



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 Belle Isle Nature Center 176 Lakeside Drive, Detroit, MI 48207 March 23, 2023

Attendees: in-person – Jim Felgenauer, Mike Eichbrecht, Bob Barnes, Ted Meyer, Henry Walters, John Bacarella, Mark Davis, William Schrader, Bruce Yinger, Dan Kimmel, Dan Walzak, Todd Wills, Pat Hartsig, Kris Kiel, Erica Clites, Ed Roseman, Tom Bissett, Jim Francis; virtual – Paul Saks, Michelle Selzer, Andrew Bahrou, Eric Grajewski, Bob Neely, Dan Boileau, Bob Burns

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

Lake Erie nutrient update (Michelle Selzer, MDARD)

Michelle provided an update on Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's work towards nutrient reductions in the Western Lake Erie Basin

- 2022 Accomplishments
 - \$25M appropriation by the legislature for fiscal years 2022-2026 to leverage and accelerate conservation efforts
 - Hired a strategist to oversee planning and implementation of the Domestic Action Plan and Adaptive Management efforts
 - Funded four Conservation Specialists to provide focused technical assistance to producers in five high priority sub-watersheds
 - Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program and the Regional Conservation Partnership Program are being used for conservation planning and implementation
- 2023 Program Goals
 - Continue discussions with state, federal, and local partners about how changes will be monitored, tracked and reported
 - Form an Advisory Group

Measuring fish spawning and nursery habitat use in the St Clair-Detroit River system and Lake Erie coastal zones (Dr. Ed Roseman, USGS)

- USGS Great Lakes Science Program covers each of the five Great Lakes with its Deepwater Science Program
 - 5 vessels covering all lakes
 - Annual fish stock assessments
 - Some surveys > 50 years
- One of the focus areas is connecting channels and rivers
 - St. Mary's River, Straits of Mackinac, Huron-Erie Corridor, Welland Canal, Niagra River, St Lawrence River
 - All are interjurisdictional, complex aquatic habitats, globally unique, high economic, cultural, and ecological significance.

- St Clair and Detroit Rivers support Great Lakes fisheries
 - Habitat has been lost due to hardening of shoreline and loss of wetlands
 - Recent investments in habitat restoration
 - Shoreline habitat restoration, fish spawning reefs, island erosion control
 - Evaluations have found greater fish catch rates at restored sites
 - Seven spawning reefs have been added, creating more than 20 acres of habitat
 - Coordinated effort to sample lake sturgeon across all life stages
 - Sturgeon egg deposition increased following reef construction
 - Catch per unit effort for juvenile and adult sturgeon have been trending up
 - There may be another opportunity to create a new reef on the Detroit River, in front of Centennial Park
 - Recently constructed spawning reefs
 - Immediate and repeated spawning
 - Increased catches of juvenile sturgeon in survey and by anglers
 - Increase ecosystem resilience, improve habitat quality, and fish populations
 - Important component to renaissance of the Detroit-Windsor area – improving environmental justice and quality of life
 - Evaluated distribution and abundance of larval perch in Lake St Clair, 2018-2019
 - Larvae were found later in the year than expected
 - Sampled southern shore of Lake Erie for larvae in 2019
 - Highest densities in nearshore waters of western basin
 - Seemed to find higher densities around river mouths
 - Identify and characterize cisco and lake whitefish spawning habitat in Lake Erie
 - Lake whitefish eggs were found on most reefs in the western basin, 2016-2020
 - Also found whitefish and lake trout eggs in the central basin
 - Future Research Plans
 - Continued adult and spawning surveys in St Clair-Detroit River System
 - Egg deposition; physical integrity; lake sturgeon population trends
 - New proposal to evaluate northern pike spawning areas and recruitment bottlenecks
 - 2024 year of intensive monitoring on Lake Erie
 - Larval fish production; physical assessment of reefs; Lake Erie-wide lake sturgeon assessment

Investigation of the Northern Madtom in the St Clair River (Todd Wills, DNR - Fisheries)

- *Noturus* genus is the most diverse group of North American catfish
 - 5 species in Michigan
- Northern madtom is state endangered in Michigan and Ontario
- Is found in the St Clair River, Detroit River, and historically in the Huron River
- Northern madtoms in the St Clair – Detroit River System are one of the native species identified as a priority in the Wildlife Action Plan
- These fish are found in unique habitat – the St Clair River is deep and wide, with swift current
- The goal of the survey was to assess lake sturgeon using set lines
 - Found an opportunity to investigate madtoms by adding minnow traps to the set lines.
- Found madtoms throughout the entire North Channel
- Compared different aging structures and found good agreement between spines and otoliths
- 171 fish were aged 2016-2022
 - Found range from age-1 (~1.3 inches) to age-6 (~5.0 inches)

