



## 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 - final Belle Isle Nature Center 176 Lakeside Drive, Detroit, MI 48207 October 6, 2022**

Attendees: Tim Muir, Rob Barnes, Blair Hughes, John Bacarella, Ted Meyer, Gerry Sickon, Paul Sacks, Erica Clites, Robert Burns, Mark Davis, Kristen Towne, Greg Wright, Eric Huber, Todd Wills, Andrew Briggs, Brad Utrup, Jan Hessenhauer, Sara Thomas, Jim Francis, Dan Walzak, Nick Atkin, Wesley Smith, Jim Felgenauer, Bob Barnes, Dave Reault

#### **Welcome and introductions (Jim Felgenauer, Chair and Jim Francis, DNR)**

##### **Committee Member Round Table (All)**

- Tim Muir – MUCC working on consent decree and having more say; NRC authority; Camp Grayling expansion
- Ted Meyer – few emerald shiners in St Clair River; Atlantic salmon showing up
- Gerry Sickon – Steelhead and Salmon Fishermen’s Association part of intervener lawsuit for consent decree; Alewife bouncing back
- Paul Sacks – State bass championship on Manistee Lake - lots of bass; membership up a little.
- Erica Clites - serving in Mary Bohling’s role
- Bob Burns – finishing up habitat projects on the Detroit River - Sugar Island is underway; shifting focus from habitat work to removing contaminated sediments
- Mark Davis – participated in Clinton River clean-up; kids fishing event in June.
- Eric Huber – USFWS, Detroit substation invasive species program
- Kristin Towne – USFWS, Detroit substation invasive species
- Greg Wright – USFWS, leader invasive species program
- Jim Felgenauer – Sturgeon For Tomorrow tournament – 35 boats landed 118 sturgeon in one night
- Wesley Smith – local tournament angler; teaching fishing skills to kids; done a few shows on Michigan Out of Doors; participate in Veteran’s tournaments. \*new member\*

##### **Review the agenda and previous Action Items (All)**

- Will be having election at spring meeting for both Chair and Vice-Chair, per the Terms of Reference
- Felgenauer - Several members have formed a Committee to work on getting a new fish cleaning station on Lake St Clair (LSC). They started the LSC Fish Cleaning Foundation corporation and are waiting on a gift and acceptance agreement with Parks. Waterways Program funds boat launches and the funding is very restrictive. Parks originally wanted this group to own and operate the station but the groups intention is to build and donate it to the state. Parks maybe has found a way to fund maintenance other than waterways. If that happens, Felgenauer will want to focus on the fish cleaning station project, so will step down as chair of the Citizen Fishery Advisory Committee.
- At some point the notes from the committees meeting will be posted on the DNR website. Felgenauer was wondering if we could post recordings of meetings on YouTube? Ideas to move “more towards 21<sup>st</sup> century”. How to better share the information presented at these meetings? Frequency of meetings? If there are ideas from the committee to make our efforts more productive – bring ideas forward.

### **Updates from Parks and Rec Division (Mike Terrell, MDNR-Parks and Recreation) - Called in**

- Selfridge – will have piece of rail removed again this year around first freeze, to improve safety for ice angler access to Lake St Clair
- Clinton River Cut off BAS - about 2 weeks behind, should be done November/December
- Harley Ensign BAS – postponed, maybe 2024 parking lot and ramps redone (will be seeking feedback on time frame for work)
- Greyhaven – getting emails, 10 designs for different boat launch layouts, might be total rebuild, docks not in good shape, will have to put in a road
- North channel - pretty much completed, will get repaved in a few years
- Marine City – completed.
- Muir asked specifics on Greyhaven and if 2024/2025 dates for completion are still a likely timeframe – that is still the expectation
- Muir also asked if some ramps can be left in later (for example – Harley) to allow late season fishing and duck hunting. Wondering if can be left through Thanksgiving at least. Terrell stated they are usually pulled at first freeze. They cannot be left in longer because there are associated staffing issues and they need to protect the infrastructure.
  - We lost connection with Terrell, so we could not continue the discussion. But it appears the issue is frustration with not knowing the status of the ramps in late season. A potential solution could be to improve communications. By posting a schedule on the web or sharing the status of the docks with this committee – boaters could be better informed on the status of the docks and eliminate some of the guessing that can lead to frustration.
  - We tried to connect Terrell in remotely, but sound quality was very poor and most could not hear the discussion. Boating access is very important to this group – Felgenauer would like to see Parks attending in person, to avoid the technical issues we experienced.
- Ted raised concern about a failing walkway in Port Huron, along the St Clair River near the police station.
  - That is not related to the discussion we were having with State Parks – it was recommended for Ted to reach out to the City of Port Huron.

