

Lake Michigan Citizen's Fishery Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

Jay's Sporting Goods

Clare, MI

October 17th, 2023 – 10:30 AM to 3:00 PM

Attendees:

Denny Grinold, Jay Wesley, Scott Lutz , Jim Bos, Tim Hossack, Mike Radcliffe, Bill Winowiecki, Mark Williams, Kevin Hughes, Marc Traver, Tom Andris, Frank Krist, Theresa Krist, Scott Heintzelman, Dean Jessup, CT Shuman, John Stegmeier, Blaise Pewinski, Dennis Eade, Dan O'Keefe, Dave Caroffino, Brian Gunderman, Mike Pajtas, George Freeman, Jim Bedford, Frank Pearson, David Cozad, Tom Baird, Dave Peterson, Mark Johnson, Steve Behan, Jim Squier, Dave Johnson, Nick Torsky, Aaron Switzer, Ed Eisch. Via TEAMS – Lawrence Atkins, Randy Claramunt, Seth Herbst, Bob Reider, Paul Jensen, Ed Erdelac, Gregg Mariuz, Darren Kramer, and Troy VanGelderren, Amy Swainston, Mark Tonello.

Advisor Reports:

- Bays De Noc walleye was better along with a good run of Coho Salmon in the Escanaba River. Wild steelhead are doing well in rivers.
- Muskegon had an excellent season for Kings up to the point.
- Early spring Coho fishing in southern part of lake was phenomenal.
- First wave of Kings came in early May was also phenomenal in Grand Haven. Lake Trout were found incidentally on the bottom.
- Catches in South Haven were ok. Through the season, we caught around 10 steelhead compared to none last year. Kings and Coho stayed around until mid-August.
- Fishing in Holland was average. We got 5-7 fish per trip mostly Kings in a range of sizes/ages. Lake Trout numbers were way down.
- Peir fishing for Whitefish in October and November was excellent off Grand Haven and Muskegon.
- Arcadia saw smaller salmon and just one blip in the year when steelhead were available. Hear of more anglers on streams fishing for Steelhead.
- Frankfort had better Brown Trout but not great. Steelhead were down, and Coho were good. Size was down for all species, and we saw fewer Lake Trout.
- Grand Traverse Bay Lake Trout and Steelhead were decent with good Kings but size was down.
- Ludington had good numbers again this year. Lake Trout stayed out in 300-400 FOW, and numbers were down for the second year in a row. There was bait with some magnum alewife. Brown Trout were better for the second year in a row. Seems to be more Coho around, but they have not run up the Big Sable River.
- Leland had big Lake Trout fishing in the spring that disappeared. We had to go out to the Manitou's to find fish. Many trips there was no bait and no salmon.
- Pentwater Lake Trout fishing was down, but the King fishing was good.

- Charlevoix to Petoskey had decent Lake Trout fishing with lots of gobies around. Brown Trout fishing was bad.

Great Lakes Decree – What is new for Lake Michigan?

- The history of court decisions regarding the 1836 Treaty Area was reviewed and went back to 1979.
- The Great Lakes for the most part have changed since 2000 with less capacity to sustain Chinook Salmon and less recruitment of Lake Whitefish.
- The negotiating timeline started in 2014 with solicitation of advisor and public feedback.
- Aug. 24, 2023 – “Maloney Decision” creating 2023 Decree.
- Key Differences were provided and include:
 - No program in 2023 to convert gill net effort to trap net effort.
 - Simplified process for making stocking changes.
 - Grid lines or GPS coordinates vs landmarks.
 - Bigger flags for net marking.
 - Mortality rates will be agreed to outside decree with mandatory review and opportunity to change.
 - Lake Trout and Whitefish models will be run every 3 years providing more efficiency for all parties.
 - Harvest limits are set for three years.
 - No automatic penalty for exceeding a harvest limit, which was an issue forcing major reductions in Lake Trout bag limits for Grand Traverse Bay and for Lake Huron anglers.
 - Bi-monthly reporting for Charter, Wholesale, and Commercial with monthly reporting for Subsistence.
 - Eliminated State commercial fishery in Big Bay de Noc.
 - State Lake Trout allocation up slightly to 13% in MM-123; and remained same for other management units.
 - Little Bay de Noc subsistence effort reduced to 100 ft of gill net per day and 20 fish per day limit with a permit system and notification to the state. Also, a limit on permits and weekly reporting during walleye spawning season.
 - No commercial fishing in Little Bay de Noc; Big Bay de Noc may have 3 fishers permitted by Little Traverse Bay Band with no more than 12,000 ft total of gill net; Sault Saint Mary may permit 2 gill net fishers with no more than 12,000 ft total of gill net. Provisions on depth to keep the mostly shallow. No small mesh gill net and no retention of perch.
 - Little Traverse Zone in eastern grid 518 and 519 open to gill netting from Oct. 1 through May 1, with no more than two operations, each with up to 6,000 ft of net.
 - Grand Traverse Zone has a larger portion of 815 and 816 open to seasonal gill net fishing by permit only. Small mesh gill net can be set near Charlevoix. There is also no transfer provision for MM-4. MM-5 Grid 714 additionally open in May;

Grids 812-814 seasonally open. Permits required and specific harvest limits for May.

