

Warmwater Resources Steering Committee
12/15/2020
Virtual meeting using MS Teams

Draft Meeting Notes

Attendees:

Benjamin Wood, Brad Koehn (Lk St Clair Muskies Inc), Brian Gilson (Director of Bow Fishing Assoc.), Andrew Briggs, Randy Claramunt, Dan Kimmel (Conserv. Director for Bass Federation of Michigan), Dave Reault (Pres of MI Bass Federation), Jim Dexter, Doug Dingey (Angler), Floyd Dropps, Jim Francis, Frank Krist, Ian FitzGerald (MUCC), Jim Diana, Jim Felgenauer (Pres – Detroit River SFT, Chair of Lake Erie/Lake St Clair Advisory Comm), Kris Kiel (Conservation Officer), Cory Kovacs, Andrew “Duke” LeBaron (MI Musky Alliance), Christian LeSage, Linn Duling, Emily Martin, Mike Holmes (Western UP Citizens Advisory Council, Board of UP Sportsman’s Alliance), Spencer Berman (MI-Ontario Musky Club, Charter fisherman on Lk St Clair), Jay Wesley, Jason Wicklund (DNR-LED), Amy Trotter (MUCC), Seth Herbst, Joe Bednar (MMA), Jonathon Durtka (MI Spearfishing Assoc.), Bruce Yinger (Downriver Bass Assoc.)

Notes for each agenda item:

- Agenda review (Herbst):
 - Terms of Reference and membership recently updated (available on website), everyone should look over the document to check for missing key viewpoints or representation. Send Seth any edits or suggestions.
 - Virtual meeting format – in early March there were a lot of operational changes and restrictions for many of us due to COVID-19. We continue to have these restrictions within DNR and this will be the case for the foreseeable future. Situation is fluid and is based on approvals from Governor’s Office, so as we move forward it is likely that we will continue using virtual meeting format.
- Roundtable Reports
 - Lk St Clair Muskies Inc. (Brad Koehn) –Noticed significant decline in musky catch rate from recreational anglers, have had to concentrate all activity on the American side with Canadian border being closed. Chapter is still concerned that the die off from VHSv a few years ago was underreported and curious to know what the current catch rates have been or if any surveys have been going on in spite of COVID.
 - Andrew Briggs (MDNR) – missed out on a lot of normal survey work due to COVID-19, did trawl work in Saginaw Bay and sturgeon trawl in Lk St Clair. WAE fishing still looking good in Lake Erie and St Clair and Detroit Rivers.
 - 11 lake sturgeon reported harvested from St Clair River this year
 - Randy Claramunt (MDNR) – SLHMU had a lot of activity this year due to dam blow-outs and flooding associated with it. A lot of time/effort spent by staff in DNR, EGLE, and other agencies to address those resource concerns, public safety, etc. More to come on this topic, but it will be a lot of work to address this issue. Concurrent with this, diploid grass carp have been found in the Tittabawassee River.

- The pandemic has given staff a unique opportunity to catch up on reports, think strategically about walleye rearing and stocking. We are trying to be more strategic about things given the decrease in field load this year because of restrictions.
 - Seth commented that as a department many people worked quickly to get approval to address those resource needs that Randy mentioned.
- Dan Kimmel/Dave Reault (Bass Federation of MI) – still seeing a big impact on fisheries from herbicides. Flips ecosystem upside down, opens up for invasive weeds like starry stonewort. If nothing else, herbicides are reducing habitat and hurting populations.
 - A tournament was held in Lake St. Helen, but heard that there were a lot of herbicides used there and in the October tournament only 31 keeper bass were weighed in. Only one team had a 5 fish limit at 8.67 lbs. Seeing a devastating effect from herbicides. If something can be done to analyze this, it would be appreciated.
 - Must get a permit to use the launch sites for tournaments, but applicators are using those same launches to spread herbicides.
 - Otherwise, it was a positive year.
- Jay Wesley (MDNR) – positive news on herbicide issue is that DNR has been working with EGLE on specifications for permits. EGLE has agreed to no copper sulfate during the spring/early summer which will help reduce impact on spawning/nesting fish.
 - Reault – importance can't be understated. If there are 2 dead bass floating after a tournament, it is a big deal but the numbers killed in treatment are considered okay.
- Jim Dexter (MDNR) – nearing completion of Thompson State Fish Hatchery upgrades. Leak testing ponds, getting ready for first egg take into the facility. Under remote work until March 1, likely will be extended through Memorial Day or 4th of July (possibly even Labor Day). This timeline is due to rollout of vaccine – if government can't or doesn't require people to be vaccinated, we are not sure how going back to the office will work.
 - Fully expect to maintain this remote work situation for several more months but have approvals in place to conduct most field work at this point. Unless things get much worse, we don't expect to rollback anything.
 - Seeking approval for Black Lake sturgeon spearing season, spring egg takes and fin clipping currently
 - Otherwise, most fieldwork should continue. Techs have received approval to work in the shops which will be very helpful.
 - Approval to post open positions is a slow process, typically takes 3 months to get approval to fill a position. Future budget situation looks worse than this past year since there is currently no federal support forthcoming.
- Floyd Dropps – Walleye (WAE) rearing in UP: good to hear that Thompson is coming online for walleye, but still worried there will be shortages and won't be able to meet goals for fingerlings.

