



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.

**Belle Isle Nature Center
176 Lakeside Drive, Detroit, MI 48207
April 10, 2024**

Attendees: Dan Boileau, Jim Francis, Dan Kimmel, Ed Eisch, Ed Blissick, John Bacarella, Bruce Yinger, Jim Felgenauer, Bob Barnes, Erica Clites, Robert Burns, Eric Grajewski, Richard Oberhielm, Gerry Sickon, Cpl. Pat Harsig, C.O. Dan Walzak, Sara Thomas, Todd Wills, Mark Davis, Paul Sacks, Dr. Shay Keretz, Andy Hartz, Alexis Gronda, Erica Volansky

Start time 10:00 am

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

Committee membership (Dan Boileau, Chair)

Clubs, groups missing for the membership?
Terms of Reference questions?

Optional trolling license proposal (Ed Blissick, Great Lakes Salmon Initiative)

- Previously circulated an email on this topic.
- GLSI – formed in 2016 following forage declines in lakes Huron & Michigan, voice support for continued chinook salmon stockings along with other species
- Lake Huron meetings in 2023 (Cormorant control finally permitted, but no \$ to fund). State budget request for these were denied, group came up with idea for optional trolling license (Great Lakes only)
 - \$26 optional license for up to 3 extra rods when targeting salmon, trout and walleye – voluntary.
 - Additional revenue generated could be dedicated to cormorant control and other critical needs of Fisheries Division.
- These extra rods would not likely have a negative biological impact (still have creel limit, just extra rods – maybe limit quicker on hot days).
- If a few extra salmon are harvested – it would take some pressure off the prey base and allow anglers to harvest fish they paid to stock.
- Fish Division asked the groups to garner public support.
- Walleye Total Allowable Catch (TAC) in Lake Erie. MI doesn't harvest anywhere close to 100% of their TAC
 - Commercial fishing bill been proposed that would include walleye as a commercial species and most angler groups opposed.
- All revenue to Fish Division budget, emphasis on cormorant control.
- Not for shore anglers (to avoid overcrowding on piers)
- Would not be used for targeting other species in protected areas/bays.
- Open water trolling in Great Lakes only.
- Numerous angling groups have voiced support.
- Seeking input from groups.



Lake Erie Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee

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

Questions/Comments from group:

- What species? trout, salmon, walleye.
- Could only buy 1 of these extra licenses.
- Tangled lines - will people pay for the “headache”?
- Any Dingell-Johnson money associated with the extra license? No, sharing formula based on unique license buyer.
- walleye – handlining? Clarification that rods only (not lines)
- Fishing regulations are already too complicated.
- Detroit River – some large cormorant colonies (next to Trenton power plant), lots flying up north.
- Licensing restructuring-multiple comments on different ways to do this, include this option in bundle of regs, not as a separate stand-alone option.
- Most likely 1 per boat would buy the extra license (not everyone on boat).
- Earmarks are a double-edged sword. \$ is protected, but hard to get more.
- Full cormorant control would be around \$450k a year.
- Poll of Group:
 - Support – 3, Opposed – 2, Neutral-7

Great Lakes Decree – update (Dave Caroffino, DNR-Fisheries) via phone

- Two appeals ongoing – following separate tracks.
 - Sioux Tribe (actual party to case) – requires mediation before hear appeal, that has wrapped up – no agreement reached. Held news conference last week (but nothing had changed). Now briefing phase. DNR has until May to file theirs. Court will then have info to move forward. Decide whether to keep the two appeals separate or combine.
- The Decree IS in effect currently. Parties working towards the info sharing, etc. Only a few instances where new fishing is taking place. Subsistence Fishery in place, some reporting from this which we haven’t had before. Productive conversations.
- State systems and reporting up and running. Reporting frequency has increased from once per month to now twice per month.
- Tribal Co-Management Citizen’s Committee has been created.
- Questions/Comments:
 - None.

Freshwater mussels and the St. Clair – Detroit River System (Dr. Shay Keretz, NOAA-CIGLR)

- PhD. research on Freshwater Mussels in Detroit River/St. Clair River
- Macroinvertebrate bivalves. North American has most diverse assemblage in world (but 65% are listed or extinct)
- Many ecological services, “personal wastewater treatment”
- Causes for decline: Past commercial exploitation (ex. Buttons, pearls), invasives, habitat degradation & alteration (dams, other fish blockage)
- Unique life cycle which is dependent on host fish species (some need a very specific host). Cool “lures” to attract the host species.
- Dreissenid mussels will foul native mussels.
- LSC - following zebra/quagga invasion, there were extremely large declines in natives, almost zero now.
- SCDRS-Historically supported about 39 freshwater mussel species.
- Good data through 2006 on native mussels, by 2004 thought that all natives were gone.



