



## 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.

### **Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge John D. Dingell Jr. Visitor Center 5437 W Jefferson Ave Trenton, MI 48183 April 16, 2025**

**Attendees:** See sign-in sheet.

**Start time 10:00 am**

**Welcome and introductions (Dan Boileau, Chair and Jim Francis, DNR-Fisheries)**

**Welcome to the DRIWR – Dan Kennedy, USFWS**

- Only international wildlife refuge in country
- visitor center on former Chrysler paint plant
- Co-manage a large portion with Wayne County parks and includes Humbug Marsh
- Protect coastal wetlands, restoration projects
- Programming - 3 dedicated staff for teaching kids how to fish and love working with partners
  - Happens all summer long and they go to other places/events
  - Big event on free fishing weekend.

**Chief's Update – Randy Claramunt, MDNR-Fisheries**

- License costs have remained stagnant and inflationary costs are reducing buying power
- Over \$65 million in basic maintenance that is needed, with an additional \$110 million with dams that need addressing-without operational costs
- \$300 million in assets (budget of \$300,000 /annually to maintain those hatcheries and other facilities)
- Manage more freshwater than any state in country but Division budget is 5% of total DNR budget and .001% of state budget
- So far in hole, can't be fixed by license changes alone - need a new conservation funding model.
- Invest in MI fisheries is now a rescue mission
  - Wolf Lake hatchery backup generator over 50 years old, energy shut down – it blew up and caught fire. Way more expensive operating a temporary generator until a new one arrives
    - Platte Lake hatchery generator is even older.
- Invasive carp control - back in spotlight
  - Has been in impasse with Great Lakes state funding conflicts.
- Boating access on Detroit River/lower Lake St Clair – Fish Division tries to have a voice, but current climate is difficult. Hopeful for new directions with new staff at other Divisions.
- Shore access also needs improvements. America the Beautiful and Michigan Beautiful grants - assumptions of being able to access all the water in MI is false, these were intended to improve access (might be on hold with federal budget)

## **Fisheries Division Updates – Jim Francis, MDNR-Fisheries**

- Fish Division Fiscal Status and Needs:
  - Fishing supports \$4 billion annually in MI
  - Last fee change in 2014 reduced all license fee and reallocated revenue, inflation outpacing revenue
  - 95% of direct funding from license or Dingell-Johnson funds (tax on fishing gear). Very low general revenue support
  - RV Channel Cat built in 1968, will now be oldest in our fleet – working towards replacement
  - Proposed license package failed in 2024 legislation session, trying to reintroduce in 2025
- Water levels - long term cycles, we're in downward phase now (1<sup>st</sup> year in quite a while below long-term average)
- Parks is renting equipment to dredge Clinton River Cutoff/Crocker Rd. to address shallow spots that are affecting launching
- 9 mile ramp expected to open Fall 2025, bridge to Harley Ensign being repaired this summer.
- Federal Projects - various fisheries things being impacted and in limbo
  - Sea Lamprey control, AIS surveillance, mass marking, prey fish assessments, lake wide assessments, habitat grants, MI Sea Grant outreach, lake sturgeon rearing, NOAA weather buoys and temperatures
- Questions & Comments:
  - Can we tap into other industries benefiting from Great Lakes (shipping, tourism, etc.) to help pay for some of these needs? Communicate importance from stakeholders to your legislators (so many competing priorities)
  - **Dingell-Johnson Sportfish Restoration Act is up for renewal at Federal level in 2026 (contributes about \$12 million to budget from excise tax on fishing gear and marine gas, can't afford to lose) – call your representatives and spread the word and ask for support for renewal.**

## **Sterling State Park and Bolled Harbor Improvements – Bob Neely, Co-chair**

- 1.2 million annual visitors
- largest 2 public launches
- \$ 7 million improvements, including re-doing a large pathway

## **Collaborative Fisheries Assessment of the St Clair – Detroit River System – Andrew Briggs, MDNR-Fisheries**

- Cooperate with Ontario and USFWS, started in 2021
  - Multiple surveys with varying gears and covering all the waterbodies on a rotational basis.
- River surveys – lots of coverage
  - Detroit River 2023 – 60 total species, 7,850 fish
  - St Clair River 2024 – 51 species, 4,795 fish
- Lake St Clair –
  - 2021 fyke net, 45 species, 27,031 fish
    - MDNR set on northern half of US side and caught least fish, USFWS on southern half of US side and about doubled our catch. Ontario caught a ton more fish.
  - Lake St Clair electrofishing - 47 species, 45,501 fish
    - Gizzard shad most common. Ontario again much higher catch rate (mostly due to a few species – gizzard shad, emerald shiner)
  - Lake St Clair gill net – 28 species, 1,832 fish.
    - Ontario higher catch rate.

