



## Lake Erie / Lake St. Clair Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee

Established by the Department of Natural Resources to improve and maintain the fishery resources of Lake Erie, Lake St. Clair, and the St. Clair and Detroit Rivers through better communication and partnership.

### **Meeting Notes March 22, 2022 1:00 pm – 4:00 pm Virtual Meeting - Zoom**

Attendees: Jim Felgenauer, Dave Schaumburger, John Bacarella, Jim Francis, Sara Thomas, Dan Kimmel, Mark Davis, Gerry Sickon, Tim Muir, Melanie Foose, Dave Reault, Bob Burns, Mary Bohling, Nick Torsky, Katelyn Brolick, Eric Grajewski, Bob Watson, Michelle Selzer, Eric Diesing, Jan-Michael Hessenhauer, Todd Wills, John Terpstra, Dan Boileau

**1:00 Welcome and introductions (Jim Felgenauer, Chair and Jim Francis, DNR)**

**1:20 Review the agenda and previous Action Items (Jim Francis, DNR)**

- Update on access sites – covered in next agenda item by Parks

**1:25 Update from Parks and Rec Division (John Terpstra, DNR-Parks and Rec Division)**

- Status of Greyhaven
  - Contract has been let and kick-off meeting has taken place
  - Doing data gathering and due diligence to develop a design
  - They have identified the need and the goal is to construct a new boat launch
  - The first on-site meeting has been scheduled, which will include a discussion on a timeline
  - This current phase is expected to take another 3-4 months, and once complete, the project would move to preliminary design
- Clinton River Cut-off Renovations – timeline
  - Bids were received but there was a fair amount of sticker shock due to cost increases of materials
    - They were able to find the additional money and the contract was awarded and signed
  - The current launch ramp is filled in and requires dredging to be operational. However, considering the construction activities are scheduled to begin in April, the decision was made to keep the site closed down until construction is completed. Based on the current timeline, that is expected to be by the end of October.
    - Keeping the site closed will make it more efficient for the contractor – resulting in a time and cost savings for the project.
  - There was a question if there would be lights at the ramp.
    - John was not sure and said he would check on it
- Harley Ensign Renovations – timeline
  - The project was never fully funded – about a million dollars short of needs
  - The project has dropped in priority given that the Clinton River Cutoff site will be closed during renovations. They do not want to have multiple sites closed at the same time.
  - This site should bump back up in priority once the Clinton River Cutoff site is completed

- Bolles Harbor Paving Project
  - A December 7 meeting with the contractor identified minor items that would be addressed in spring
  - The project is complete and the site is fully functional
- Ice Access at Selfridge
  - A section of rail was removed from the front wall to provide access
- Questions
  - Are there plans to fix the erosion taking place on the walking path at Sterling State Park?
    - Received a grant from EPA to address the issues, but waiting on permit from Corp of Engineers
  - The Marine City Ramp is in bad shape – are there plans to fix it?
    - Staff have poured 6 new concrete planks and are waiting for them to cure (30 days)
    - New planks should be installed by the end of April
  - Can lights be added to Decker's Landing to improve safety?
    - Not sure on the status

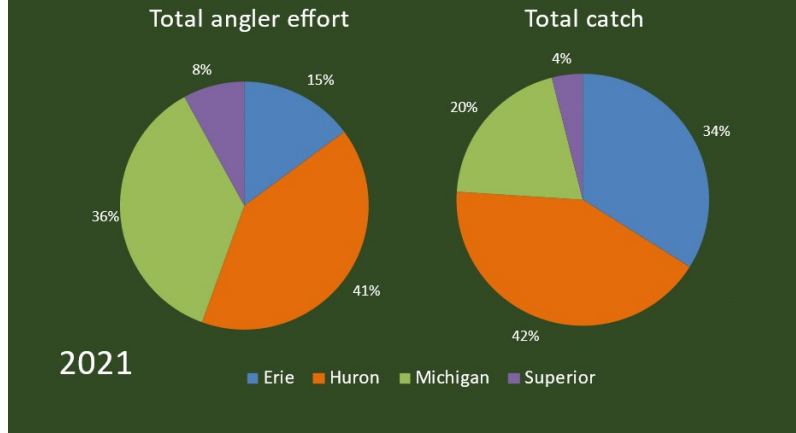
**1:45 Lake St Clair Fish Cleaning Station (Jim Felgenauer, Chair)**

