



Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee

Established by the Department of Natural Resources to improve and maintain fishery resources of Lake Huron through better communication and partnership.

Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee Virtual Meeting Minutes
Online Zoom Sea Grant Assisted Meeting
Tuesday February 1, 2022
10:00 am - 3:00 pm

Presentations are available online at this link:

<https://sites.google.com/msu.edu/lhcfac/home>

Approved

Attendees: Frank Krist, Randy Claramunt, David Fielder, Jason Gostiaux, Jeff Jolley, Meaghan Gass, Laura Ogar, Brandon Schroeder, Tom Frontjes, Julie Shafto, Tom Peterson, Tom Baird, Dave Cozad, Dana Serafin, April Simmons, Gene Kirvan, Dan Manyen, Tom Keerl, Greg Gumbrecht, Jim De Clerck, Ed Blissick, Mike Kelly, Ed Beckley, Mike Veine, Thomas Peterson, Dick Zook, Donna Wesander, Christian LeSage, Ed Roseman, Nick Torsky, Tim O'Brien, Lawrence Atkin, Todd Grischke, Bob Reider, Fred Sterns, Lakon Williams, Kevin Postma, Randy Terrian, Craig Milkowski, Patrick Hartsig, Seth Herbst, Todd Wills, Tom Heritier, Tess Nelkie, Chris Schelb, Paul Stowe, Ed Retherford, Jeff Moss, Bob Hobkirk, Roger Bergstedt, Tom Andris, Steve Griffin, Jim Johnson, Marty Jones, Andrew Briggs, Denise Sheppard, Jim Dexter, Judy Ogden, David Borgeson, Damon Brown

10:00 Welcome and Introductions (Frank Krist, and Randy Claramunt, DNR Lake Huron Basin Coordinator).

Frank started off thanking Meaghan and Brandon from Michigan Sea Grant for their assistance in making this virtual meeting possible.

Frank remembered Dr. Ken Merckel and noted this is our first meeting since Ken passed. Most will remember Ken for his extraordinary advocacy for the Great Lakes Fishery and his tenacity and ability to communicate successfully with leaders, managers, researchers, and others from nearly every agency and organization that works with the Great Lakes. Frank indicated that he likes to remember Ken also in another way. Ken would call Frank regularly and Frank often asked why Dr. Merckel was not retired when he was already in his 80s. Ken would always say he enjoyed caring for his patients very much and his staff depended on him, so he did not want to abandon them. Since Mayville was a small community, it was not possible to sell his practice consequently he continued keeping up with new dental technology by taking classes regularly. It was not only Ken but his wife Lenore of 59 years that both worked together at the Office enjoying their relationships with the patients and staff. Unfortunately, after 55 years and Ken's health, the office had to be closed.

Ken and Lenore both cared deeply for their community and were active in many local organizations. They enjoyed working with the kids and Ken coached little league and girls' softball. If the world had more people like Dr Merckel and Lenore this would be a much better place.

Frank then mentioned that Ken greatly enjoyed debating managers and researchers. Randy Claramunt readily agreed and remembered his last conversation with Ken. Randy called Ken recently knowing it was probably the last conversation they would have and true to his passion for Lake Huron and the Committee, Ken kept lobbying for the needs of Lake Huron until the very end. Ken's persistence impacted decisions and management directions. Everything that Ken did for all of us is very much appreciated.



Jim Johnson remembered a time back when we were trying to obtain desperately needed funding for lamprey treatment of the St. Marys River so lake trout could be rehabilitated in Lake Huron. Ken was on a Task Group with Jim, and Howard Tanner to obtain the needed funding. Ken knew that the legislature would be more favorable to supporting hatchery rehabilitation needs so he tied a \$4.2 million request for sea lamprey funds with a request for a \$5 million request for an upgrade of Oden and Platte River Hatcheries. Ken was a bulldog and worked best one on one with legislators and even knew and communicated with Governor Engler. He did not give up and the State funded both the hatchery and sea lamprey work. These dollars were matched with a federal grant of \$4.2 million and with the implementation of the 2000 Consent Decree these efforts resulted in major progress of rehabilitation of lake trout in Lake Huron. Ken knew most everyone at the Great Lakes Fishery Commission and after years of dealing with Ken, the Commission decided it would be easier if they just made him an official Advisor where he had major impacts. Ken will be greatly missed by many all around the Great Lakes.

Captain Dan recalled when he took Ken and his daughter on a charter trip on the river, and how Dan was permanently affected and impressed with what Ken shared with him that day.

Frank introduced Natural Resources Commission Commissioners Dave Cozad and Tom Baird, encouraging them to participate in the meeting. Dave Cozad was impressed with the number of folks participating, and Tom Baird concurred. They both looked forward to the discussions ahead.

10:05 Introduction of Laura Ogar as a new Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee Member (Frank Krist and Randy Claramunt)

Frank introduced the new Committee Member, Laura Ogar. Laura grew up fishing and continues to do so with her husband. Laura has history working with the Alaskan Natives dealing with fisheries issues and other aspects of their culture. She has been intensely involved in sturgeon projects, the Coreyon Reef project, Frankenmuth Dam removal, public access issues, among many others.

Laura shared a story of catching a Grayling in Alaska. Laura is looking forward to listening and learning, and hopefully making contributions to the committee.

10:10 Saginaw Bay Walleye and Yellow Perch Fishery:

- **An overview (Randy Claramunt and Frank Krist).**

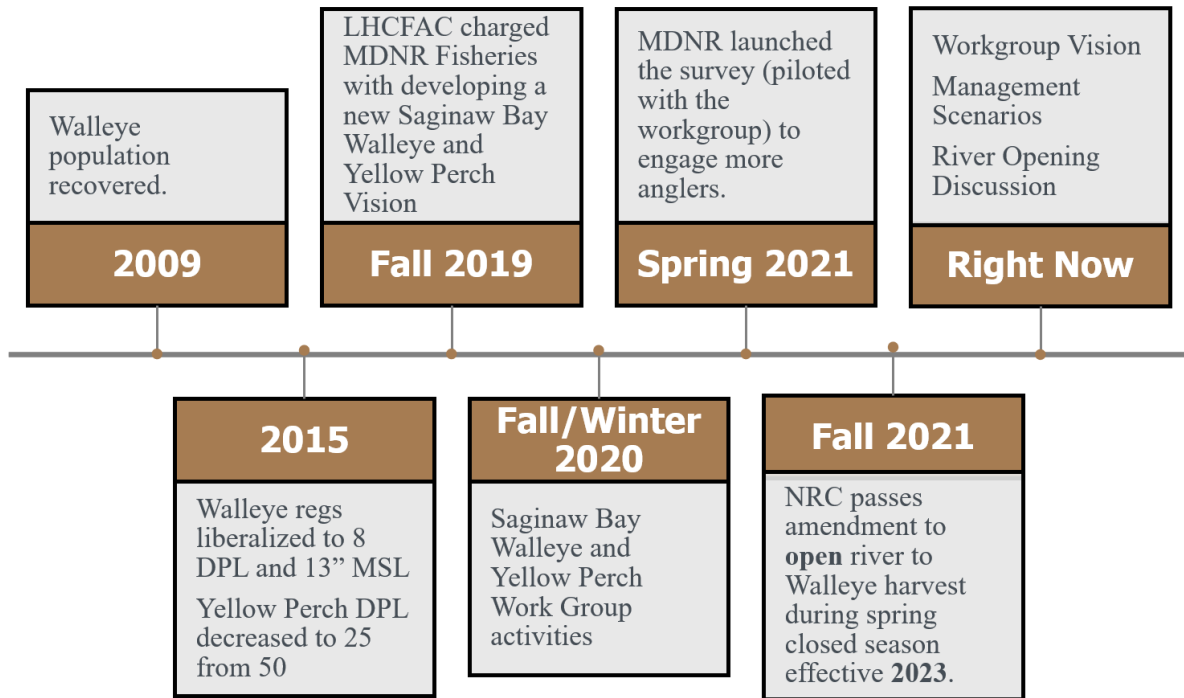
Randy mentioned that much information would be covered and we are looking forward to the input from all of the participants. Frank introduced Jeff Jolley.