- US side - 90% hardened shoreline; Canadian side - 52% hardened shoreline, 28% marsh/wetland. Ontario caught way more turtles.

### **Lunch – provided by DNR**

### **Lake Erie Fisheries Summary – Jim Francis, MDNR-Fisheries**

- Lake Erie had 6 years in a row of great year classes of walleye from 2018-2023. This consistency is unusual, usually see an occasional good year here and there. However, estimated year class for 2024 was below average and we expect to see lower adult population levels in 2026.
- For the recreational walleye fishery in Erie during 2024, harvest rates were very high and above long-term average. Michigan anglers harvested 135,921 walleye, which was 18% of our Total Allowable Catch.
- Walleye diets in Western and Central basin primarily gizzard shad, little to no yellow perch.
- Yellow perch harvest has been relatively stable, with minor fluctuations since 2010. Outliers in 2016 (highest) and 2019 (lowest).
- In 2024, Michigan anglers in Lake Erie harvested approximately 72,000 pounds of yellow perch, which was 28% of our Total Allowable Catch.

### **Lake St Clair Fish Cleaning Station – Jim Felgenauer**

- Started from scratch
- Non-profit status, engineering design completed. Communicating with county, Harrison Twp, approvals for waste discharge.
- Lake St Clair Walleye Association provided a large seed donation.
- Great Lakes Fisheries Trust grant for \$100,529, advertisement in 2025 fishing guide, sign at Crocker boat launch and with other organizations.
- Approx \$220,000 total cost. Need to raise about \$97k still
- Jim Felgenauer and Bob Barnes have done the heavy lifting
- Grant goes to Nov 30 (extensions with fund raising). Working on other grants for larger \$ amounts, maybe some fund raisers. MDEC matching fund program - patrons. Need additional support from fishing community.

### **Summary of 2024 Fisheries Surveys – Andrew Briggs, MDNR-Fisheries**

- Very intense angling effort on Lake St Clair and Lake Erie
- Proportion of smallmouth bass larger than 14" is much higher than in the 1970-1980s, fish > 17" increasing also. Growth has been consistent. Survival to age 6+ has gone up since predominance of C&R.
- Lake sturgeon – St Clair River caught 98 on setlines
  - Catching more juveniles – good sign for recruitment.
- Lake sturgeon harvest – 4 in 2024.
- Forage assessments – limited to where can trawl. Low catch rate of yellow perch, also caught rainbow smelt, johnny darter, logperch, trout perch. Micromesh gill net – able to sample in areas of vegetation. In these nets had high yellow perch catch.
- Three active telemetry studies: smallmouth bass, Mooneye, and northern pike. Lake St Clair is well covered in acoustic receivers.
  - SMB – 0.5 mi per day average movement. Tend to stay in same general area (As jaw tag data showed). Tend to stay on US side.

**Committee Member Round Table (All)**

- Friends of the Detroit River-finished Sugar Island July 2024, monitor other projects. AOC-sediment contamination projects upcoming.
- John B. – some customers concerned with changes in technology (nest spawners)
- Weigh-in tournaments
- Detroit River access – St. Jean's launch in bad shape, Riverside Marina – some repairs, potential group sign-on letter
- DNR Lake Erie office – steelhead and trout being stocked, walleye being transferred from Hatchery to rearing ponds, adult trout stocked at Proud Lake Rec Area and Spring Mill Pond

**Meeting wrap-up (Dan Boileau, Chair)**

- The group liked the facilities at the refuge and would like to keep this site on the rotation for future meetings



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Sign-in Sheet LE/LSC Citizen Fishery Advisory Committee meeting April 16, 2025 - Detroit River IWR	
Name	Affiliation/Organization
Jim Francis	MDNR - Fisheries
John G. Mazzella	SPORTSMAN'S DIRECT
Tim Muir	MUCC / LSCWA
Geary Sickon	MSSFA
BLAIR HUGHES	ST. CLAIR-DETROIT STURGEON FOR TOMORROW
Alison Bressler	University of Michigan
Robert Burns	FDNR Detroit Riverkeeper
Andrew Briggs	MDNR - Fisheries
Sara Thomas	MDNR Fish
Bob Barnes Sr.	LAKE ST CLAIR WALKER ASSN
Andrew Bahrou	M EOLE
Mark Davis	Metro-West Steelheaders.
Bob Neely	LAKE ERIE
Dan Kimmel	Mi Bass Federation / Mi Bass Fishing Coalition
BRUCE YINGER	DRBA AND FISHERMAN
Erica Clites	Michigan Sea Grant
Pete	DWF
Dan Boileau	DWF
Ted Meyer	
Randy Caramant	- DNR - Fisheries
Jim Felgenauer	SFT