

Lake Michigan Citizen's Fishery Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

Jay's Sporting Goods

April 5th, 10:30 AM to 3:30 PM

Attendees:

Denny Grinold, Jay Wesley, Scott Lutz, Chuck Pistis, Jim Fenner, Jim Dexter, Dan O'Keefe, Jim Bedford, Jim Bos, Tim Hossack, Mike Radcliffe, Bill Winowiecki, Blaise Pewinski, Mark Williams, Kevin Hughes, Eric Braden, Ed Blissick, Tom Andris, Frank Krist, Ben Turschak, Donna Wesander, Jim Squier, Scott Hentzleman, Michael Feagan, Justin Vanderlinde, Nick Torsky, Ed Eisch; VIA TEAMS: Dave Clapp, David Cozad, Dennis Eade, Gregg Mariuz, Seth Herbst, Heather Hettinger, Kendra Kozlausko, Christian LeSage, Matt Groleau, Mike Verhamme, Paul Jensen, Steve Greer, Tony Radjenovich.

Advisor Reports:

- Still a lot of ice in northern Lake Huron. MH-1 was over the Lake Trout allowable harvest limit. It was estimated using an extraction formula. We need actual creel surveys in 1836 Treaty waters.
- Steelhead action on the Kalamazoo River was great this past fall and winter.
- Coho salmon fishing has been good south of St. Joseph.
- The MUCC Kids Camp is back.
- Ice is coming off north of Manistee. Most of the tournaments are back this year.
- Small boats in Ludington are getting four to six brown trout a trip. Fish on For Freedom is back again this year.
- Lake Huron/St. Clair coho action has been great. Manistee River has been hit or miss for steelhead.
- Some people are getting out on Grand Traverse Bays but the fishing has been tough.
- PM River is high and the steelhead action is ok and about the same as last year.
- Prairie River was ok this year for steelhead.
- There has been a good southern river steelhead run.
- No yellow perch, and anglers are getting some brown trout.
- Over 7,000 steelhead passed the South Bend Fish Ladder the month of March, which equates to about 15,000 at Berrien Springs.

Charter Boat Data Review:

- Donna gave her last official report to the Citizen Advisors as she will be retiring at the end of the month.
- Charter operators have gone up slightly overtime and are now over 600 for the state.
- 69% are reporting online now, and there were over 22,000 excursions in 2021.
- Lake Michigan Charter Excursions were over 14,000.
- Lake Michigan Charter harvest was mostly Lake Trout (53,000), Chinook Salmon (24,000) and Coho Salmon (13,000).

- Wisconsin has higher Charter effort at 336,000 hrs and Michigan's effort was 275,000 hrs.
- Wisconsin Charters harvested 35,000 Chinook salmon, and Michigan Charters harvested 24,000.
- Over 2,000 fish were caught in Little Bay de Noc in 2021 with most being Walleye, Yellow Perch and Chinook Salmon.
- Big Bay de Noc/Fairport caught 350 with mostly Chinook, Steelhead, and Smallmouth Bass.
- Manistique caught over 350 Chinook, Steelhead, and Lake Trout.
- Charlevoix caught 2,200 of mostly Lake Trout in 2021.
- Frankfort/Platte Bay caught 6,000 of mostly Lake Trout with some Chinook and Coho.
- Manistee caught 9,000 in 2021 with mostly Chinook and Lake Trout.
- Ludington also caught about 9,000 of a mix of Chinook, Lake Trout, Coho, and Steelhead.
- Pentwater caught about 3,000 with a mix of salmon and trout.
- Muskegon caught over 2,500 with a mix of salmon and trout.
- Grand Haven caught 8,000 mostly Lake Trout and Chinook with some Coho and Steelhead.
- Holland caught over 5,500 of mostly Lake Trout.
- Saugatuck caught about 3,000 of mostly Lake Trout.
- South Haven caught about 5,000 Lake Trout.
- St. Joe caught nearly 12,000 of mostly Lake Trout and Coho Salmon.
- All ports caught between 6 and 14 fish per excursion.
- Fuel surcharges could impact trips for 2022 if marine fuel costs remain high.
- We would like some tribal detail of what they catch. Annual harvest reports are on the Tribal Coordination Unit web site.
- Do you keep records of guides on rivers? Discussion followed regarding draft bills that would require reporting by guides.
- We think that there is under reporting of charters. LED and the Charter Program will continue to monitor.