- **Review of the decision to open the Lower Saginaw River year-around & future rollout (Dr Jeff Jolley, DNR Southern Lake Huron Unit Manager; Randy Claramunt and others)**

Jeff acknowledged the DNR team involved in the Saginaw Fishery work including DNR Biologists April Simmons, DNR Biologist Jason Gostiaux, DNR Researcher Dr. David Fielder, and Randy Claramunt. Also, Meaghan Gass and Brandon Schroeder from Sea Grant have provided a lot of assistance. Jeff gave a recap of the process and timeline, beginning in 2009, through 2015 when walleye were becoming abundant, until today when the Natural Resource Commission (NRC) passed an amendment to open walleye fishing year-round in the Lower Saginaw River from Center Street in Saginaw to the mouth of the river beginning in 2023, see the timeline in the slide below. Jeff highlighted the great fishing that has been occurring in the bay and the additional opportunities for bank and small boat anglers that will be created with the new spring open season beginning in the river during 2023. There are a lot of tools available to assist in the management of the new fishery, such as creel surveys, which provide angler catch rates, effort, and biodata such as walleye size, sex ratio, and age. Supplemental, information on the status and health of the walleye population will be obtained during the Dow Dam spring tagging studies and monitoring work which is conducted during the spawning season.

Jeff shared the outreach plans for educating the public about the new season including, Coffee and Conversations, Sea Grant workshops, sharing information with municipalities that will be impacted, DNR Marketing and Outreach Division's ability to produce outreach materials to highlight the fishery, and working regularly with Law Enforcement Division since the Officers will be in the field frequently interviewing and observing anglers.

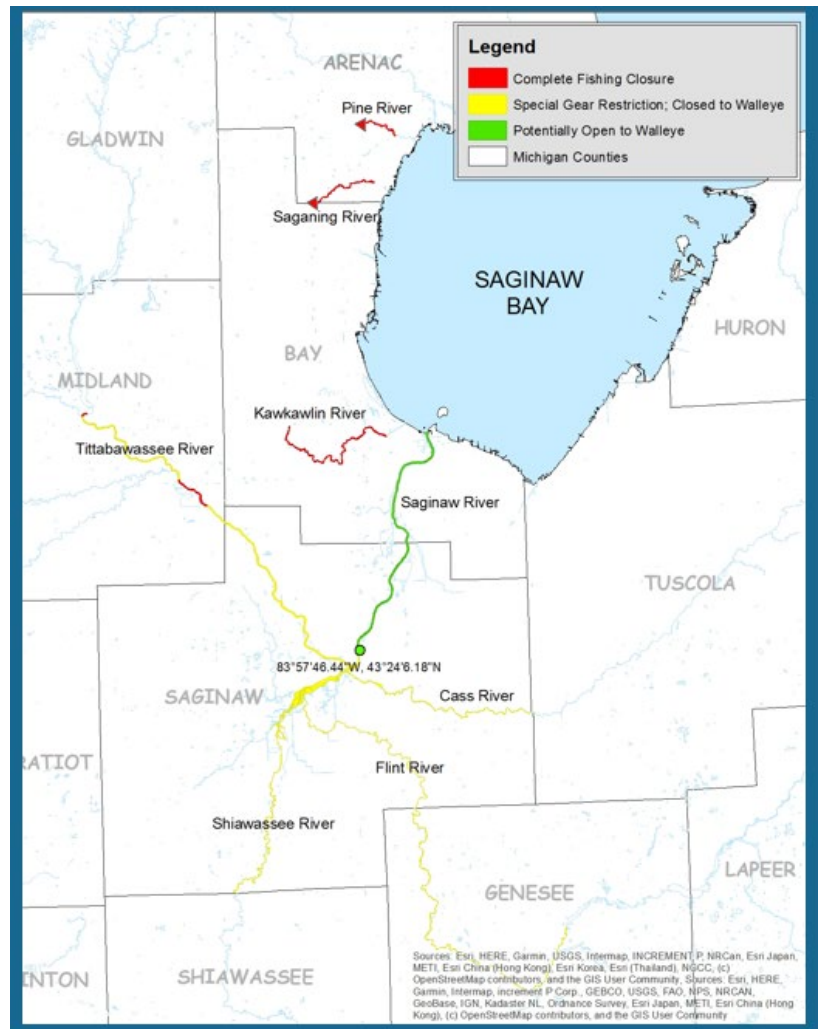
Timeline for opening the Lower Saginaw River year-round to walleye fishing during 2023



Jeff presented the map on the right that shows the section of river that would be opened year-around for walleye fishing beginning in 2023 (green), the sections closed to all species during spawning (red) and sections not open to walleye during the normal inland spring closure but are open to other species with special restrictions (yellow). There are some fishery closures on some sections of other tributaries as well. Jeff also reminded folks that these are all preliminary regulations, subject to change based on input received.

Jeff paused to receive questions:

- Tom Baird** asked about Law Enforcement Division's (LED) concerns regarding the fishery at this time. Officer Bob Hobkirk who is in charge of DNR LED in Bay, Saginaw, and Midland Counties said it will naturally create more work at this time of year, possibly creating some manpower issues. Randy emphasized that anglers must be in compliance with the rules for any location they are currently fishing in. For example, if you legally take walleyes and then fish in an area where walleye fishing is not legal then you would be in violation if you possess walleyes.



