nutrition and conditions of predators, and diet overlap. If this diet study was broadened to collect stomachs from anglers, it would likely be from a select group who are signed up for the program, rather than a drop-box collection from all anglers. A diet study on Lake Huron had financial contributions from organizations to help offset the cost of student assistants. We may be able to do it with NMU students for free though should consider paying, if possible. Could also consider incentives for turning in

stomachs and could seek donations for that. The committee had thoughts and questions and overall support was voiced for the idea.

Results of Lake Superior Angler Survey and Plan for Additional Input for Management Plan

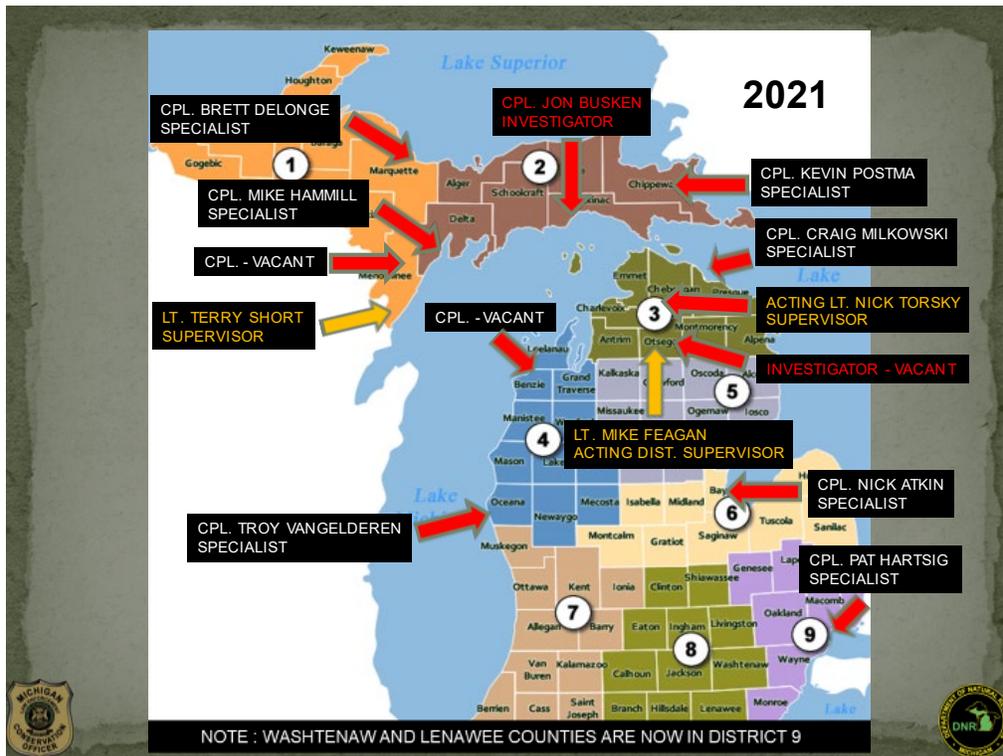
Hanchin touched on some of the responses from the public survey that will help inform the Lake Superior Management Plan. All responses will be summarized as an appendix in the plan. Most respondents were from Michigan and particularly the UP though a few were from other states. A summary of the slides presented are as follows:

- High proportion indicated that fishing is one of their most important recreational activities.
- Many anglers fished more than 20 times in past 12 months, indicative of avid anglers.
- Many people had 20+ years of experience fishing Lake Superior.
- Fish targeted most often on Lake Superior were lake trout, followed by salmon and steelhead.
- Fish targeted most often on tributaries to Lake Superior were brook trout, steelhead, and walleye. Speculation that some respondents may have considered angling above lower-most barriers.
- Anglers supported more restrictive lake trout regulations on offshore reefs.
- An example of a question where anglers were split was regarding reduced possession limits vs. shortened seasons if regulations were needed to reduce lake trout harvest. Anglers were split 50:50.
- Native species vs. non-native management was voiced. Respondents recommended seeking balance between the two management themes but also expressed support for native species management in the comments.
- Anglers supported the current coaster brook trout fishing regulations.
- There were 1,014 general comments provided that were all read, categorized, and enumerated. The summary will be provided as an appendix in the plan. Many comments indicating concern about native American fishing so some education will be needed regarding treaty rights. Respondents also produced a “wish list” asking for essentially every species of fish to be stocked. Our job will be to determine where stocking is needed and feasible, resulting in return on investment. Was happy that many comments indicated that anglers understand that conserving and improving habitat should be a priority.
- This winter staff plan to meet with tribes and organized angler groups to seek additional input as we draft the plan.