- 2 Northern Pike (NOP) vs. 5 NOP with one over 24” – understand downstate that this was probably a good thing, but most of UP lakes have unlimited spawning habitat and numerous pike but not enough forage so they’re slow growing. We’d like to see that changed. Would like to share lakes where we observe slow growth so that could potentially be changed
 - Seth noted that this would be discussed later in the meeting, but that there are regulatory options laid out in the NOP management plan that has been publicly accepted. Urged Floyd and others to continuing talking to managers in the UP about this.
- Jim Francis (MDNR) – had setback of survey work due to COVID. Missed many lake surveys in spring but did get most stream surveys done. Were interested in doing fall surveys/targeted effort on bass population and did extensive work on Union Lake this fall, will be followed up by NOP and WAE population estimate in the spring as well as looking for marked bass from last fall.
 - To address comment on Lk St Clair – have taken disease samples from bass tournament this year. Ongoing challenge in Lk St Clair because it is a VHSv hotspot. Had creel survey program up and running but it was delayed so some data was missed, but most of the summer was captured so Jim will follow up with Brad on catch rates.
- Frank Krist
 - Mentioned that virtual meeting have been going well.
 - Northern Inland Lakes Fishery Advisory Committee – some concern about guides fishing on lakes, will be talking about that tomorrow from 2-4pm. Email Frank if you would like a link!
- Ian FitzGerald (MUCC) – have commissioned study through MSU on economic impact of algal blooms on Lake Erie, will have a rollout on this study when its done (spring, early summer).
 - Just to note, MUCC has a policy going through their process (for approval or disapproval at our 2021 convention) to remove the minimum size limit on pike in inland UP lakes. Keep possession limit at 2 with only one pike over 24".
 - Also working on legislative priorities (commercial fish and youth fishing licenses)
- Jim Felgenauer – lost a lot of outreach opportunities due to COVID, did not have North Channel Sturgeon Festival this year. 2019 was the first year for the Festival.
 - Landed 63 sturgeon were landed during the 2020 North Channel Sturgeon Classic fishing tournament. (longest was 73”, 4 were recaptures from previous tagging efforts). Had 48 tag returns this year.
 - 10th Anniversary sturgeon cooperator patch this year as well, fishery is growing. A lot of interest from out of state anglers, especially from Ohio with individuals interested who usually fish flathead catfish.
 - Have 3 fish from Black Lake/River for virtual outreach early next year
 - Trying to work with others on Parks Division to have fish cleaning stations installed when ramp renovations are done at Crocker launch.

There is a gap in funding for shoreline fishing improvements, fish cleaning stations, so they'd like to see that filled.