- **Captain Dan** was happy and a little dismayed about opening the river. There is a zoo atmosphere on the river at times. On the other hand, 6 weeks have been added to take advantage of the fishery, which might spread out some of the angling, maybe lessening the “madhouse” atmosphere. He is a little worried about how this is rolled out, and there might be a lot of confusion. Perhaps a placard or some sort of signage should be placed at every ramp to assist in getting the word out regarding the change in regulations.
- **Mike Veine** was concerned about how the internet can change behavior and how quickly people can become well informed on fish patterns and successful techniques used to catch fish. He is concerned about snagging techniques currently used and how these spread quickly around the internet. He is worried about the population potentially getting overly harvested, impacting the overall fishery negatively. Jeff concurred that the rapid information exchange can lead to quick increases in effort, and effectiveness of that effort. He also said that we need to keep monitoring this, and there are often cases where the worst behavior is undertaken and spread around the internet by a few individuals so the bad behavior appears to be greater than what actually might be occurring.
- **Dave Fielder** discussed that the creel survey during the new spring season will provide much data on the harvest and effort. This new information will be combined with the open water and winter creel surveys of the Bay and be used in the models to help characterize the walleye fishery and estimate the population. The river and bay walleye population will be treated as one population.
- **Captain Dan** is a little worried about how we will be learning as we go, and hopefully, there won't be difficulties in reacting quickly enough should problems occur. He mentioned that snagging is occurring, and some of it is likely unintentional, but there are techniques that can be used to minimize foul-hooking and people should be educated on those techniques. Also, with videos online showing how effective snagging can be, perhaps an effort should be made to monitor these posts and react.
- **Ed Beckley** wondered about how long it would take to change the regulation if it is determined to be harmful to the fishery. Randy said that the creel survey does not provide real time results so the fishery will not be closed down during the season. All data and parameters will be reviewed each season including not only the creel surveys, but the lake research survey and other data. This would be reviewed in late summer by the DNR, and Advisors and a recommendation would be provided to the NRC Commissioners for them to consider changing the regulation. It would therefore take a year for the NRC Commissioners to make a change. Randy stressed that all the metrics will be used each year to ensure the walleye population is healthy.
- **Laura** is concerned about the sustainability of this spawning corridor. On the other hand, the community has invested in fishing access points along the river, and this is a great opportunity for those folks without big boats. We need to publicize these access sites to make sure people can take advantage of this opportunity. We need to assure that the walleye population can withstand whatever pressure it bears. Frank said Dave Fielder will be providing a presentation this afternoon showing how the walleye population will be monitored. As was mentioned earlier, the population will be managed as a whole, not just a river fishery or bay fishery.
- **Ed Beckley** said that this is a great opportunity for those folks without a boat. This regulation helps people in the south part of the bay, but what about other rivers. Why not open all the rivers? Frank said opening the Lower Saginaw River is test and if it is successful then opening other streams might be something to discuss in the future.

Jeff thanked folks for their input and reminded everyone that this fishery could be highly variable over the years, depending on the weather.

• **Draft of the next generation of the DNR’s Saginaw Bay Walleye and Yellow Perch Management Plan (Dr. Jeff Jolley; Jason Gostiaux, DNR Fishery Biologist and April Simmons DNR Fishery Biologist)**

Jeff gave highlights of the Work Group’s vision, and the product that came from the Work Group meetings and discussions (see presentation at <https://sites.google.com/msu.edu/lhcfac/home>). He detailed some of the main objectives generated by the work group meetings. They include:

- Quality walleye fishery
- Self-sustaining fishery
- Diverse fishery – species, seasons, accessibility
- Improve yellow perch fishery – harvest opportunity and prey base
- Investment in habitat improvements
- Investment in science-based management, monitoring and research
- Cautious, calculated decisions.

Jeff talked about river access and showed the slide below that summarized the public access opportunities along the Lower Saginaw River. This looks like a lot of access but during the busy periods this may not be enough. A review of the facilities is needed since some sites need improvements such as making parking more convenient.

River Fishery Access

- 9 public launches on Saginaw R
- 500+ parking stalls
- 40 launch lanes
- 26 individual publicly accessible shore fishing access sites
- 12 miles of publicly accessible shore fishing (30%)



The workgroup discussed efforts to educate anglers where public access opportunities are located and the slide below is an example of a map produced by the *Take a Kid Fishing Project* that is an illustration of a piece of outreach material highlighting access sites along the river.

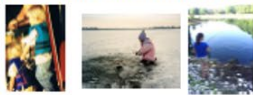
Fishery Access

TAKE A KID FISHING!

SAGINAW AND BAY COUNTY: GUIDE TO PUBLIC LAKES AND RIVERS

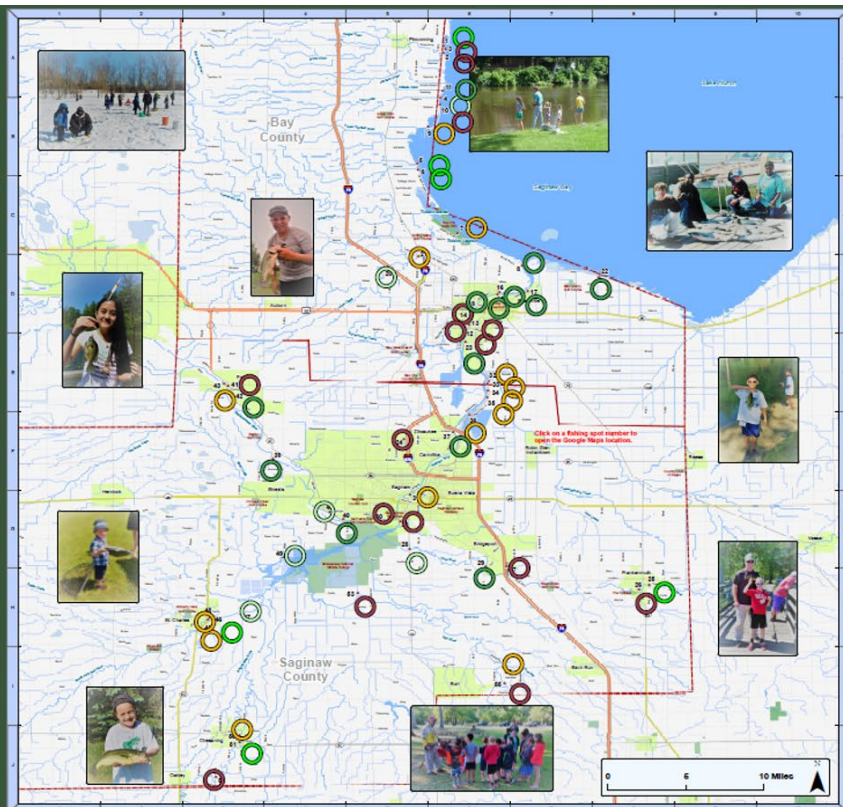
Use this guide to help get started on your next fishing adventure in the Saginaw and Bay Counties Region. The map shows fishing access sites on local roads and streams and the fish illustrations on the reverse side of the map help identify many of the common fish species found in these bodies of water. Other information includes the date and depth of fishing or necessary net, water and preparing and storing the fish you catch.

Once you've located your next fishing spot, don't forget to take your own or daughter, niece or nephew, grandchild, or another special kid along. Don't forget to take lots of pictures to capture the special memories of these special fishing and enjoying our abundant natural resources.



This map and guide is available in the many languages available with your fishing gear in an effort to help anglers and their families enjoy the outdoors together. Many thanks to our sponsors and their support in making this project possible.