Law Enforcement Update

Cpl. DeLonge provided a summary of the Great Lakes Enforcement Unit staffing (see map below). Two (1,800' and 500') old gill nets were recently retrieved near Marquette. Identification was made for one. Over the summer there were several sightings and retrievals of lost nets. Committee members were briefed on vessel updates. Law staff participated in a patrol in Monroe County with Michigan State Police, which focused on inspections of vehicles coming into

Michigan. Michigan DNR Law Enforcement Division hopes to fill the two Corporal vacancies this fall. The Upper Peninsula position will most likely be moving from the Bays de Noc area to Lake Superior. The Traverse City position is staying there. The vacant Lower Peninsula investigator position is temporarily vacant as that person is the acting Lower Peninsula supervisor. The vacant supervisor positions currently filled with interim acting positions will be filled next year.



Advisor Roundtable Reports

- Copper Country Walleye Association: Slower summer on Portage for walleye catches, clearer water this year. Lots of small northern pike in Portage.
- Stephanie Swart: Measuring tapes for angler diet can be obtained from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (Carolyn Koch) through their Eat Safe Fish program. [Carolyn will work with Shawn Sitar to get tapes shipped to the Marquette Fisheries Research Station].
- Fred Waara Trout Unlimited: Comments about low water conditions this summer. The Chapter is working with the Alger Conservation District and in Iron County on projects. Tree planting will be occurring this October on Lost Creek (Marquette). The Fred Waara chapter is working on expanding the Trout Unlimited partnership to the eastern portion of the Upper Peninsula.
- Isle Royale Boaters Association: Good year of fishing at the Keweenaw Peninsula and Isle Royale. Good spring and through July but August was tougher. Heavy marking from

lamprey was observed on lake trout. Baitfish marked on east end of Isle Royale was highest observed in a while though fish seemed small. Downrigger weights would shake when going through bait. One fish snagged on weight was 12" cisco. Scum line on north shore tapered off after 2 weeks.

- Travis White: Busy charter season for all with lots of bookings by customers. Lake trout were the main target. Spring fishing was slow likely due to low runoff and lack of stained water. Thermocline over 140' with 60-degree water still. Splake fishing at Copper Harbor picking up recently. Coho runs are just starting and runs down a bit thus far. Snagged 4 lost nets this year and 3 of them were recovered. Steve Amsler from the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission and Brett DeLonge from MDNR were helpful. Travis tried to keep a boat fender and 200' line for purposes of marking lost nets. This helps beyond GPS since the nets can move quite a bit.
- Keweenaw Splake Anglers: Fall fishing for splake at Copper Harbor has been tough so far but should pick up. Held a kid's fishing day in Calumet at Swedetown Pond with stocked bluegills.
- Michigan United Conservation Club: Comments regarding warm water on Lake Superior this summer out of Marquette and Big Bay. Hard to fish if you are limited to 100' by gear. Pike left shallow water much earlier. MUCC has passed a resolution against the use of trotlines, jug lines. With respect to commercial fish regulations, MUCC would like to see updates on these regulation proposals, and MUCC does not support allowing commercial fishermen to keep gamefish. Mentioned regulations in Wisconsin that allow commercial fishers to keep lake trout and they had to shut down recreational fishing since quota was met.

Next meeting of the Lake Superior Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee

April 6, 2022 at 6:30 (eastern) in Marquette or virtual (TBD).