



Northern Inland Lakes Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee

Established by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, to improve and maintain fishery resources through better communication and partnership.

Northern Inland Lakes Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee Meeting Friday, October 14, 2021 Tuscarora Township Hall Indian River MI

Approved

Attendees: Irvin Dedow, Rick Colonna, Mac Richardson, Steven Roznowski, Tom Ludwig, Robert Garant, Paul Borg, Herm Boatin, John Everett, Paul Fox, Frank Krist (Committee Chair), Tim Cwalinski (DNR facilitator), JP Van Ostenberg, Dave Hutto, Wayne Blomberg, John Hutto, Ron Dulak, Roger Bergstedt, Emily Martin, Lindsey Henski, Jeffrey Powers.

Welcome and Introductions: Thank you to the township for accommodating our group. Introductions were made. Long Lake Association (attendees) volunteered to cover the meeting venue cost for the next public meeting (\$25) if at the Indian River Tuscarora Township Hall.

Round Table Update:

Wayne Blomberg— Pickerel/Crooked Lake Association (PCLA): Lots of bluegill have been caught. Heard a little about a drop off in yellow perch numbers. Small pike are also caught, so I am interested in future pike regulations for both lakes. PCLA is actively monitoring and treating Eurasian water milfoil in the watershed near the town of Conway, and phragmites on the other end of Crooked Lake. Two lake sturgeon were captured in the locks this year, which was a surprise for some. Operators opened the Crooked Lake end lock to release them from the gates/lock.

Roger Bergstedt — Black Lake: Black Lake is dependent on stocking efforts for walleye. There have been a few years where there have been low numbers stocked by DNR or the lake association. Fishing for walleye was flat this year on Black Lake (again). As an angler, you can see the missing year classes in the harvest. There were many algal blooms in 2020 and a late one in 2021. These blooms were reported to EGLE, and they are monitoring the situation.

JP Van Ostenberg — Michigan Musky Alliance: Have been on some muskellunge fishing outings to collect data for Tim Cwalinski [Winyah, Cooke and Loud ponds]. The weather was incredibly poor with thunderstorms for fishing these sites. Reports from Mullett and Black lakes were positive with typical catch rates of muskellunge per angler. The Alliance has been posting the signs 'Know the Difference' regionally which help distinguish muskellunge versus northern pike. If you don't see one of those signs at your waters, please let the Alliance know, or the regional DNR fisheries biologist.

DNR Conservation Officer Paul Fox: Walleye season opener was slow at the Inland Waterway lakes and no significant law enforcement issues were observed. Grand Lake has been the hot spot for enforcement this year as it is as busy as ever for perch/walleye fishing, and general summer recreation. Long Lake seems to be bypassed by anglers enroute to fish Grand Lake.

Tom Ludwig-Long Lake Association (Alpena County): Anglers have been targeting walleye and are catching a lot of sublegal northern pike. Crawler harnesses and lures are bringing in 20-22 inch pike. Anglers are asking how to avoid catching pike. Fish habitat shelters have been placed in over 60 locations in the lake on an active EGLE permit over the last few years. Cwalinski and Ludwig discussed pike regulations for Long Lake and decided they would discuss them more (to liberalize pike regulations there) following the meeting.

Paul Borg— Grand Lake Association: Since the pandemic started there are more people on the lake than historically. Tournament fish catch results are generally low. The largest walleye caught during the tournaments was 21 inches. Smallmouth bass fishing has been good so the bass may be recovering from the recent decline in the fishery.

John Hutto – Burt Lake Preservation Society: John usually targets walleye, jigging with minnows. In the fall, he usually catches a few steelhead and rainbow trout. In the past five years, there has been no steelhead/rainbow trout caught. Smallmouth bass are present around the docks during spawning, but the numbers harvested have incredibly decreased. Bass fisherman are still out on the lake, but it doesn't seem like they are doing very well. Harvested zero walleye this year compared to 125 in a typical year. In general, the Burt Lake folks who spoke talked about a noticeable decrease in the catches of all prized species.

Irv Dedow – did well fishing this winter, but outside the Inland Waterway on Munuscong Bay.