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS



Jeff talked about the earlier approach of managing the walleye population to obtain recovery. With a self-sustaining population established, we are in a different place now, and need a different approach. Progress toward some objectives can be measured with various metrics:

- **Age-0 abundance** – Catch per Unit Effort (CPE) estimate in 3 of previous 5 years $\geq 20/10$ -min trawl
- **Growth** (Mean age-3 Total Length below 110% of statewide average)
- **Spawners** (i.e., unfished spawning stock biomass)
- **Catch rate** – Open-water estimate > 0.2 fish/hr (but this can sometimes be deceiving depending on weather and fish behavior)
- **Stocking** – hopefully objectives can be met without stocking.

Jeff then shared a few potential walleye management scenarios resulting from differing metric combinations, and potential regulations that might result.

Jeff then focused on the yellow perch situation, detailing the changes that have occurred over time and potential causes for the changes. He emphasized that yellow perch management options may be limited, and the cisco recovery effort is continuing.

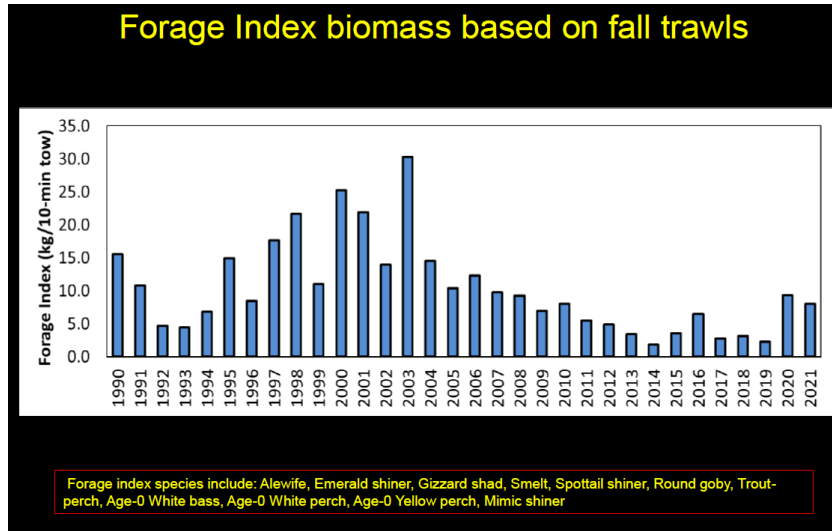
Jeff again highlighted upcoming outreach plans to educate and obtain input from the public on management options for the Saginaw Bay walleye and yellow perch fishery.

- **Update on the Saginaw Bay late summer survey results and other new data (Dr. Dave Fielder, DNR Research Biologist)**

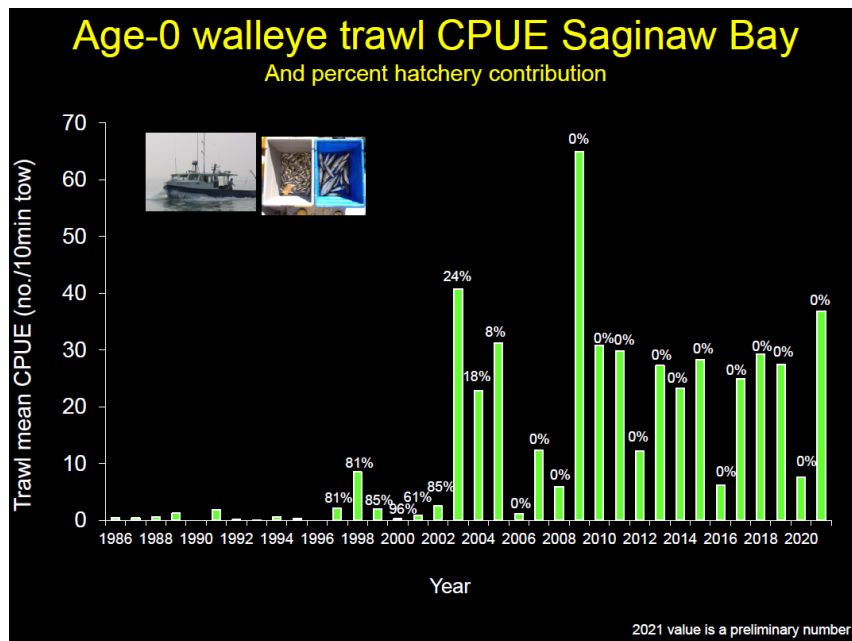
Dave Fielder gave an overview of current information regarding the walleye and yellow perch populations. He showed last summer's open water creel survey information. The walleye fishery had the lowest harvest in many

years, and lowest catch rate for many years (similar to 2011). He then showed growth information, indicating that growth increased very slightly. If there are fewer walleye in the population, growth rates may increase because more food could be available but on the other hand, significant increases in prey fish abundance can also result in increased growth of walleye. One year's slight increase in growth rate is no reason for alarm at this point.

The forage index slide below indicated higher abundance of prey fish in the past two years.



The slide below showed the 2021 Age-0 walleye trawl data revealed the third highest level indicating another strong year class is coming. If the pattern over the past decade holds true, a couple good year classes are likely on the way.



The floor was opened for questions.

- **Randy Claramunt** mentioned if the yellow perch bottleneck is between fry and adult, habitat complexity might assist to some degree in improving yellow perch survival, and perhaps higher water levels might help. Improving yellow perch habitat could be beneficial such as the Coreyon Reef project and the Saginaw Bay Coastal Management work.
- **Captain Dan** added that during higher water times his bait seining produced higher numbers of yellow perch. How to artificially help this along is tough. Dan said the anglers this season had to look around a

lot to find perch but found them using different techniques. Part of the difficulty of getting the yellow perch to bite might be the higher availability of food. Saginaw River was producing decent perch. Dan mentioned how water quality might influence perch.

- **Captain Ed Retherford** spoke about the migration of walleye to the north out of Saginaw Bay. He says it has been outstanding in recent years fishing out of Presque Isle, with many more anglers participating in walleye angling while fishing for trout and salmon in the north. Dave Fielder mentioned the telemetry project that showed that 37% of the adult walleye migrate out of the bay, some heading north, others south. There is a significant number of walleye that migrate into other waters of Lake Huron, all the way to the St. Mary's River. Some of these walleye become available to some tribal and Canadian commercial fisheries. The telemetry study shed light on walleye movement, and the consistency in movements from year to year of individual fish.
- **Frank** asked if the amount of walleye that moved out of the bay changes through the years. Dave said it is hard to answer that, since it was the same tagged fish that were monitored each year, and they tended to behave similarly each year.
- **Ed Retherford** said that many of these fish are found really deep, and are big fish. Sometimes he gets 7-8 walleye in a trip.
- **Randy T** said this is a prey-driven migration. He then talked about the overall objectives for Saginaw Bay. Should we set an overall biomass/abundance objective? Jeff said we need to look at all the metrics that will show us the overall picture. Abundance will vary, but there are so many factors to consider when considering whether to change regulations. There is a range for each variable that is acceptable for a set of regulations, and this must all be viewed through the lens of sustainability. Randy T. just wondered about setting objectives for the walleye and expected that we were doing that.
- **Tess** said she did not see the creel clerk as often as in previous years. Dave Borgeson. said there were 3 new clerks hired, and this caused some delay early in the year deploying these people.
- There was a question regarding cisco potentially suppressing walleye or perch in the bay. Dave Fielder said this was not likely, and that it is thought they would provide forage for walleye.
- **Randy Claramunt** wanted to clarify the question Randy T asked regarding objectives. Yes, we want to set objectives and benchmarks, but we don't want hard and fast regulations tied to each of these, since they all need to be considered together to best view the whole situation.
- **Frank** asked when the planning process will be completed. Randy C said that the process is really the important part of this. Hopefully, we will get this articulated in a document by the end of the year, but we will be engaging throughout the year. The goal is to achieve a shared vision of what the overall goals and objectives are, and a shared vision of how to get there.
- **Frank** asked about the potential effects of the dam failures. Dave Fielder said that any effects of the failures weren't long lasting in terms of negatively impacting the walleye production. Jeff said that his crew's observations seem to indicate fairly similar habitat and fish conditions when compared with previous years. Often large flood years can result in large increases in forage production.