Creel Data Review:

- Lake-wide sport harvest (all states) for Lake Michigan was about 5.5 million pounds with Chinook salmon, Lake Trout, Coho Salmon, and Steelhead making up most of the harvest. This harvest level has been stable for the past 8 years and may be an indication of the lake's current carrying capacity.
- The lake-wide commercial harvest is down to 2 million pounds of mostly whitefish and is the lowest in the time series.
- The number of fish caught in the Michigan creel was up slightly in 2021 to 100,000.
- Salmonid effort was down to 556,000 angler hours, which is significantly lower than the goal of 1 million, and the catch rate for Chinook salmon was up in 2021 to 0.083 Chinook per hour.

- Effort was reviewed for major ports with a creel presence, and effort was down from Frankfort down to Grand Haven in recent years. Advisors suspected that this was a direct result of lower Chinook salmon numbers.
- Blow days could also influence creel effort as smaller boats will wait for good weather. Charter boats can generally get out on most days.
- Some younger anglers may not be getting into big lake fishing due to the expense of the boats and equipment.

Lake Committee Updates:

- There were several presentations at the 2021 Lake Michigan Committee Meeting. Highlights from each topic were presented.
- Total May Phosphorus in Lake Michigan continue to be low that is also related to lower zooplankton and mysis levels in the lake. Although nearshore nutrient levels may have stabilized, offshore nutrient levels continue to go down with guagga mussels expanding in deeper waters.
- Adult alewife abundance continues to be low but stable for the past 6 years. There was a better alewife year class, which may be like the 2016-year class.
- Adult bloaters continue to be low, and there was a very strong year class in 2021.
- Adult smelt continue to be low with a slight increase in the 2021-year class.
- USGS is experimenting with spring surveys to see if the alewife density and age classes are different than seen in the fall. The ages classes were similar, and a slightly higher density of alewife was caught. It was also interesting that most of the alewife were caught in 100 ft of water or deeper in the spring.
- USGS and DNR also sampled near saildrones in 2021 to see if there was any avoidance of the vessels during acoustic surveys. Results will be out soon but did not show any significant avoidance.
- Goby bots were used to estimate round gobies using video footage. The goby bot biomass estimates were over three times higher than the trawl estimates.
- The biomass of Chinook has decreased since 2005 and has stabilized at a lower level since 2013. The brown trout biomass has been on a steady decline. Lake Trout has been on an increase since 2006 and is approaching levels last seen in the late 1980s. Coho Salmon have annual variability but has been stable over the time series. Steelhead have been stable since 2003.
- Chinook growth has been good for the past 6 years after slow and variable growth from 2007 to 2015.
- The Predator Prey Ratio has not been run since 2019 due to data gaps and updates to the steelhead and lake trout models. The PPR will be run in May of 2022 using all data through 2021.
- Smallmouth bass, Northern Pike, and Walleye are all increasing in nearshore areas while yellow perch have been low.
- A strain evaluation was completed by the Lake Trout Working Group. Current stocking includes Seneca Lake strain, Lewis Lake (relic of Lake Michigan strain), and Parry Sound (Lake Huron strain) with the Klondike (Lake Superior Strain) recently discontinued.

- The mass marking highlights include increasing southern Lake Michigan Lake Trout wild production approaching 55%. The northern Lake Michigan Lake Trout are at 10%.
- Preliminary Steelhead mass marking data shows 33 to 45% wild fish in Lake Michigan. The average movement of a steelhead is 158 miles. Indiana stocked steelhead are surviving better than Michigan and Wisconsin. Southern Lake Michigan stocking sites are surviving better than northern.
- Whitefish continue to decline in the 1836 Ceded Waters while Green Bay populations continue to increase.

Stocking Plans for 2022 and 2023:

- There are extra Chinook salmon in the Michigan hatchery system, so Lake Michigan and Lake Huron will be stocked at level 3, which is 5 to 10% higher than normal. Lake Michigan will receive 687,250. Some extras may also go to other Lake Michigan states due to poor egg survival in their hatchery systems.
- Michigan plans to stock 296,000 Brown Trout, 1.58 million Coho Salmon, 625,000 yearling steelhead along with 300,000 fall fingerling Steelhead, and the USFWS plans to stock 2.1 million Lake Trout.
- In 2023, Michigan will pursue a stocking increase of Chinook up to 1 million.
- Brown trout stocking review will start in 2023 after stocking was shifted to northern ports that are closer to deeper waters. For example, the Ludington brown trout catch decreased from 4,000 in the late 1990s to less than 100 in 2021. During that time the stocking of Brown Trout increased from 20,000 to 80,000. Lake-wide (all states) brown trout harvest has declined from 600,000 pounds to 100,000 pounds through the time series.
- What can replace Brown Trout with? Probably could increase Rainbow Trout (Steelhead and Eagle Lakes), Atlantic Salmon, and perhaps Coho Salmon. We already have extra capacity for Chinook Salmon because they are only in the hatchery for 6 months rather than 18 months.