Steve Philip (via email) - Mullett Lake:

Species	Total Catch	Largest Catch
Northern pike	340	12#s 38"
Walleye	190	23"
Smallmouth bass	10	21"
Steelhead/Rainbow Trout	81	27" 7.5#s
Cisco	3	16"

Grand Total of fish caught 624

Personal Observations

- 1) Fewer northern pike caught in 2021 than last year and fish were smaller. Every 10th fish was a keeper.
- 2) Walleye size and quantity about the same as last year.
- 3) Round goby were bigger than last year. Up to 4 inches in length.
- 4) Couldn't catch yellow perch until mid-July. Then, limit catches on a regular basis. All perch were small. When we wanted a perch fry, we cleaned and ate 7" fish.
- 5) Population of trout was up from last year. From the beginning of August, the only trout stomach content were spiny water fleas. None of the usual little perch were in their stomachs.
- 6) Up to 4" of spiny water fleas would collect on vertical down rigger lines.
- 7) Struggled to catch daylight walleyes. Finally gave up and fished in the dark primarily.

Where are the recent and past Northern Inland Lakes Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee meeting agendas and minutes housed and what are the responsibilities of the group with these materials:

Frank and Tim have records/meeting minutes/agendas dating back to when the committee Began in 2010. Only recent agendas and minutes are available electronically on the DNR website at [DNR - Northern Inland Lakes Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee \(michigan.gov\)](http://DNR - Northern Inland Lakes Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee (michigan.gov)). Two years of information is there. For older documents, committee chairs can assist you. As members, you are highly encouraged to review past meeting materials and share with others who you talk to about the Inland Waterway along with Grand and Long Lakes fish populations and management.

A preliminary summary of results for the 2021 Pickerel Lake Status and Trends summer fish community survey:

Pickerel Lake is located in Emmet County at 1,082 acres, has two tributaries, and one outlet. Pickerel Lake has had a multitude of surveys conducted, including adult walleye and pike population estimates, fall juvenile walleye evaluations, and aquatic vegetation surveys. How is the 2021 survey different? The 2021 survey was completed by DNR with its Status and Trends statewide protocol, which is designed to capture the entire fish community, using standardized gear/effort, and has different gear targets. The 2021 Status and Trends Survey yielded 3,996 fish, including 25 species, 5 panfish species and 7 predator species. The highlights of the survey documented an extremely strong bluegill and pumpkinseed population, acceptable numbers of natural reproducing walleye, and a very common and stunted northern pike population. See the fish abundance survey chart at the end of the minutes.

Status of liberalizing northern pike regulations for Crooked Lake and future pike regulations at Pickerel and Black lakes:

The committee was provided information on the stunted pike populations at Crooked Lake in a past meeting and the DNR and committee decided to pursue liberalized pike regulations at Crooked Lake. The DNR management unit put through the paperwork for this management scenario within the last year. The Natural Resources Commission met today (same day as this meeting) and pike regulation liberalization at Crooked Lake was one of the many topics for action. The proposal passed and pike regulations at Crooked Lake are now different from the statewide standard. The new regulations for pike in Crooked Lake are a daily possession limit of 5 northern pike of any size, of which only one fish kept may be 24 inches or larger.

What about similar northern pike regulations for Pickerel Lake and Black lakes? Pike growth has a lot to do with lake morphology. Recent high water levels have played a large part in increased spawning success.

Standard statewide pike regulations are a 24 inch minimum size limit with a two fish daily limit. There are two exceptions to this. Exception 1 is: no minimum size, 5 fish daily limit, and only one fish over 24 inches. Exception 2 is: 24-34 inch protected slot limit and a two fish daily limit (this exception is rarely used). Discussion ensued over northern pike data and recent interest in liberalizing pike regulations at Pickerel and Black lakes. Data suggests northern pike densities and growth at Pickerel Lake are similar to Crooked Lake. We have known over the past two decades that pike densities are high at Black Lake, and growth is average to below average for this species. The management unit has received two recent calls from the public requesting less strict regulations for pike at Black Lake.

The committee decided to support a process for moving forward with liberalizing northern pike regulations (5 fish daily possession, only one fish 24 inches or larger may be kept) at Pickerel and Black lakes. Wayne Blomberg with PCLA highly supported it for Pickerel Lake (as he did with Crooked Lake). Members present from the Black Lake Association were generally supportive and will discuss with members of the BLA and get back to the DNR on their thoughts on this process for Black Lake.