Break

Resumption of the Saginaw Bay Fishery Discussion

- **Jim Johnson** said that the Lower Saginaw River does not contain any known walleye spawning habitat and its characteristics are similar to the bay and often the water even flows upstream. The lower river isn't that critical for spawning. The good spawning habit in several tributaries will be closed. We really don't know what all the implications are to opening it up, but we should learn in time. As for metrics, we need to integrate the many metrics that are being monitored into models that will help us understand all the effects that various management options have on the walleye population over time. Even healthy walleye populations fluctuate up and down which is normal.

- **Randy Terrian** talked about last year’s hesitancy for opening up the river for fishing. Randy said he needed to see response of newly hatched walleye to dam failures. With lowered harvest reported at several ports, that generated additional concern caused by the dam failures. We now have that information, showing continued recruitment, providing a higher level of comfort for opening the river to walleye fishing.
- **Captain Dan** said that the data will drive the policy. This is all new, and we will learn as we go. He agrees the lower river isn’t critical to spawning. Has anyone looked at Cheboyganing Creek that empties into the Saginaw River? Bottom should be mud or clay. Are there any fish data, creel data, habitat information? Jason Gostiaux said he can look into it, doesn’t have the answer now.
- **Jason Gostiaux** then spoke to Randy T’s question about managing for abundance. Jason said the work group wanted to take the number of walleyes in the bay out of the discussion temporarily, just deal with the overall objectives of the group, and then look at the metrics that will best gauge the progress toward those objectives. He mentioned catch rates, growth rates, etc., that when taken together help best describe the overall trajectory of the walleye population relative to the goals. The overall number wasn’t the only factor driving the group’s considerations.
- **Frank** asked if a draft version of the *Saginaw Bay Walleye and Yellow Perch Management Plan and Vision* will be available for people to review and provide comments. The presentations are excellent, but it would help to have a text version to more effectively allow people to understand and react to the current planning effort. Jason said there will be multiple opportunities for review, and several levels of review. The Workgroup will complete a draft soon which will be shared with the Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee. After that review and input from the biologists and managers a draft will be shared with the public. So, there is plenty of time for interactions to facilitate a fuller understanding of the ongoing effort. The upcoming August meeting will likely include more opportunity for discussion.
- **Randy T** said he was appreciative of the effort, and the complexity of the interaction between walleye, yellow perch, and cisco. He thinks the group is going about it the right way, hoping to have a walleye and yellow perch fishery that are complementary.
- **Laura Ogar** asked about Dave Fielder’s statement that the regulations regarding perch recovery “didn’t work.” Dave said reproduction of perch continues, but still the survivorship of perch hasn’t gotten better, and the walleye population has continued to grow (as a whole), continuing predatory pressure on the perch population. Maybe the expectation that allowing greater harvest of walleye will benefit perch should be tempered with what we have observed to date.
- **Jeff Jolley** said that the yellow perch situation isn’t unique to Saginaw Bay. Many areas are looking into poor yellow perch growth and trying to figure it out. One way a perch population may deal with heavy predation is getting sexually mature at an early age and small size. Otherwise, perch need to be in a predator poor area, or grow very fast.
- **Tom Baird** is looking forward to reviewing the data as it is compiled. He is wondering about the perch quandary and reflected on his love of perch and fishing for them with a cane pole in Grand Haven. He hopes some progress can be made on this front.
- **Dave Cozad** said that this process (Advisory Committee) is working with the high level of participation and is commendable. He greatly appreciates the long-term data sets we are blessed to have in this system. He thanked everyone for their participation.

1:30 The 2022 spring Sea Grant Workshops with special emphasis on sharing with the public the opening of the Lower Saginaw River year-around and obtaining input (Meaghan Gass, Michigan Sea Grant; Brandon Schroeder, Michigan Sea Grant and All)

Frank touted the success over the years of getting information out to the public via the Sea Grant workshops, introducing Meaghan and Brandon to speak on that front. Brandon thanked the group and noted how happy he is to participate in this effort. Brandon says their role is to help educate and gather input from the public. He said that the workshops are planned to be virtual this year.

- April 12 – Saginaw Bay focused, educate and gather input
- April 19 – Les Cheneaux, Straits, St. Mary’s River nearshore workshop

- April 28 – Offshore focused

The goal is to facilitate engagement of the public with the resource experts. Brandon thanked the Committee for their efforts. Committee members are critically needed to help get the word out as well. He asked the group to provide topics that they think should be included in the workshops.

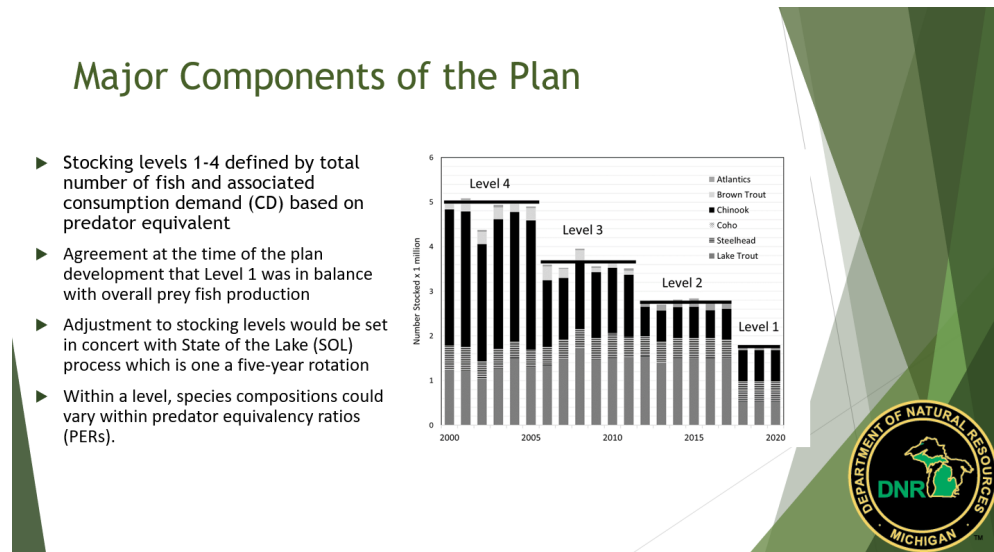
Meaghan said that an in-person Conversation and Coffee event is scheduled for April from 7 pm to 8:30 pm at the DNR Customer Service Center in Sault Ste. Marie.