- Had a call from wholesale bait dealer in the last week about the new regulations for additional testing requirements with concerns that the new restrictions/testing could drive small dealers out of business.
 - Told dealers to contact Seth and Gary Whelan about these concerns, but not sure what the other avenues are for them to express concerns
 - Seth noted that FO245 is the order concerning this issue. Set to expire in March 2021, recommendations laid out are to increase some biosecurity measures associated with bait supply. Changes would increase fish health testing to limit VHS in the bait supply. Previously the requirements had been relaxed, but the recommendations to increase testing are a direct result of the positive VHS samples from bait retail shops. Ultimately, we must weigh risk vs. reward and have had many conversations with baitfish industry which will continue leading up to January NRC meeting.
 - Biggest recommended change is a monthly testing requirement in summer/warmwater months, which previously was not required. Recommendation is a single sample to be tested in May, June, July, August, and September if bait is harvested from specific zones in the state. This is the recommendation Fisheries Division feels is appropriate to address VHS threats identified in the bait supply.
- Cory Kovacs (MDNR) – harvest registration for 2020 so far are similar to prior years for musky. 21 fish harvested to date, 10 of them from Lake St Clair/Detroit River/St Clair River/Lake Erie system. Phone number for these reports has been changed, it is in the online fishing guide. Fish must be registered if harvested.
 - Esocid Comm has been working on sampling protocol for pike and musky per our management plans that have been approved. Trying to get these protocols to the Management Team for review. Also have a pilot creel diary with 9 anglers helping us collect information on size structure for musky on inland waters.
 - Will talk about CIR for northern pike later in meeting
- Christian LeSage (MDNR) – regulations are winding down, switching over to fisheries management plan reviews, fishing guide is nearly finished and will be shared with the printer in the next couple weeks.
 - January is when fish production allocation starts, so will be doing that over the next couple months.
- Linn Duling – no specific comments, but share concerns about aquatic weed control. Nice to have committee back together.
- Emily Martin (MDNR) – No updates from inland TCU side

- Seth Herbst – commented that TCU and others at Executive level are working on 2000 Consent Decree negotiations which are under a confidentiality agreement, so there is not much to share on that topic.
 - Mike Holmes – wanted to add to discussion/comments on pike size limit. Recently agreed as a group that we go for a Wisconsin version of regulations with pike, which is 5 pike and no size limit. WI applies this and it has been very successful, northern zone is cut right across the state (north of the line is a 5 pike creel limit, no size limit) and southern part of the state is 2 pike, 26” size limit. Line is HWY 10 for these two zones.
 - Seth responded that there are options within regulations in the management plan that have no minimum size limit and daily possession limit of 5. Encouraged them to work with staff in the UP on this issue.
 - Spencer Berman – agree with what Brad said earlier about catch rates on LSC. Would like to see if we can work out something that will allow us to fish both sides of the lake, but not sure if this is the committee to discuss that.
 - Jay Wesley – group looking at the herbicide treatment issue is planning to evaluate the potential impacts of largescale fluoridone applications. Specifically, examining if starry stonewort comes in afterward as well as other items related to the use of fluoridone. Appreciate any specific feedback or comments, can email them or put them in the chat box.
 - Trying to work within statute on conditions of permits, which seems to work more favorably than changing statute. Applicator industry is strong and has strong lobbyists so changing statute can be difficult but tweaks to permit conditions are likely the best route forward.
 - Seth said he understands that we have to work within statute and what it allows, it is important to recognize that it limits some of what we can do and that Aquatic Nuisance Control has to consider that when taking Fisheries Division feedback.
 - Seth noted he appreciated everyone’s feedback and that though we try to have 2 meetings a year everyone is encouraged to send an email if there are emerging issues in your region. These issues could be occurring throughout the state and may be of interest to everyone.
- 2020 Regulation Updates
 - Seth: Due to COVID-19, many regulations that went forward for review this year were straightforward and streamlined since there was not in-person public input provided and Fisheries Division really values that input. Not many updates but hoping to enhance our virtual meetings now that we have a better grasp on how to reach stakeholders about issues that we are working on drafting now.
 - Christian sent out Word document before meeting and no one had any questions.
 - Important as a committee to understand where and when you can contribute your feedback in a meaningful way and how we go through the regulation proposal review process
 - Christian: Fisheries Order Proposal Process
 - Provided an overview of the annual regulation review process