Lake Erie Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee

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

- But later a few refuges found in delta/marsh areas. Didn't have good info on channels/river.
- Started field work in 2019. (SCUBA diving surveys)
 - Detroit River 56 sites, 2000 unionid shells of 31 species.
 - Live mussels – 220 @ 5 sites, 11 species. (212 found at mouth of River Canard), including a few listed species.
- 2021 in St. Clair River – 28 of 51 sites found shells.
 - Live unionid at 7 sites, but only 14 total! A few listed.
- Using the data to develop habitat suitability models to identify potential hot spots. Identified several areas thought high likelihood of occurrence.
 - Went to those sites in 2022. Ex. New site at Lake Erie Metro – they did find some new live mussels. However at the sites in SCR they didn't find any new live mussels. Natives may be extinct in main channels, but they are persisting in delta area.
- Native continue to persist in Detroit River, but not SCR 😞
- Data can help with restoration, permitting issues, etc.

Questions/Comments from Group:

- Why Detroit & not SCR– Detroit River is slower and wider, especially at bottom half (fewer Dreissenids in that area as well).
- Any effect of thermal regimes from the power plants? This study didn't find live in areas around the power plants (they do down in Lake Erie).
- Contaminant impacts? Unable to answer from this study. Unionids can stay closed and not filter for longer duration than zebra mussels.
- Do different species require different substrate type? Yes.
- More dreissenids in north part of Detroit River, "source/sink". Population numbers seem to be at an equilibrium now.
- Belle River (could it be a nursery area/source for SCR?) Didn't find mussels at the confluence for this study.
- Some variables in habitat model: Velocity, depth, distance to inlet/outlet, tribs, abundance of zebra mussel

Law Enforcement updates (LED Staff)

- Cpl. Hartsig from the Great Lake Enforcement Unit provided an update on commercial fishery operations in Lake Erie.
 - Two beach seiners, trap netter new person from OH, well-marked nets, all rough fishes. Same 2x month wholesale fish sales reporting
 - Fewere illegal crayfish in the pet trade after large increase during covid peak
- Conservation Officer Walzak provided an update on walleye fishing in the Detroit River
 - Six officers in Wayne County, more patrols out on Detroit River. Anglers have been very compliant: haven't seen over limits, no small fish really.

Lunch – provided by DNR

Lake Erie yellow perch bag limits (Sara Thomas, DNR-Fisheries)

- Sara presented an overview of recreational fishing trends in Michigan waters of Lake Erie, along with the Western Basin as a whole.
- The Total Allowable Catch (TAC), which is a unique co-management strategy in Lake Erie, provides sustainable walleye and yellow perch fisheries.

P.O. Box 30446 - Lansing, MI 48909
Phone (517) 284-5830 - FAX (517) 373-0381



Lake Erie Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee

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

- Michigan harvests an average of 50% our TAC, with an exception in 2016 which had record harvest.
- Showed data from creel surveys that prior to 2016, only 11% of interviews harvested more than 30 yellow perch per angler, with most anglers harvesting 10 or fewer perch.
- Lake Erie was made an exception to the statewide regulation change in 2017 (reducing yellow perch bag limit to 25 per day) and remained at a bag limit of 50 yellow perch.
- There was a low in long-term yellow perch harvest during 2019, but the fishery has rebounded.
- Michigan continues to harvest less than its TAC and most anglers continue to catch 10 or fewer fish, with some having great days with 30 or more yellow perch per angler.
- Charter trips for yellow perch in Lake Erie are very low compared to the number of walleye trips.
- Approximately 27% of charter trips harvest more than 30 yellow perch per angler. MI's bag limit continues to be in-line with other Lake Erie jurisdictions and keeps harvest below TAC.

Questions/Comments:

- Committee members expressed no issues with the current Lake Erie exception for yellow perch – 50 per day.
 - They cautioned strongly against DNR making regulations that reduce take when there is no biological need; oppose unnecessary restrictions.
- Why don't consumption advisories apply to commercial fisheries? The consumption advisories apply to sport caught fishes, the sale of commercial fishes is regulated by Department of Ag.
- Could Michigan exceed its TAC, like it did in 2016? Highly unlikely, never seen anything like it before or since. Also, even though we saw very good catch rates last year, we were still under our TAC.
- Commented that this reflected most other fisheries, with a few anglers harvesting the most.
- Also commented that a reduction in bag limit, would reduce possession limit.