### **Fisheries Research Update (Todd Wills, Jan Hessenhauer, Andrew Briggs, MDNR-Fisheries)**

- 2021 creel summary
  - Total angler effort on Erie and LSC is small compared to other the other Great Lakes (19%), but those 2 lakes make up about 40% of catch.
  - Erie Angling intensity (effort divided by lake surface area) is 54 times higher than lakes Huron, Michigan, and Superior combined, LSC 2x. 2-3 times higher catch rates on Erie and LSC.
  - Lake St Clair Creel – smallmouth bass catch rates highest in 2021 but walleye and muskellunge were lower. Harvest of yellow perch was up in 2021 but walleye and bluegill were down a bit.
- Lake Erie Bottom Trawl Survey 2022 – helps look at young-of-year yellow perch and walleye production.
  - 2022 walleye was similar to last 3 years; yellow perch down from record in 2021 but similar to 2017 and prior.
  - But, age-1 yellow perch in 2022 was very good (highest since 2017). Good survival of those 2021 fish.
- Lake St Clair Anchor Bay Trap Net survey
  - trend since 2012 presented
  - 30 lifts in 2022 April – May, cold snap in the middle
    - Smallmouth bass close to ten-year mean and up from 2021 (cold year); walleye up since 2016; yellow perch bouncing around – no clear pattern; downward trend in northern pike - lowest since 2012.

- Smallmouth bass size structure remains excellent. (large increase in memorable size fish over time (proportion greater than 17"))
  - Smallmouth bass mortality rates, not updated for 2022 yet - stable over time
- Acoustic Telemetry
  - Three active studies
  - No additional tagging planned for muskie.
  - Smallmouth bass - 27 fish tagged in Anchor Bay and 19 tagged by Mile Roads.
    - Some fish recap (22%) by anglers.
    - Hope to get grants for future to look at some movements by fish caught by anglers, to evaluate post-release mortality in a natural wild setting.
  - Yellow perch - 53 tagged, have \$50 reward tag (2 turned in to date). If find tag inside get a hold of Jan. Predator tags, change tag report out when in stomach.
  - LSC receiver grid has been expanded in 2021 to increase coverage.
- Sturgeon Assessment
  - St Clair River - 80 setline sets, 76 fish caught (72 unique), 23 recaps; 41 juveniles and 35 adults.
  - Recently catching more juveniles – are reefs helping reproduction?
  - LSC – 42 trawls, 31 sturgeons caught, 2 recaps. Largest 104 lbs.
  - Harvest - 42-50" slot, 10 registered in 2022.
- LSC forage trawls
  - Yellow perch most common in spring and higher than in 2021. Spottail shiner were highest since 2012.
  - Fall – targeting young-of-year fishes. Yellow perch below average, higher than 2021. Other common species were spottail shiner, logperch, rock bass, round goby.
  - Vegetation has hampered trawling, looking at using micromesh gill nets. 2022 did 4 sets with smaller mesh nets. 345 total fish, 12 species, similar to what catch in trawls.
- LSC collaborative survey with Canada and USFWS
  - Large mesh gill nets in late June – July. 350' long nets. 75 total sites lakewide
  - Over 2000 fish caught, 32 species. Yellow perch and shorthead redhorse most abundant. Captured some at-risk species: sturgeon, mooneye, spotted sucker, river redhorse, silver chub.
- Burns asked if there were thoughts on why the northern pike declined and that he had noticed some large muskie this spring floating down Detroit River. Wills said it is perplexing because we had higher water levels (which should be conducive to pike spawning) and pike numbers going opposite way, VHS could be playing some role. In addition, Wills stated muskie are hard to index, but DNR does do a juvenile index electrofishing survey in fall. Canadian anglers' perception that muskie fishing down. Burns asked if smallmouth bass competition could be playing a role? Wills stated probably not, co-existed in lake a long time, condition of fish is good (food not a problem). Burns brought up he has noticed fungus on pike, Wills said this is common - is septicemic red sore disease, see in spring nets a lot, can leave scars.
- Bacarella noted that weeds in the lake have changed through time; the heavy weed growth is out farther in the lake but not nearshore. Those close weed beds are gone now. Substrate seems to have changed, sort of like crushed zebra mussel shells. And there are a lot of weed treatments in the canals that may be leaching out into the lake.
  - Briggs reminded folks of the survey results presented at past meeting that surveyed the shallow nearshore throughout the lake with smaller nets last year; Canada caught more fish than in US waters – likely do to better nearshore habitat – less seawalls and more natural shoreline.
  - Result – yes, weeds have changed in Lake St Clair over last 30 years. Asked about the Trawl surveys – more logperch? Shiners down? Briggs indicated spottails higher last couple years (but lower than avg).

- Ted – tiling and run off are causing water quality problems – could be contributing to vegetation changes.
- Felgenauer asked how many tagged sturgeon were reported this year - Briggs stated numbers aren't in yet. Felgenauer also asked if any updates on the slower growth rates in yellow perch in LSC first 2 years? (Travis – CMU graduate student did diet study, there has been a shift in diets from earlier decades.)
- Paul S. – smallmouth bass Catch and Immediate Release regulations do not seem to have impacted smallmouth bass indexes. Was there a sunset on this regulation (5 years)? DNR – no, this regulation was not sunsetted.
- Reault - Are we seeing the invasive predatory zooplankton in LSC? Briggs stated they don't sample for zooplankton. Thomas commented that these two species Bythotrephes and Cercopagis generally prefer colder, deeper offshore waters and LSC is likely not preferred. If their abundances were high, anglers would know it because they would clog their lines, which can be a big problem in Lake Michigan.