Standardized DNR large lake summer fish community surveys for the northeastern Lower Peninsula. What has been done, what has not? Why was the Black Lake fish community survey not completed in 2021 as was scheduled and will it be done?:

Status and Trends (S&T) Fish Community Surveys have been conducted throughout Michigan for the past 19 years. Prior to that, management units would survey their respective lakes how they saw fit. These types of fish community surveys were not comparable throughout Michigan, thus the survey protocol was developed at the statewide level around 2001. Certain species are more vulnerable to certain gear. S&T Surveys are completed based on computer generated random lists based on lake size. The Northern Lake Huron Management Unit out of Gaylord (covering the northeastern LP and eastern UP) has 13 lakes in the “large” strata (see table below). All but two of the lakes were completed with S/T spring/summer survey protocol from 2002-2020. The number of lakes in the “medium” and “small” strata is rather large. Biologists try to mix and match surveys in the strata nearly every year. See the Table below:

**Northern Lake Huron
Status & Trends
Lake List
Large Lakes**

	Waterbody	County	DEQ Sampling Year	Previous Survey	Acres_GIS
1	BURT	Cheboygan	2010		17394.553
2	PICKEREL	Emmet	2010		1082.266
3	GRAND	Presque Isle	2010	1995	5822.473
4	CEDAR	Alcona	2007		1057.123
5	OTSEGO	Otsego	2007		2012.62
6	ST. HELEN	Roscommon	2007	1999	2415.951
7	COOKE BASIN	Iosco			1634.991
8	FLETCHER POND	Alpena			6818.594
9	CROOKED	Emmet			2351.598
10	MULLETT	Cheboygan			16704.177
11	HUBBARD	Alcona			8767.841
12	BLACK	Cheboygan		1997	10113.456
13	VAN ETTEN	Iosco		1995	1409.111

Other types of lake surveys can be accomplished outside of the S&T program; examples include fall juvenile walleye surveys and walleye population estimates. Black Lake was scheduled for a 2021 S/T survey, but was not accomplished. Some reasons for not completing Black Lake include a shortage of personnel in 2021, questions with the effectiveness of fyke and trap netting on large shoal areas, and concerns with the use of overnight gill net sets (sturgeon mortality) at Black Lake. Not using a specific gear type is not an option with the S/T protocol. In addition, if a gear type can't be used effectively, than it simply is not an S/T survey. Due to these reasons, the management unit decided to use the survey protocol at the smaller Pickerel Lake (1,000 acres) in 2021 instead of Black Lake (10,000 acres) Will Black Lake make the S/T survey rotation eventually? There is no guarantee since equipment is standardized for S&T surveys and the use of gill nets are mandatory. These are concerns that need to be considered.

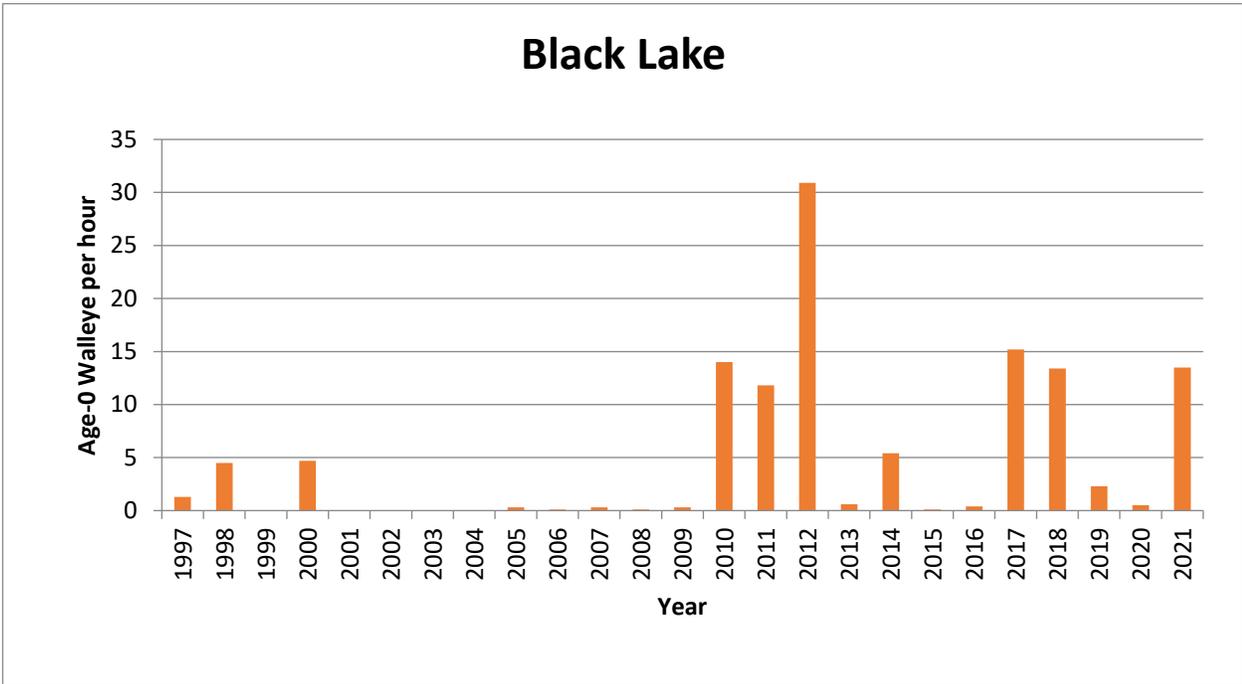
The 2021 spring fingerling walleye stocking summary for Black Lake; Fall 2021 electrofishing results for juvenile walleye at various Inland Waterway Lakes:

These surveys are conducted at night, using DC current in 2-5 feet of water, targeting juvenile walleye numbers (age 0). This is an index with great variability but are useful to compare multiple years at the same lake.

Black Lake – Stocking Events (spring fingerling walleye by DNR or tribal agencies)

- 2010 - 196,000
- 2011 - 119,000
- 2012 - 192,000
- 2014 - 204,000
- 2017 - 274,000
- 2018 - 242,000
- 2021 - 388,000

Catch rates of juvenile walleye remain low in non-stocking years and are more acceptable in stocking years. Higher fall juvenile catch rate was found in 2012 which was our second lowest year of stocking in terms of numbers. Higher stocking numbers do not correlate to a higher fall catch rate. In summary, periodic stocking is supporting the population. The graph below clearly shows the highest age-0 walleye catch rates correspond with stocking years. Some years were simply not surveyed (e.g. 2001-2004). Tim mentioned that many statewide lakes were not stocked in 2021, and Black Lake received a fairly generous number. DNR will likely not stock walleye fingerlings in Black Lake in 2022. It could receive fish if there is a surplus of pond reared walleye statewide (very rare), or if the tribes have surplus fish in 2022.



Mullett Lake – walleye (see graph below)

Stocked 2010-2013 with marginal returns based on fall electrofishing (even with a very large stocking event in 2013)