- The task group working on this project includes Tim Muir, Jim Felgenauer, John Bacarella, and Bob Barnes
- A corporation has been established and the group is waiting for permission for the project to proceed before applying for tax exempt status
- The original cost estimate was \$180,000 – that will likely need to be updated
- The bottleneck right now is getting approval from Harrison Township – but close to having approval
  - There were initial concerns if their sewers could handle and transport the fish waste
- Once approvals are received, looking to have fund raising opportunities
- Looking to apply to Great Lakes Fishery Trust for funding – they can fund up to 50% of the project
- Will need to develop a formal agreement with DNR for upkeep
- Initial timeframe looking at totally funding this year and construction next year
- Lake Erie Metropark is currently getting a fish cleaning station

**2:00 Lake Erie Summary – Assessment Data and Fisheries Results (Todd Wills, DNR)**

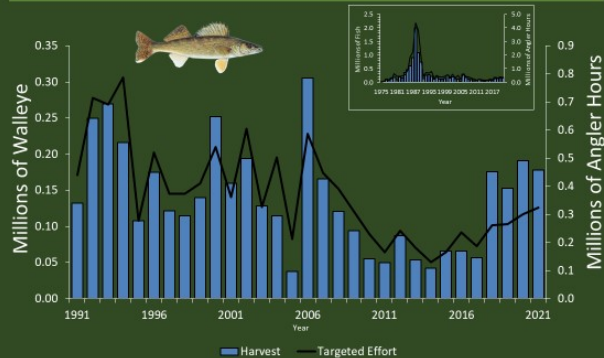
- Recreational fishery performance
  - Relative to lakes Michigan, Superior, and Huron – Michigan waters of Lake Erie in 2021 accounted for 15% of fishing effort and 34% of catch (excluding Lake St Clair)

# Recreational Fishery Performance



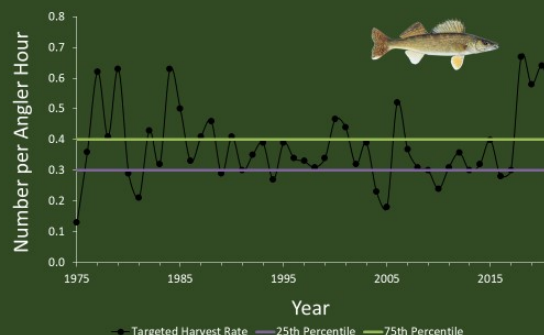
- But if look at effort per square mile of water – Lake Erie is way higher than the other lakes
- Similar for catch – Lake Erie has twice the catch rate of Lake Huron and 4 times the catch rate of Superior and Michigan
- Although most of the interest is in walleye and yellow perch – it is a diverse fishery with harvest of white bass freshwater drum, white perch, largemouth bass, channel catfish and smallmouth bass
- Walleye fishery
  - 8% increase in effort in 2021 relative to 2020 and 7% decline in harvest
  - The walleye catch was high the last 4 years and were accompanied by near record harvest rates (0.5-0.65 walleye per hour)
  - 2015 year class still contributing significantly to the fishery, and fish from the larger year classes in 2018-2019 are beginning to show up in the fishery.