Regulations:

- Coffee and Conversation meetings are occurring throughout the state and is where statewide and local regulation changes are discussed with the public.
- Underwater Spear Fishing changes were approved that allow the take of walleye, northern pike, and lake trout in Lake Michigan south of Grand Haven. This requires a no cost license that also requires reporting of effort and harvest.
- Steelhead bag limit decrease to one steelhead per day between March 15 and May 15 on the Muskegon, PM, Manistee, Little Manistee, Bear, and Manistique rivers in the Lake Michigan Basin.

DNR Reports:

- Law Enforcement Update
 - David Shaw is the current Chief of Law Enforcement Division.
 - The Lake Michigan Unit is currently fully staffed.

- There will be a new boat added to the fleet that will run out of Whitehall.
- There are a lot of issues with cut bait coming into the state that are lacking the proper labels. Please let them know if you see this.
- The Division is hiring and are running 20 to 25 through the academy.
- Have you lost your senior experience with all these young officers? There is a good mix now. Along with the young officers, about half the force has 12 to 18 years of experience, so they will be around awhile to train and assist young officers.
- Fisheries Division
 - Research: Spring Lake Trout and other lake assessments will start in April. Charlevoix is excited about the potential funding to replace the R.V. Steelhead. The station will continue to conduct reef assessment work to see what fish are using them, what the condition of the reef is, and how are mussels influencing them. These data will support future protection and rehabilitation work. Donna is retiring at the end of the month and John Clevenger who ran the coded-wire tag program retired, so working hard to get a replacement. As a result, some of the head return letters have been slow to go out. Charlevoix is doing telemetry work on Lake Trout and Cisco and will be testing out special tags for steelhead.
 - Hatchery: Walleye egg take is underway, and the grates are in at weir for steelhead. Some of the hatcheries have experienced power outages and the safety systems and trained staff prevented any fish losses. Fish production was good for all salmon and trout and all targets were achieved. Hatcheries have received energy funds to install solar power. They are also excited about the proposed \$30 million for hatchery infrastructure improvements.
 - Field: Steelhead grates are in at weir, walleye egg takes underway, and early walleye and northern pike surveys have begun in the south. Most of the north is still froze up. Field could receive needed equipment replacement funding for new boats, motors, electrofishing equipment and nets. Wildlife, Forestry, and Law would also receive these proposed equipment funds.
 - The state was over the allowable harvest in MM-4 (Grand Traverse) in 2018 that resulted in a 2019 penalty. Lake Trout jigging continues to be popular, and anglers are concerned that the allowable harvest could be exceeded again because of the 41% hooking mortality that is applied. It is recommended that an education effort continue to inform anglers to catch their limit and then stop fishing for Lake Trout to reduce the number of released fish. There was a recommendation for a new study to look at techniques for releasing Lake Trout and to evaluate jigging hooking mortality. Wesley will work with Jonas, Tim Hossack, Bill Winoweicki, and Frank Krist to produce a draft study proposal that can be reviewed by the Citizens Advisors at the fall meeting. A third-party study could cost more than \$65,000. There is risk that the release mortality could be higher certain times of year.

Steelhead Presentation:

- There has been a reduction in the Steelhead runs in some rivers that has caused anglers and groups to become concerned. To address this concern, the Division has developed a presentation on current Steelhead management, research, regulations, and future assessment that has been given to the Natural Resource Commission and to the Coldwater Resources Steering Committee.
- Changes have occurred in Lake Michigan since 2003 that may be limiting smolt survival due maybe to predation of out migrating smolts with the absence of alewife and increase in walleye and lake trout predators.
- Although smolt production has been variable in our wild rivers, there is no significant evidence to suggest that adult returns are influencing the number of smolts produced.
- To update our creel data to compare effort, harvest, and released Steelhead in major river systems, creel is proposed to start in October 2022 on the Muskegon and Manistee rivers.
- Staff are also preparing to conduct a study using telemetry tags to track migration of smolts and to detect when and if predation occurs with tags that change frequency when in a fish stomach.
- Michigan's regulations are conservative compared to other states. Some do have a lower limit down to 1 during stream runs and others like Wisconsin, Indiana, and Illinois will stay at 5 for Lake Michigan and their tributaries.
- A question was asked if Charters would be negatively influenced by a lower bag limit to 2 on Lake Michigan. The Charters that do go out to steelhead water say that anglers want the experience and usually hook up with more fish than they land. A bag limit of two per angler would not be a big issue.
- More discussion of Steelhead management will occur at the Coldwater Resource Steering Committee and here at the Lake Michigan Citizen's Fishery Advisory Committee.

Next Meeting:

- September 29th at 10:30Am at Jay's Sporting Goods.
- April 11, 12, or 13 in 2023.

Adjourned at 3:30 PM