- Males grow faster and obtain larger size than females
- Diet included amphipods, caddis larvae, caddis pupae, and mayfly
- Because the source for the St Clair River is Lake Huron - water it is cold
 - There is a very narrow spawning window where the water reaches preferred temperature
- Genetic analysis indicates the St Clair River and Detroit River populations are genetically distinct
- In 2022 they used SCUBA to assess the fish
 - Observed 5 individual nests with guarding males
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AOp6W2YOx3w>
- Future work
 - Try and understand habitat requirements and potential improvements
 - The current study evaluated deep water, want to explore targeting shallow water habitat
 - Want to explore the Huron River to see if still present

Lunch—provided by DNR

Law Enforcement Update (Pat Hartsig, Kris Kiel, Dan Walzak, DNR – Law Enforcement)

- Anticipate commercial trap netter to be active this year on Lake Erie
 - Usual locations – including off Stoney Point and Luna Pier
 - This operator does a great job marking nets
- There are two beach seiners permitted to fish Lake Erie
 - Nets are set in closer – around 4 feet of water

Upper Detroit River boating access – update on Greyhaven (Tom Bissett, DNR – Parks and Rec)

- Tom is the Urban Manager in the Detroit area
 - Covers Belle Isle and Detroit River
- The design work for a new Boating Access Site at Greyhaven should be finished up in a couple of weeks
 - The next step would be to get public input on the design alternatives
 - Will include lights, restrooms, safe parking
 - Once the design is completed – the project will have to compete for Capital Outlay funding
- The committee understands that funding for the Waterways Program is restricted funding
 - But the program seems too narrowly focused
 - For example – should not exclude shore anglers
 - Other amenities should be considered like picnic tables or a fish cleaning station
 - the way the Waterways program runs – fail to realize that anglers and boaters are one in the same
- Question – there was recently a press release about a \$1.5M sculpture constructed on Belle Isle - can't that money be better used to improve recreation? It is unclear the source of the funding for that work. Many times those types of projects are gifts that specify the use of the funds.

Fisheries Division Updates (Jim Francis, DNR - Fisheries)

- Randy Claramunt is the new Chief of Fisheries
 - Most recently Randy was the Lake Huron Basin Coordinator
 - Jim Dexter was with Fisheries for over 35 years and Chief for the last 12 years
- Great Lakes Consent Decree
 - 2000 Consent Decree remains in effect until a US Federal Court orders otherwise
 - A proposed new Consent Decree has been filed with the court and is part of the public record
 - The proposed agreement will not be in effect unless and until it is ordered by a court
- Invasive Carps
 - Brandon Road Lock and Dam barrier system
 - IL Governor pledged \$50M and Governor Whitmer included \$64M in her proposed budget
 - This would cover the required non-federal match to fund the project
- Access Sites – Lake St Clair
 - Clinton River Cut Off BAS
 - Construction delay – likely early summer before it opens
 - St Clair Shores
 - 9 Mile Rd ramp will be closing for repairs
 - Detroit River
 - Riverside Park is open
 - DelRay is closed for safety reasons due to potholes
 - Ecorse Ramp may closed for repairs this season
 - Wyandotte Ramp is under new management
- Michigan DNR Hunt Fish App
 - Encourage people to give it a try
 - Easy access to licenses, guides, maps, etc

Fish Cleaning Station update (Jim Felgenauer)

- Lake St Clair Fish Cleaning station was formed
- Hope to get half of funding from the Great Lakes Fishery Trust
- Lots of work still needs to be done
 - Letters of support
 - Need a business plan
 - Need management staff
- This project began with discussions at the Citizen Fishery Advisory Committee
 - There was a need identified for a fish cleaning station
 - Jim is looking for support from membership organizations to keep this project moving forward

Elections (All)

- Jim Felgenauer asked to step down from his Chair duties for the committee
 - Jim is leading the effort on the fish cleaning station project – which is a big time commitment – as well as other volunteer activities he is involved in
- No one immediately expressed interest in running for the Chair vacancy

Committee Member Round Table (All)

- Walleye Mike – some salmon are around; southern Lake St Clair was good for walleye all winter (in boats)
- Erica Clites – reminder of Sea Grant fishery workshop April 12
- Ted Meyer – raised concern over parking lot access for shore anglers in Port Huron; we continue to lose access to the fisheries; shore access is a barrier to teach kids fishing
- Henry – the Charter Boat Association is closely monitoring the consent decree negotiations
- Mark Davis – Metrowest Steelheaders meet the first Tuesday of the month – April 4 meeting is a swap meet; do a kids fishing outing at Kensington in June; Metrowest hosts 30-40 events a year; very family oriented
- Dan Kimmel – have continued concern about plant management in inland lakes
- Bob Neely – ongoing concerns with the algae problem on Lake Erie – contributions from many sources including sewage, wastewater, farming
- Bob Burns – fish reef will be sited off of Wilson Park in the Detroit River; April 1 Friends of Detroit River Dinner
- Andrew Bahrou – Domestic Action Plan is getting revisited this year; EPA and Environment Canada are revising Lake Erie LAMP
- Dan Boileau – Downriver Walleye Federation has a general meeting the third Monday of the month
- Jim Felgenauer – there are lots of facebook groups out there – could we better connect or leverage with these groups? try and get younger people involved

Next Meeting will be scheduled for Fall 2023.