## Recreational Fishery Performance



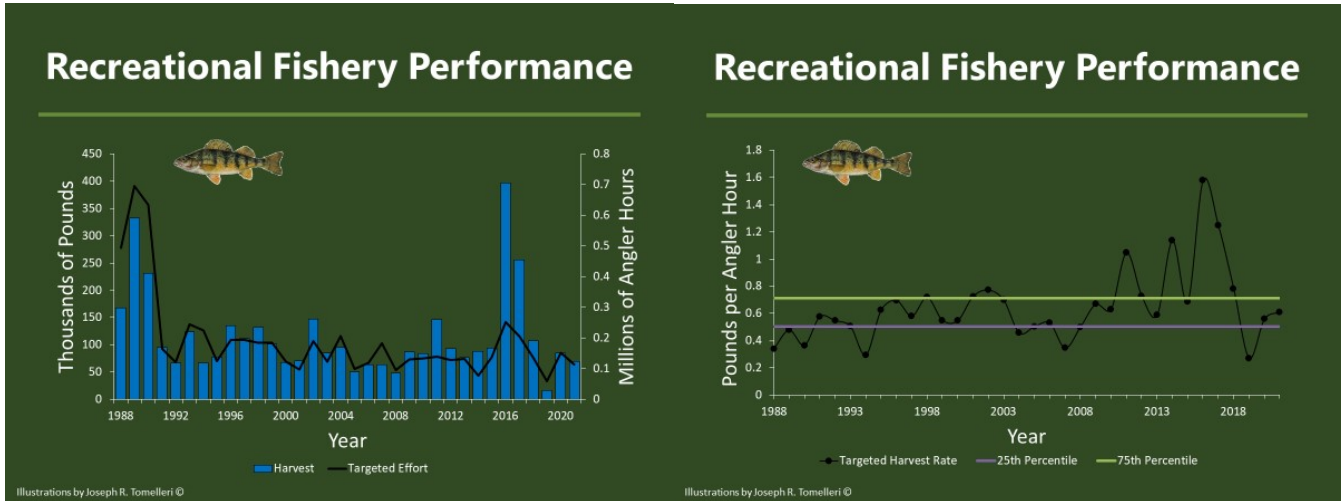
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## Recreational Fishery Performance



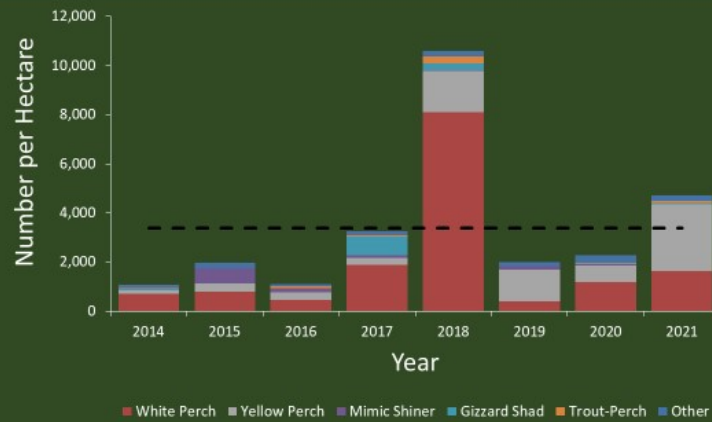
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- Yellow Perch fishery
  - The fishery did not perform as well in 2021 relative to 2020 – effort was down 25% and harvest was down 29%
    - Number per hour was down slightly but pounds per hour was up – so fewer fish were harvested but they were larger
  - Most of the fish harvested were age-3, followed by age-2



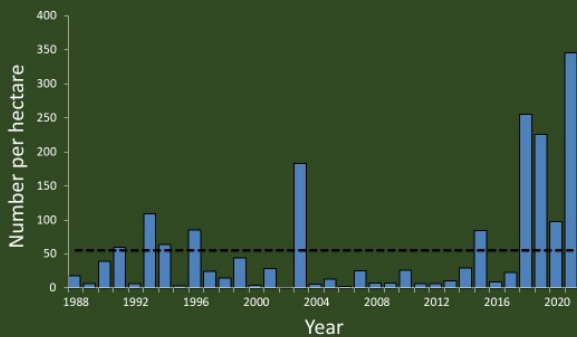
- Charter and Commercial Fishery
  - Charter summary – 4,958 anglers, 1,169 trips, and 24,231 angler hours – targeting mostly walleye and then yellow perch
  - Commercial summary
    - No Commercial fishery for Walleye or Yellow Perch in Michigan waters
    - Channel catfish, common carp, goldfish, and white bass account for  $\frac{3}{4}$  of catch
- Annual Survey Results
  - Lake Erie Index Gill Nets number per net lift below average for walleye
    - Switched up the survey and expanding effort
  - Lake Erie Trawl Survey
    - Forage fish over 4,000 per hectare - above average