Frank thanked the many agencies that provides presentations and shares information regarding Lake Huron’s status in the workshops. Randy thanked Meaghan and Brandon for their efforts. Randy spoke about the Conversations and Coffee effort, which is mostly focused on getting input on various DNR regulation change proposals for next year.

2:00 Discuss the issue of Chinook Salmon possibly being available for stocking in the spring of 2022. Should that be considered for a test stocking in southern Lake Huron and how does that relate to the *Lake Huron Salmon and Trout Management Plan*

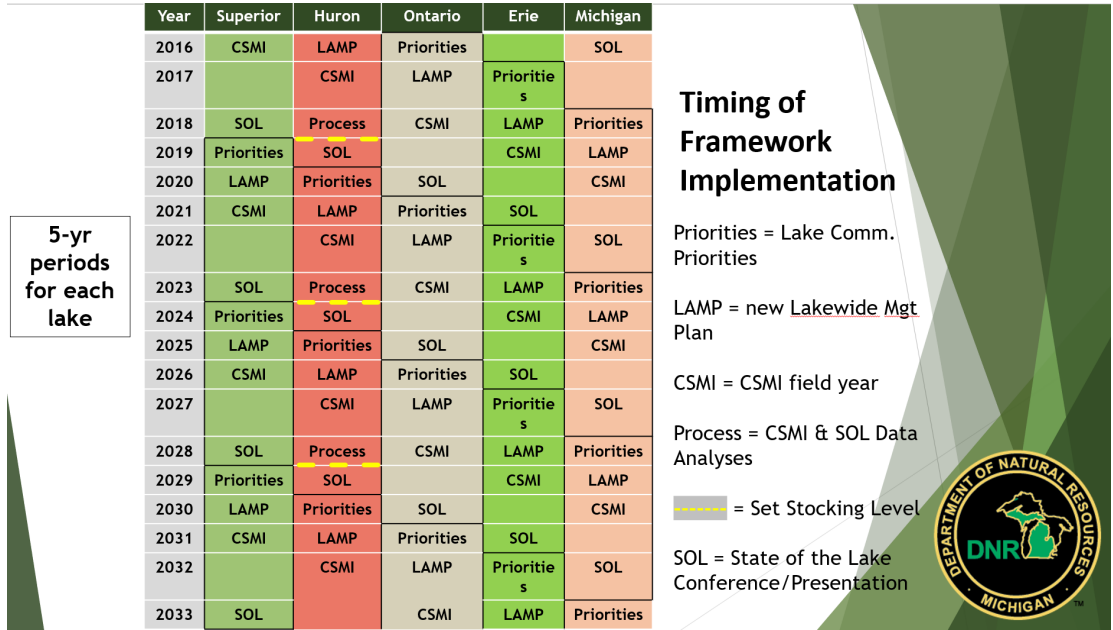
Frank brought up the Great Lakes Salmon Initiative (GLSI) proposal that if surplus Chinook were available, could they be stocked in Lake Huron? Although the current hatchery inventories do not show there will be a surplus, the LHCFAC members were asked to react to this GLSI proposal

To partially address the GLSI proposal with the Committee, Randy provided a review of the efforts to date on the Salmon and Trout Management Plan, see attached. In the slide below, he showed stocking numbers through time, which were changed to respond to changing conditions o in Lake Huron. The plan is structured to review large scale changes in stocking (Levels 1-4) every five years in conjunction with two sources of information:



1. Under an agreement through the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, all agencies that are signatory to the Joint Strategic Plan are committed to a 5-year *State of the Lake Report (SOL)* available at this link, http://www.glfsc.org/pubs/SpecialPubs/Sp20_01.pdf. This Report draws together updated fishery information and evaluates the fishery referencing the Fish Community Objectives, available at this link, http://www.glfsc.org/pubs/SpecialPubs/Sp95_1.pdf
2. The *Lakewide Action and Management Plan (LAMP)* <https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2018-04/documents/lake-huron-lamp-2017-2021-105pp.pdf>, reviews the monitoring of the nutrients, contaminants, bacterial pollution, habitat loss, lower food web and other environmental parameters.

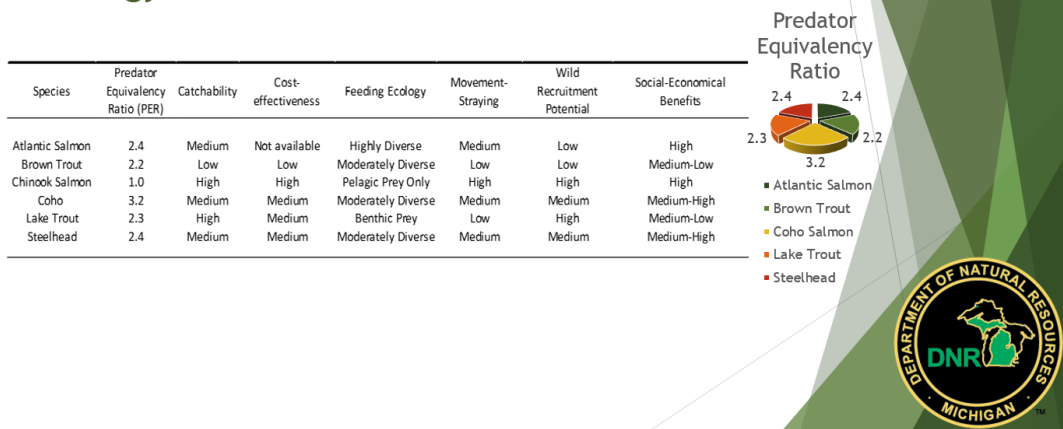
Randy talked about the LAMP and SOL processes that help feed information into the decision-making process. He showed the timeline (see slide below) for these processes, including the Cooperative Science and Monitoring Initiative (CSMI) year of intensive sampling, <https://www.epa.gov/great-lakes-monitoring/cooperative-science-and-monitoring-initiative-csmi>. CSMI is an EPA sponsored “binational effort instituted under the Science Annex of the 2012 Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement to coordinate science and monitoring activities in one of the five Great Lakes each year to generate data and information for environmental management agencies.”



If you view in the chart above, the Lake Huron column from top to bottom you will notice that each 5-year cycle is marked with yellow dashed lines. You can see the year when the various LAMP and SOL documents became available and when the Great Lakes Fishery Commission Lake Huron Committee establishes Priorities. This year the CSMI intensive sampling will take place and during 2023 the data will be analyzed through the Process.

Even though the review of the stocking levels will not take place this year, within the 5-year stocking level policy, changes in stocking could be done using *predator equivalents* and with consideration of current and likely near future Lake Huron conditions. Multiple managing agencies complicate the decision-making process in Lake Huron. Randy described “predatory equivalency ratios,” normalizing each species to Chinook consumption, which is the highest among the various species stocked, see the slide below.