### **Law Enforcement Update (Dan Walzak and Nick Atkins, MDNR-Law Enforcement)**

- Walzak - covers Wayne County, very busy, high population so need to manage “people”. Been providing enforcement on Belle Isle since 2015, with Wayne County officers now covering the bulk of the effort. There is room for more officers in this area. 5 + Sergeant in Wayne Co. right now, would like 2 more officers. New recruit Academy occurring right now.
  - Angler reports are good. If any complaints, it's from people that don't spend as much time on the water. Walleye fishing great (but down a bit relative to the recent banner years), yellow perch fishing slow (but some nice size). White bass, not much of a run again this year. Bass anglers happy, nice smallmouth bass in lower Detroit River.
  - Atkins also mentioned that there were 13 recruits in CO academy. After the new year, they will get experience and then get assignments in July.
- Atkins provided updates on the Commercial enforcement unit – there has been a promotion, will have some new lieutenant positions opening. Advance marine school just concluded. Please note annual Lake Erie gillnet survey by DNR next week (10/10) near Luna Pier and Stoney Pt. Atkins also stated there are a few shallow water trap nets around Stoney Pt. area for rough fish. Two seiners.

### **Lunch—provided by DNR**

### **USFWS Aquatic Invasive Species Early Detection and Monitoring (USFWS)**

- Annex 6 of Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement – included invasive species directives.
- Early detection program – how to maximize effort (improve efficiency), map relative risk of locations.
  - Top 100 high risk grids – lots in St Clair Detroit River System and Lake Erie. The grids were condensed into 21 distinct locations. Highest risk sites (Tier 1) are sampled multiple times a year.
  - Started in 2012 and used multiple gear types. Narrowed sites down in 2019 based on past catches and species richness (targeted approach).
  - Estimate 2-3 years of sampling to get 95% of species.
  - a total of 101 species in 2021 in lakes Huron and Erie
  - Some non-native species they captured this year: redear sunfish, grass carp, Nile tilapia,
  - Notable Natives: sturgeon, pirate perch (extirpated in LE basin, caught in Sag Bay)
  - Watch species - Tench in St. Lawrence System that are working their way towards the Great Lakes. Very large cyprinid, uproot vegetation. Have been stocked in US waters scattered. Also bighead carp and silver carp.
  - Members asked what has helped slow spread last several years: Legislation for ballast exchange. Ohio constructed berms to disconnect Ohio/Erie watersheds.

- Felgenauer asked when is something non-native vs. “invasive” – invasive causes harm to ecology, economy or human/animal health. Non-natives are not from area, may not cause harm.

### **Fisheries Division Updates (Jim Francis, MDNR-Fisheries)**

- FY 2022 Appropriation, 15% increase to DNR - most additions are one-time investments to improve infrastructure and modernize equipment.
  - Fish Hatchery Infrastructure Improvements - \$30 M one-time investment from General Fund
  - Equipment Modernization, Fish Div \$1.4 M to provide modern, safe, and efficient equipment for the Department’s core work.
  - Great Lakes Vessel Modernization - \$4 m to replace 54-year-old Steelhead on Lake MI
  - Tribal Relations & Fisheries Co-Management - \$625 K ongoing from General Fund, support additional technicians and biologists with the Tribal Coordination Unit.
    - Ted voiced concern that too many DNR resources are going to support tribal fishing effort.
- Harmful Algal Blooms - The Erie Situation documentary on PBS, may be re-broadcast.
  - States are taking some actions to reduce P inputs: H2Ohio, Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development grants
  - EGLE has 3 part series on Water Quality, First one was yesterday. Recordings should be available. [EGLE presents educational webinar series on Lake Erie algal blooms \(govdelivery.com\)](http://govdelivery.com)
  - Smith noted that Western Lake Erie is covered in green right now.

### **Summary of meeting and future meeting topics (Jim Felgenauer)**

- Felgenauer revisited that Waterways Commission dollars are restricted funding, difficult to get other activities done. Example - North Channel just redone, grassy area but can’t have any picnic tables, could be good shore fishing. Waterways restricted funds so boat launches are viewed as “single use”. Parks does have other sources of funding that some of this stuff maybe could come from.
- Bacarella agrees that DNR should maximize some of these locations for multiple uses. Example of multiple municipalities that have added large piers. Have more groups talk to each other about partnerships. Meyer mentioned that young kids start out shore fishing and funds for shore anglers seem to be minimal. Francis brought up several recent successes for shore access: Brandenburg, Belle Isle, FWS Refuge piers.
- Meyer mention that in Lexington Harbor he has seen Atlantic salmon with sea lamprey on them. Wills mentioned they do see bigger native lamprey in LSC. DNR will pass along this report to the Lake Huron management unit.
- Future Meeting topics – waterways funding model, regulation process Felgenauer – wondering if more input into regulations beyond the local ones because many anglers fish all over the state.

Next Meeting will be scheduled for March 2023.