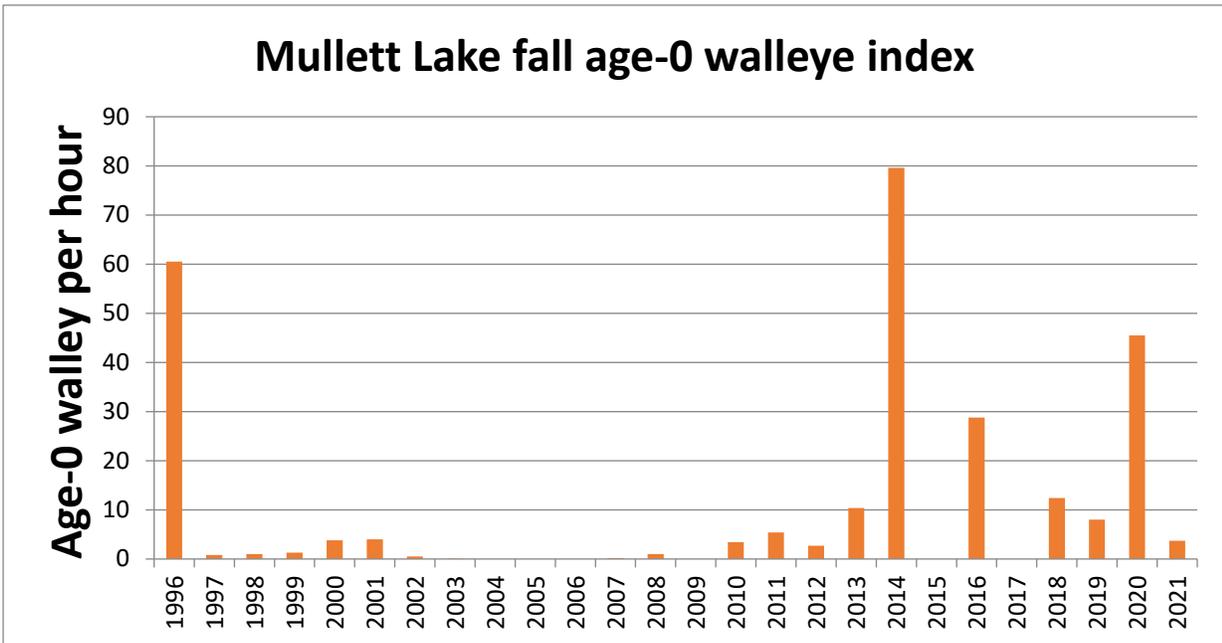
2014-2016 - strong natural reproduction

2017-2019 - good to acceptable natural reproduction

2020 - very strong wild year class

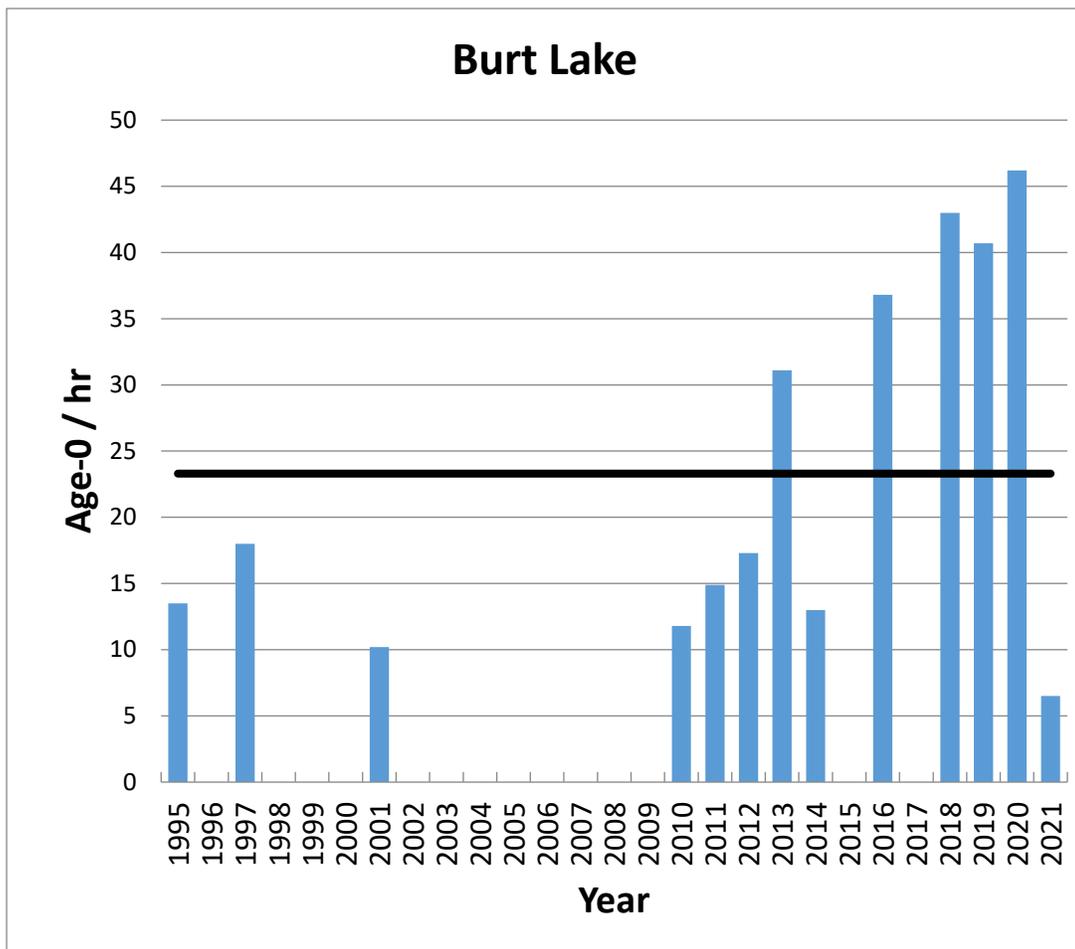
2021 - weaker wild year class, but present; likely weaker from cannibalism from the strong 2020 year class

Stocking Mullett Lake is absolutely not warranted. Anglers catching all sizes of fish, including sublegals at various times.