Species, predator equivalency ratios (PER), and factors considered in the stocking strategy for Lake Huron.



The slide above shows for example that a Chinook Salmon eats 2.4 times as much food on average as an Atlantic Salmon eats. Another example shows that a Chinook eats about 3.2 times as much food as a Coho eats in its lifetime.

Randy mentioned the lack of steelhead egg take in 2020 and the resulting lack of stocking leading to the question of potentially stocking more salmon in 2021. Based on LHCFAC input, it was decided not to do this last year, but those types of decisions are the kind that can be facilitated by utilizing the equivalency ratio methodology.

Tess noticed the difference between stocking at level 2 and level 1. There seems to be a difference in where the state of the lake is, and the 5-year stocking level. Randy said that was a good catch, and there is an issue with the appropriate level of lake trout stocking at this time. Although the Salmon and Trout Management Plan Subcommittee supported a higher stocking level policy (Level 2), the lake trout stocking cuts in 2018 placed the actual level at Level 1 (66% reduction in lake trout stocking). During the development of the of the Salmon and Trout Management Plan, the LHCFAC members voiced strong support for reinstating a proportion of those lake trout stocking cuts in southern Lake Huron. Even though there was a desire among the Great Lakes Fishery Commission Lake Huron Lake Committee members to reestablish some lake trout stocking in southern Lake Huron, there is not a unanimous viewpoint to add more lake trout. After several years of discussions and no agreement to reinstate lake trout stocking, the Lake Huron Committee will be asked to deliberate on replacing lake trout with other salmonines using the predator equivalents and within level 2 for overall consumptive demand including potential stocking scenarios involving various species in Michigan's waters of Lake Huron. This topic will be discussed at future LHCFAC meetings this year.

Randy Terrian talked about how well-received some of the coho stocking has been. Stocking sites have been alternating among years, and could these be stocked every year? The coho seem to be easier to catch when they come back to spawn than the Atlantics. The Atlantics cause some frustration during the fall return to harbors but the coho seem to create a happy group of satisfied anglers due to high catchability. Coho have been very well-received.

Captain Dan talked about some of the rare encounters with coho in some of the southern rivers in the past. He wonders with cleaner waters could some of these southern rivers be stocked again, perhaps resulting in even better return results.

Ed Blissick (GLSI) talked about the rebound of the Chinook on Lake Michigan, and his thoughts that we have shown the ability to manage that fishery effectively. He thinks some movement of salmon stocking to Lake Huron could occur. He said they supported increasing Chinook stocking of Lake Michigan, but other states did not support the proposed increase. This was disappointing, since it was their understanding that if the lake could support additional fish, they would be stocked. Since the fish were projected to be available, the question was, if these extra Chinook were not going into Lake Michigan, could they go somewhere else. He appreciated the openness of the LHCFAC to this question, and the potential ability to try different stocking events to help diversify the fishery with more silver fish. GLSI wondered about a one-time Chinook stocking to learn and perhaps take advantage of cisco as prey (a species they wonder about in terms of its potential predatory influence).

Mike Veine was concerned about the hard "no" about increased stocking of lake trout in southern Lake Huron. Randy Claramunt said we are only stocking lake trout in the two most northern locations in Lake Huron. Recruitment isn't going on everywhere, mostly in the north, and not a ton in southern Lake Huron. The difficulty really centers around Ontario and the declining whitefish commercial fishery. There are some large social-political issues on this front. In the Lake Huron Technical Committee, there is a difference of opinion as to whether stocking is needed on a lake-wide basis. Based on input from the LHCFAC, Randy Claramunt will push for coho or other Salmonine species to replace the lake trout consumptive demand released due to the reduction in stocking.

Frank mentioned the lake whitefish status report recently published. There does not appear to be evidence of lake trout predatory pressure being a primary force on whitefish recruitment. This paper might not influence the perspective of the Ontario commercial fishery. Ontario has a high level of resolve on their stance to hold off any increases in lake trout stocking.

Randy Claramunt said that one of the major issues is that MDNR does not rear lake trout for Great Lakes stocking anymore. Also, he is fairly certain that he would get support from stakeholder for trading steelhead, coho, or Atlantics for additional rearing of lake trout in our state hatcheries.

Randy Terrian asked about getting some of the Ontario fish to stock in Michigan waters, but wouldn't we want Seneca strain instead of what Ontario has? Randy Claramunt said Ontario would probably not want to give us lake trout to stock, since they are interested in decreasing the overall lake trout presence. But yes, Seneca's have greater survival than other strains.

Randy T. asked if walleye consumption is accounted for? Randy C. said yes, they are a contributor and being factored in but walleye consumption of pelagic prey fish (e.g., smelt) is relatively low compared to lake trout and other salmon and trout species.

Tess said diversity for diversity's sake is not what she wants. She thinks we should look long term for what is best for the fishery. Randy said our choice to go to coho was done because it was most conducive to the condition of the lake at the time, taking into account available prey items.

Paul Stowe asked about potential numbers of coho, stating that they were close to rearing capacity for coho at the Platte. Reducing the stocking in the Platte River could have implications to the coho egg take during lean years of the Platte River coho runs.

Tom Keerl said they were catching coho through the ice in the Harrisville Harbor, even though they weren't stocked at that location.

Laura weighed in on the diversity for diversity sake comment. Are there cycles that we should be considering? Are we keeping a long-term viewpoint in mind? Randy C. said that is a good point, and we haven't been changing stocking every year, and we have been fairly deliberate in the changes we have made. Randy says he thinks we need the flexibility to adjust as the lake changes.

Ed Blissick says he wasn't advocating only taking coho from the Platte. He said perhaps using the Swan as a back-up facility might be wise. Ed says coho, steelhead, and Chinook create fisheries that excite anglers.

Randy C. mentioned Matt Zink's recent thesis presentation describing the Atlantic salmon survival, abundance, etc., that shows there is room to increase Atlantic salmon numbers if desired. There is room in the predatory community for these fish. He did a cost/travel analysis that models angler behavior preferences showing Atlantic salmon are a significant driver of behavior that is similar to Chinook. This might indicate further investment in Atlantic salmon would provide a higher proportionate benefit to the fishery than many other species, on a par with Chinook.

Randy Terrian viewed Matt's presentation and concurred that Atlantics are a highly desirable fish among anglers. He thinks increased stocking and making sure they are stocked at the most appropriate times and locations is needed to benefit the program. He also thinks additional coho should be stocked as well, including fall stocking.

Randy Claramunt mentioned the stocking timing document that was produced for Atlantic salmon and steelhead, which is an attempt to coordinate stocking at the various ports to minimize predation. Randy Terrian literally worked thousands of hours over several years with anglers along the Au Sable River and other stocking sites to obtain data on the optimal stocking times. Randy T hoped that we will adhere to the stocking plan to learn if the plan is effective resulting in improved post stocking survival. He hopes hatcheries can fully implement the plan.