- Felt it was good to highlight the process because it sometimes gets lost as to why we are asking for feedback on proposals at the time of year we do.
 - DNR needs to provide written recommendations to NRC in July for the fall NRC meetings.
 - Approved regulations goes into Fishing Guide, which is reviewed and finalized for printing in Dec. or early Jan. for the next fishing season
- Questions:
 - Seth: relationship with local Fisheries staff is critical to get the process going. We do everything we can to conserve the resources and listen to a lot of stakeholder/angler groups. Conversations occur throughout the year, but late fall and early winter is when staff are considering regulation proposals for the upcoming year. NRC ultimately has the authority on determining method and manner of take for fish throughout the state.
 - Many of you know this, but NRC meetings are public, and you can sign up for public testimony/hearings to provide feedback on any topic. Right now, there are a lot of discussions at NRC on deer hunting regulations and often many people sign up to provide feedback.
- Northern Pike – Catch and Immediate Release (Kovacs)
 - Proposal from Spring 2019 from Michigan Muskie Alliance
 - Tossed the proposal around internally, brought it to Esocid Committee (managers, researchers, Jim Diana, other PERM staff, etc.) and discussed various considerations, got an issue statement set up for the Biologists Conference. As a committee, felt it was a good idea (proposed opening CIR season for NOP – currently the season is closed during part of the year). This would create more opportunity and we know some northern pike are already being caught.
 - Law Division also received this – Cory sent a brief survey to LED across the state
 - Brought to internal biologists conference (issue statement from Esocid Committee).
 - Common themes from MDNR vetting process:
 - Could create challenges for LED enforcing angler intent
 - Many northern pike already being caught during bass and musky CIR seasons
 - Consideration for artificial lures only and no live bait or open water only provision
 - Currently seeking angler and stakeholder feedback to get a feel for support or non-support (or just comments/viewpoints) on this issue. Will ask for yes/no from everyone to formalize the position of the committee
 - Group discussed pros and cons and a vote was taken
 - **Support: 16**
 - **Do not support: 2**

- Michigan Spearfishing Association (Herbst and Durtka)
 - Fisheries Order 219
 - Association presented to NRC in April 2019
 - NRC directed MSFA to contact DNR with proposed amendments
 - Timeline: Fisheries Division discussed process for regulation review, Citizen Advisory Committee review and discussion
 - DNR is reviewing proposal and seeking stakeholder feedback
 - Proposal will be presented today and will serve as kickoff of review
 - Going through review process this winter, will be up for public feedback during Coffee and Conversation and other stakeholder meetings, if it is recommended it will be presented in Fall 2021 and be effective in April 2022 if approved.
 - Showed video on underwater spearfishing from MSFA
 - Proposal
 - Bow and spearfishing are already allowed within Michigan.
 - Proposal is to allow using rubber and spring propelled speargun and pole spears. Spear must be attached to line not exceeding 20 ft in length.
 - Cannot use SCUBA, re-breathers, or similar devices
 - Suggested prohibited within 150 ft of designated swimming areas, boat docks, boat access, egress sites, and power intake tubes. Also prohibited where placement of diver-down flag would restrict boater navigation or access to boating access site.
 - Also proposed expanding opportunity by allowing harvest of Northern Pike, Lake Trout, and Walleye in the Great Lakes only.
 - Proposed season: Last Saturday in April through Sept. 30th
 - Existing minimum size and possession limits for the proposed species/locations would still apply.
 - Jon Durtka (comments) – want to make sure that they aren't diving/fishing in areas with high populations to avoid risk of accidents and other conflicts
 - Questions
 - How many people are in association and actively do this?
 - Not a huge activity. At the highest, if you took Facebook likes as an indicator it would be about 400 members. Probably less than 100 people actively do it that Jon knows of.
 - Committee discussed pros and cons and vote was taken.
 - **Support: 11**
 - **Do not support: 4**
- Draft Walleye Management Plan for Inland Waters (Herbst)
 - Did not have time to fully discuss this agenda topic, but Seth said the draft goals (see below) would be provided to the Committee as a follow-up to the meeting.

- Overarching goal: Maximize angler satisfaction and ecological benefits derived from Walleye fisheries
 - More specific goals:
 1. Provide diverse opportunities for Walleye fishing
 2. Manage Walleye populations to achieve desirable fish community characteristics
 3. Maintain and develop relations with tribal governments and stakeholders
 4. Maintain self-sustaining Walleye population
 5. Provide production capacity for stocking
 6. Protect, restore, or enhance habitats supporting Walleye fisheries
 - Seth also provided the estimated timeframe for when the public review period would occur.
- Meeting wrap-up (Herbst)
 - Committee was happy to meet again to discuss fisheries management topics
 - Committee thought that the meeting went well, and most were happy with the virtual meeting platform.