Fisheries Division Updates (Jim Francis, DNR-Fisheries)

Lake Erie Updates

- Walleye are still above average abundance.
 - six years in a row of very high recruitment (2018-2023)
- Even though current harvest rates are at record levels, fishing effort is lower now than in early 2000s when the overall population was much lower than today (part could be higher catch rate, not as many younger anglers).
- Largest portion of harvest in 2022 was age 3-5, but fish in age classes through 9+ represented.
- Growth is down, not unexpected given the high population abundance.
- Walleye diets – mostly gizzard shad (Western basin). Eastern basin – rainbow smelt but also round goby.
- Smallmouth bass diets Western and Central -almost exclusively goby
- Yellow perch harvest & harvest rate going up since low in 2019
- Hydroacoustic surveys – still a lot of forage out there.
- Fishery expectations for 2024 – above average abundance and size for both yellow perch and walleye.



Lake Erie Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee

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

Fishing Regulation Proposals

- FO-219 Underwater spearfishing permitted beginning in 2022 (through March 2025)
 - Mandatory Reporting
- New proposal to expand waters, add night fishing, expand species.

Questions/Comments:

- Concerns on LSC due to boating traffic. MSA-Spearfishes want to be safe, would avoid high traffic areas.
 - Safety concerns for night

Investing In MI Fisheries

- Funding level & structure challenges. Potential license restructure – seeking input.
- Current cost for an all-species license is the same as it was in 1997.
- Has to be voted on by legislature.

Comments:

- Build in an automatic increase – similar to Recreation Passport
- Dingell Johnson funding (from federal excise tax) has been flat.
- Roll trout stamp back in and add extra tags for other unique species.
 - Add Great Lakes stamp
- Small increase a few years in a row rather than a big jump all at once - then cost of living adjustments.
- Larger scale issue of addressing other users like kayak, hikers, mushroom, birders, etc. – will be discussed at a later stage. Fisheries need is too critical right now.
- Motivate others to contact legislators.

Commercial Fishing Legislation

- HB 5108- this one would allow gamefish harvest (25% of lake trout, walleye, smallmouth bass) 2023
- HB 5553 – supported by DNR, modernization of the statute 2024, developed with support of MUCC

Other Topics

- Domestic Action Plan – Lake Erie nutrients
 - Bob Neely sits on the Western Lake Erie Basin Advisory Group
 - Bob has reviewed the initial draft of the revised 2024 DAP and drafted a letter to be sent on behalf of this committee.
 - This will be followed up by email after the meeting
- LSC canal vegetation treatments – dredged upland canals have different regs (navigation purpose)
 - ANC treatments is a frustration at all warmwater steering committees.
 - Vegetated canals spawning habitat?
 - Shorewood Canal has flow (ex. Permit shown)

Fish cleaning station, update – (Jim Felgenauer)

- Sign at Crocker boat launch (cost of materials)
- Engineering, stubbed in utilities. For station provide engineering designs for Parks and Rec Division approval. Starting fundraising (GLFT, Wilson Foundation, Webber Foundation)
- \$5,000 from LSCWA. Community support from Macomb County. Hire someone to help?
- Support letters (want 20 by end of month, help with GLFT proposal). Non-profit approved.

P.O. Box 30446 - Lansing, MI 48909
Phone (517) 284-5830 - FAX (517) 373-0381



Lake Erie Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee

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

Mooneye acoustic telemetry study on Lake St Clair (Todd Wills, DNR-Fisheries)

Tabled until next meeting

Committee Member Round Table (All)

- July 28 LSCWA Free kids fishing event, up to 350 kids, free gear, Lake St Clair Metropark. LSCWA Monthly membership meetings (4/17), raffling off annual boat pass. 6/1 – Annual Tournament \$5000 1st prize (portion will go towards fish cleaning station)
- Downriver Walleye Federation – membership down (~250 members currently), demographics aging, support high school fishing teams
- Kimmel – in discussions for changes to Aquatic Nuisance Control program (with no increase in employees)
- Support local bait shops
- Lake St Clair – good perch bite until cold snap, walleye fishing continued through winter
- Detroit River habitat work is showing results for fishing. Friends of Detroit River over \$50 mil in work. Finishing up Sugar Island this year.
- SeaGrant – Workshop 4/11 virtual and in-person, register for access to recordings, Benefits of fishing in mental health circles.
- Steelheaders – support HB 5553 (and opposed HB 5108). Tracking Consumer Dam issues.
- Metrowest Steelheaders -monthly meeting in Livonia. Kids fishing even in June at Kensington. 5 salmon in classroom sponsors. Ultimate Fishing Show & Outdoorama
- MI BASS Nation 19th Tip up for Troops, Kent Lake free fishing weekend. Provide boats and prizes. Seniors Tournament Series. Dearborn Firefighters fundraiser. Youth Projects.
- EGLE – seeing uptick in dredging permits now for Lake St Clair

Meeting wrap-up (Dan Boileau, Chair)