Randy Claramunt warned that mass marking is critical to our understanding of our stocking program success. The DNR has had to hand clip Atlantic salmon, which is a huge effort. Mass marking needs within Michigan are great. If we don't get mass marking, Randy won't recommend hand clipping. It takes more staff than we can afford, and preliminary evidence suggest that hand clipping actually contributes substantially to post stocking mortality. Return results seemingly indicate a mortality increase of hand clipped fish. Mass marking with automated machines involves much less handling and likely much less mortality will be induced. Steelhead will be mass marked for another five years.

Randy T mentioned the stocking plan for steelhead in the Au Sable, with differing stocking times for different lots. We hope to learn if there is differential survival between these two stocking events (early vs. later), so different marks will be needed for these fish.

Randy T said the creel limit for steelhead in Lake Michigan tributaries has been reduced, perhaps there may be more people headed to the Lake Huron tributaries. Would increases in pressure in the Lake Huron streams harm the natural reproduction? Should Lake Huron lower the limit on our tributaries?

Frank said they would be open to a discussion in the future if members think it appropriate. Frank thanked Randy T for all his work in gathering information concerning the Atlantic, coho and steelhead fishery.

Tess asked if there were alternative methods for marking fish that would be appropriate. Randy said there are different methods that can be used, like stable isotope analysis that can indicate origins of caught fish. The mass marking effort, however, provides the most information to managers, helping answer pertinent questions.

Captain Dan had a personal policy of keeping only one female steelhead. He said he heard some guides saying they might want to go to places where they can keep more. Will guides have to stop fishing if they have their limit on the boat? Randy C said you can keep your limit, and then practice catch and immediate release if you wanted to continue fishing.

2:30 Updates from members and agency representatives

Nick Torsky, Great Lakes Law Enforcement Unit: there is not a lot of change to report from field enforcement standpoint. Challenging weather conditions in the fall made commercial fishing tough. There was a short window for commercial fishing after the November closure but that closed rapidly. Nick was organizing an education class when he was an acting Lieutenant, but that stint has ended with retirements and Officers moving to new positions. Kevin Postma is an acting Lieutenant in Eastern UP and will mostly be supervising Officers from the Upper Peninsula. Two retirements in Northern Lake Michigan were filled with one of those Officers moving to Keweenaw area of Lake Superior in the 1842 Treaty Waters. The Law Enforcement Division (LED) was not able to hire field officers in 2020 because of Covid. A group of nine prior certified enforcement officers were hired. Another 19 went to recruit school, were trained, and will be deployed this year. A couple of new officers will be located in the Thumb. LED is currently in the hiring process for 2022, with around 20-25 officers expected, hopefully keeping up with retirements. There have already been around 6 retirements since January.

Todd Wills, Alpena, Lake St Clair, and Lake Erie Great Lakes Research Stations: They are back to being fully staffed at Alpena; Kaley Genter was hired with much experience after working for the US Fish and Wildlife Service in Alpena for many years. Todd encouraged everyone to attend the virtual Great Lakes Meetings that the Great Lakes Fishery Commission is hosting. Registration for the meetings is available at this link, <http://www.glfsc.org/lake-committee-registration.php>

Tim O'Brien, USGS Great Lakes Science Center: They completed most of the planned 2021 prey fish assessments in US and Canada. These had been reduced in 2020. They are busy preparing for the upcoming Lake Committee meetings. They have an ambitious survey schedule planned for 2022, evenly split between lakes Michigan and Huron. They are very busy. Spring surveys, with cisco assessment off Saginaw Bay are planned for this year. Standard assessments for 2022 are scheduled. Summaries of prey fish results will be available for upcoming spring workshops. Trawl and acoustic findings will be reported together, and presented at the Lake Committee meetings and workshops. Goby assessment work won't be in these reports, but Pete Esselman will likely report his results during the Lake Committee meetings.

Paul Stowe, Natural Resources Manager, Platte River State Fish Hatchery: Atlantic salmon are looking good, with about 100,000 at the Platte and 80,000 at Harrietta. Platte Atlantics are the longest in length they have produced so far, hopefully this will result in better survival. Things are looking good. They will be clipping and tagging the fish first at Platte, then moving to Harrietta. Some early rearing losses occurred in steelhead, but unsure where those levels are currently. Chinook are fairly on track for targeted numbers. Swan River fish are at Platte, and the hatchery personnel will work with Frank to stock them when conditions are appropriate.

Donna Wesander, DNR Fisheries Charter Fishery Reporting: Members of the charter boat, aquaculture and commercial fisheries industries were sent federal grant information regarding available funding for potentially impacted businesses. If someone is eligible and did not receive the information or has questions, contact Donna at

WesanderD@michigan.gov or call 517-284-5830. Deadline for submitting is Feb 28. Charter catch reporting will be done exclusively online in 2022. Charter catch results for 2021 are being compiled and will be available soon.

Dave Borgeson, Northern Lake Huron Unit Supervisor: staff is preparing for Black Lake sturgeon season, and planning for the upcoming field season. They are also involved in an ongoing structured decision-making effort for reviewing options and challenges to a sustainable fishery in the Au Sable River system, bringing many stakeholders into the process. Randy Claramunt mentioned that cormorant management program is resuming, and just over 10,000 birds permitted to be taken during 2022. No funding has been reinstated for this program. USDA Wildlife Services has been able to assist in the effort. We are currently lacking the long term sustained funding needed for this program.

Jeff Jolley, Southern Lake Huron Unit Supervisor: staff is gearing up for field season, strategizing walleye stocking in inland waters and renewing prescriptions. April has been working with several constituents on habitat and lake management issues and some proposed fishery orders may results. A lot of the Saginaw Bay focus for this year has been discussed during this meeting.

Julie Shafto, Creel Program: Julie worked in Alpena last fall. Tough fishing for coho and Atlantics last fall in Alpena. Since coho were stocked in Alpena during 2021 this would normally be an off year for them. Not many Atlantics reported last year. More Chinooks were seen than coho. She had great fall fishing for yellow perch in the Thunder Bay River at Alpena.

Meaghan Gass, Michigan Sea Grant: Efforts are being undertaken with sustainable fisheries and aquaculture work. There are projects engaging K-12 students to educate them about the Great Lakes. Ten Teachers are going out on the Lake Guardian vessel in conjunction with this year's Cooperative Science and Monitoring Initiative (CSMI) work, <https://www.epa.gov/great-lakes-monitoring/cooperative-science-and-monitoring-initiative-csmi>. This should provide a close view of how the survey work is being conducted on the Great Lakes.

NRC Commissioner Tom Baird : thanked Frank for including him in this meeting. A lot of good impressive work is being done.

NRC Commissioner David Cozad: concurred with Tom. The sincere, sustained interest, as evidence by the continued attendance during the meeting was impressive.

Randy Claramunt: appreciated the comments of the Commissioners. Also appreciated the depth of information and input shared during today's meeting.

3:00 Adjourn.

Three additional meetings have been scheduled for this year on the dates below beginning at 10 am and continuing until 3 pm. The Outback Room has been reserved for these meetings at Jay's Sporting Goods in Clare and depending on Covid, the goal is to have the meetings in-person with an online hybrid option. Below are the dates scheduled for the meetings.

Tuesday April 26, 2022
Monday August 8, 2022
Tuesday October 4, 2022