# Lake Erie Trawl Survey

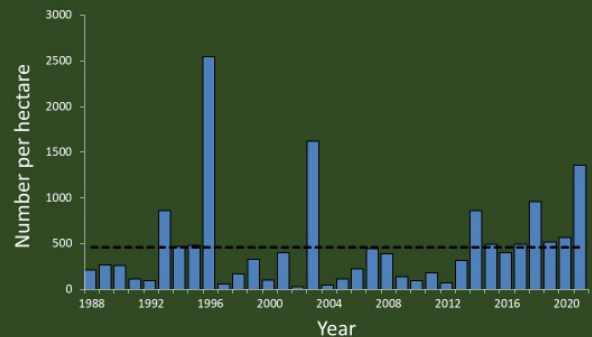


- ON-OH Trawl Survey
  - Strong walleye reproduction continues – new record for 2021
  - Strong reproduction for yellow perch – 94<sup>th</sup> percentile

## ON-OH Trawl Survey



## ON-OH Trawl Survey



Illustrations by Joseph R. Tomelleri ©

- 2022 Fishery Expectations
  - Walleye
    - Continued strong fishery
    - Large-sized fish from 2015 year class
  - Yellow Perch
    - Status quo
    - Needs recruitment
  - Overall
    - High angling catch rates; intensity
    - Lake Erie well above other Great Lakes
    - Unknown – effects of fuel prices will have on effort this summer

- Reminder – 15” Walleye Minimum Size Limit April 1, 2022 start date for Lake St. Clair and St. Clair River

### **2:30 Ice Shanty Removal Deadline for Lake St Clair (Jim Felgenauer, Chair)**

- The final shanty removal deadline for Lake St Clair is before sunset on the first Sunday after February 20<sup>th</sup>
- Propose to have the regulation consistent with the rest of the Lower Peninsula, which is by midnight on March 1
- No one spoke in opposition of the proposal, so it was approved by the committee

### **2:45 Lake St Clair – New Lakewide Survey (Jan-Michael Hessenauer, DNR)**

- Lake St. Clair can be a challenge to monitor due to many variables and constant changing on the lake.
- MDNR and Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources have been partners for years starting with volunteer angler diaries, coordinating of creel surveys, and muskie acoustic telemetry.
- Contemporary Survey Programs
  - Fish Community approach
    - Michigan
      - Spring trap nets (2002+)
      - Spring/fall bottom trawls (1997+)
      - Fall e-fishing (2016+)
    - Ontario
      - Fall trap net (1974 – 2016)
      - Beach seine (2007 – 2017)
    - Focus on LSC vs. connecting channels
    - Complementary but not coordinated – each was doing their own thing but not designed to work together
- New Era of Coordination
  - Initiated by agency program review
  - In 2018 Ontario and MDNR met to discuss coordinating fish community assessment
  - USFWS Early Detection Monitoring program joined
  - Proposed coordinated program include:
    - Nearshore small fish community fyke netting
    - Fish community assessment gill netting
    - Connecting channels assessment
    - Nearshore fall electrofishing Muskellunge assessment
- 2021 Fyke Net Survey
  - 110 total sites
    - MDNR: 40 sites
      - July 7-20
      - 69.4-80.1 degrees F
    - USFWS: 30 sites
      - July 20-28
      - 74.8-77.0 degrees F
    - Ontario: 40 sites
      - July 7-29
      - 70.7 – 79.9 degrees F
  - Catch Summary
    - 27,031 total fish caught (246/net)
    - 45 species identified (not including hybrids or unidentified species)
    - Most common:

- Bluegill/ unidentified sunfish (81/net)
  - Largemouth Bass (55/net)
  - Smallmouth Bass (35/net)
  - Gizzard Shad (30/net)
  - Spottin Shiner (10/net)
  - Spottail Shiner (9/net)
- MDNR caught 1,763 fish
- USFWS 2,610 fish
- Ontario 22,658 fish
- Consistent rate of catch rates on US side. Canadian side had much higher catch rates
  - Habitat differences are what is driving this. Softer shoreline with marshes on Canadian side
- Turtle bycatch mainly in Canadian waters
- Next Survey – Gill Nets in 2022
  - June (once water temp has reach 64 degrees F for a week)
    - Two depth strata: 1-3 m and 3-6 m
  - North American large-mesh gill nets (38-127 mm mesh)
  - Overnight sets (16-22 hrs)
  - Number of sites TBD