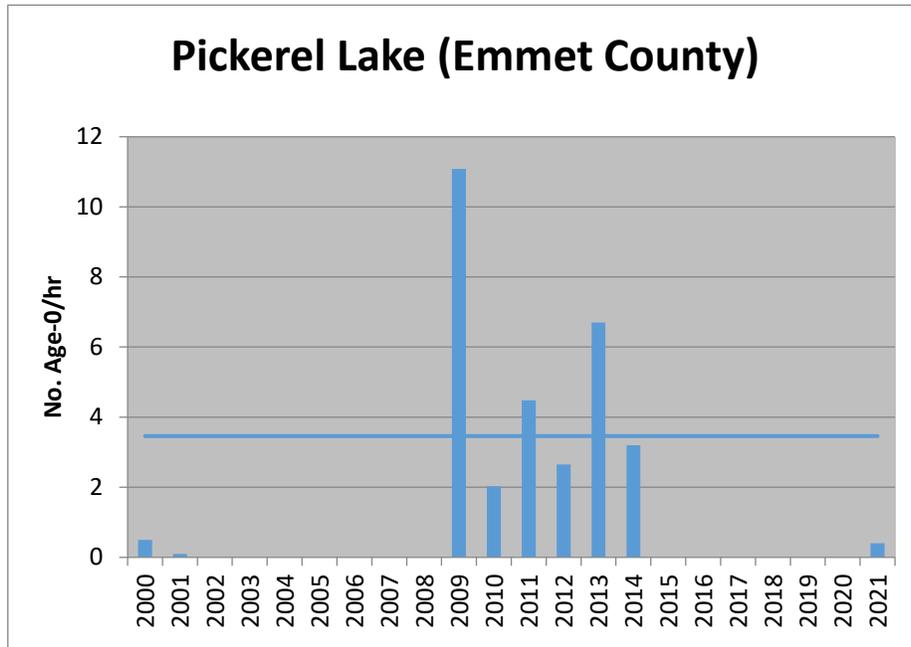
Burt Lake – (see fall electrofishing catch rates of age 0 walleye below)
2016-2018 - strong year classes
2017 - unknown
2019-2020 - strong year classes
2021 - year class was documented, but the catch rate was lower

Burt Lake has not been stocked in many decades. Catch rates of wild walleye in the fall from nighttime electrofishing are typically high in most years when sampled (exception 2021). At our large lakes, a catch rate of 10/hour over a narrow shoreline strip over the shoals is acceptable. Higher catch rates at Burt Lake are often the case. Despite this, anglers are generally reporting fewer fish caught, meaning that good reproduction in recent years may not be translating into good survival to catchable sizes. Many other states are finding this phenomenon but are having a hard time finding the causes. Some believe overwinter mortality of juveniles (their first winter) is the culprit.



Pickrel Lake – (see below)

In 2021, 6 miles of shoreline was surveyed for 2 ½ hours, and 1 age-0 walleye was captured. 10 yearling and older walleye were captured (13.9-15.7 inches). Catch rates are acceptable for this lake, and no stocking is warranted, especially with the high-quality bluegill population present. Sampling events have been less frequent at Pickrel Lake since stocking is not a consideration.



Finalized Michigan DNR statewide walleye management plan:

The statewide walleye management plan is about one month away from being distributed to the public.

Purpose and Scope – High priority species because of its ecological, social, and cultural significance. Emergent threats to walleye populations nationwide (invasives, climate change). Fisheries Division felt it prudent to update goals, objectives, and strategies to guide statewide walleye management in future years.

What is in the Plan?– Lake classifications and angler behaviors and perceptions.

Regulation toolbox – 15-inch minimum size limit with a daily possession limit of 5 fish (statewide standard). The majority of Michigan lakes fall in this category. There are three exceptions:

- 1 – 18-inch minimum size limit, with a daily possession of 2 fish.
- 2 – No possession (typically at a few statewide lakes where predation on stunted panfish is needed)
- 3 – 13-inch minimum size limit, with a daily possession of 5 fish.

Goals –

- 1 – Protect, restore, or enhance habitats supporting walleye fisheries.
- 2 – Maintain self-sustaining walleye populations.
- 3 – Maintain and further develop relations with tribal governments and stakeholders.
- 4 – Provide production capacity for walleye stocking.
- 5 – Provide diverse opportunities for walleye fishing.
- 6 – Manage walleye populations to achieve desirable fish community characteristics.

Anglers are encouraged to read the entire document online and familiarize themselves with statewide walleye management. The document should be on the DNR website in November or December of 2021.

Statewide cormorant control update:

A new cormorant management program has been agreed to and put into use. Our Region/Section can kill 21,000 birds but it is highly regulated by the federal government (who oversee migratory birds) in conjunction with the state.

Anglers should continue to document problems (counts and pictures) and forward to Randy Claramunt or their local management biologist. Certain areas of the state are in more dire need of control, and typically it is where nesting birds are found.

Adjourn: 2:23 p.m.

See Bottom of page 2 for an explanation of the Pickerel Lake Status and Trends Summer Fish Survey