### **3:15 Update from Law Enforcement Division (Nick Torsky, Bob Watson, Dave Schaumburger, DNR)**

- Nick Torsky
  - Pat is on a detail – started last fall through spring.
    - Inspecting fish haulers of all sorts.
  - Currently have 3 commercial fishers in Lake Erie.
  - 8 trap nets in the water right now – not collecting any game fish.
  - Pat has a great working relationship with netters
- Bob Watson (St. Clair County)
  - big change is size limit going from 13 to 15 on St Clair River and Lake St Clair
  - Canada is open

### **3:30 DNR Fisheries Update (Jim Francis, DNR)**

- Regulation's update
  - Beginning April 1, 2022 – the walleye size limit will increase to 15 inches for the St Clair River and Lake St Clair
    - The bag limit and minimum size limit for walleye will now be consistent from Port Huron all the way down to Lake Erie
  - Underwater spearing proposal was approved by the NRC
    - Restricted to Lake Michigan (south of Grand Haven) and Lake Huron (south of Thunder Bay River)
    - Required to get a spear fishing license
    - Required on-line reporting of effort and harvest
- State budget recommendations
  - Fish Division proposed \$34 million in one-time capital outlay
    - Hatchery infrastructure Maintenance
      - Projects include upgrading water supplies, upgrading electrical systems, replace roof, repair and replace asphalt, upgrade aeration systems

- Improve working conditions for staff and improve rearing conditions for fish
  - Reduce likelihood of catastrophic loss and increase ability to mitigate disease issues
  - Incorporate energy efficiency
- Cool-water infrastructure upgrade
  - Currently, walleye at Wolf Lake SFH are incubated in same building as steelhead and chinook.
  - Currently muskies are incubated, hatch, and early life rearing in retrofitted basement of old fish health building
  - Creates a biosecurity risk for both groups of fish
  - Construction of dedicated cool water production facility
  - Not intended to increase production numbers
- Great Lakes vessel modernization
  - This year is 54<sup>th</sup> year of operation for S/V Steelhead on Lake Michigan
- In addition, requested \$12.6 M DNR wide equipment replacement and \$650K Tribal Coordination Unit staffing
- Tim Muir – Are Lake St Clair ramps going to be removed later in the year?

### **3:30 Roundtable Reports (All)**

- John Bacarella – good winter and great ice conditions. Fishing was phenomenal. Perch size and numbers were great. Size and numbers of perch along the shoreline are good right now. Walleye fishing on ice was best since the 80's, maybe better. Lots of new anglers taking part.
- Mark Davis – MetroWest Steelheaders put on sportsman banquet. Kids fishing day June 4, 2022. Clinton River Cleanup April 9, 2022. 40 tournaments scheduled
- Dave Reault – appreciation of expanded times to fish
- Eric Grajewski – nothing to report
- Mary Bohling – Sea Grant Fisheries Workshop
- Dan Boileau – back to in person meetings and will share information from today's meeting
- Bob Burns – Friends of the Detroit River continues to do habitat restoration in the Detroit River. Stony Island creating lots of habitat and anglers trolling for walleye there. Celeron Island working well. Sugar Island started last fall – shoals in place and habitat island will. South Hennepin Marsh work. April 2, 2022 Riverkeeper Dinner. April 23, 2022 Spring clean up
- Dan Kimmel – Not acceptable to close ramp
- Gerry Sickon – Chapters from all around the state come to Lake Erie so happy about that. DNR general funds excited about it. Contacting senators and state reps to get on board.
- Melanie Foose – Another sediment remediation project along Ralph C Wilson Centennial Park area. Incorporate fish spawning habitat there as well. MCUTC project sampling last summer data has just come in. Moving straight into design phase. Will include dredging in that area.
- Sara Thomas – C&C next Tuesday. Everything on scheduled to be stocked this year. Clinton, Huron, Spring reel pond April 1<sup>st</sup> open
- Future meeting topics – going back to in person meeting Belle Isle meeting