- Little River Zone will have two gill net operations each fishing up to 6,000 ft. Requires advance notice to the state; public outreach; net locations; 15 fish daily limit for salmon and walleye; seasonal closures around Ludington and Manistee.
- Open Discussion:
 - House Bill 441 is necessary to match decree to have both Charter and State Commercial fishers to report every two weeks. Why was Charter/State reporting committee removed? DNR is always open to work on reporting improvements with the industry. DNR will work on putting committee back into bill.
 - Some concern expressed over more gill net opportunity.
 - Questions about changes around Ludington and Manistee.
 - Why weren't there seasonal closures considered for Pentwater?
 - Questions about enforcement to make sure that there is reporting.
 - Concern with allocations set every three years.

Weir Contract with American Canadian

- The need to manage salmon at weirs began in 1966 when Pacific Salmon were stocked.
- Weirs are temporary blockage of fish as they move upstream to spawn used for:
 - Egg takes, data collecting, and harvest.
- Swan Weir is used as an alternate Chinook salmon egg take facility.
- Medusa Weir is used to collect biological data.
- Boardman Weir prevents an excess of salmon from dying in Traverse City.
- Lower Platte Weir is used to allow the court ordered 20,000 Coho Salmon to pass up the Platte River.
- Upper Platte Weir is used for Coho Egg Take.
- Little Manistee Weir is used for Chinook salmon and Steelhead egg takes.
- Weir operations require a lot of staff and equipment to harvest excess fish. The Department tried to give away fish, used prison labor, and allowed tribal use in the past. The contract is the most efficient and cost effective. The contract is an open bid process.
- The contractor can provide fish for human consumption through vendors and by donation to food banks, can provide for pet food or fertilizer, or can landfill.
- The contract comes at a cost to the state.
- An angler representing other anglers from the Platte River addressed the advisors about his concern of early fish being harvested from the Lower Platte. He had a meeting with DNR staff to find out more about it. He suggested making those fish more available to anglers. DNR will work on dredging to assist angler access to Platte Bay.
 - DNR will also consider moving some fish out of the Platte River and are comfortable moving 75,000.
 - It was suggested to move those fish to Lake Huron with most advisors agreeing to that.

Brown Trout Stocking Update

- DNR Staff completed a five-year review of Brown Trout stocking for Lake Michigan. The past two years show some increase in the Brown Trout catch at some ports. Based on advisor recommendations, Petoskey will be discontinued, and Grand Haven and Cedar River will be added for stocking. The rest of the sites will continue unchanged. Here will be the stocking sites and numbers moving forward:

Cedar River	15,000
Menominee	30,000
Glen Arbor	20,000
Platte Bay	40,000
Frankfort	50,000
Manistee	60,000
Ludington	81,000
Grand Haven	<u>20,000</u>
	316,000

Is the Lake Trout Catch Going Down?

- Charter and Creel Data were provided for review.
- Lake Trout catch was down at most ports in 2022, and it sounds like again in 2023 based on advisor reports.
- There was disruption in 2020 and 2021 with most Lake Trout being stocked from Manistique due to Covid issues with offshore stocking.
- Are Lake Trout staying deeper because there is more bait remaining in deeper waters? Is it temperature related?
- Some anglers complained about algae getting on lures anytime that they tried to fish the bottom.
- Lake-wide surveys by the states, tribes and federal government do not show a decline in Lake Trout currently.

DNR Updates:

- HB5108 was brought up. DNR is waiting for a bill analysis and official position. The bill would allow commercial fishers to take Lake Trout, Smallmouth Bass, Walleye, Yellow Perch, Panfish, and other species. It also requires the Department to establish allocations for these species with a 75% recreation and 25% commercial split. Many other areas of concern that will be identified in the bill analysis. Several sportfishing groups are coming out against this bill including MUCC.
- Weir operations are coming to an end. There was a good Coho Salmon return to the Platte along with a steady return of Chinook Salmon to the Little Manistee Weir. Chinook females were smaller requiring more fish to reach the egg quota.
- Ed Eisch was promoted from Fish Production Section Manager to Assistant Chief.
- Seth Herbst was promoted from Aquatic Species and Regulatory Affairs Unit Manager to Research Section Manager.
- The Research Vessel Steelhead replacement is in design phase.

- Hatchery maintenance and upgrades are continuing with costs continuing to go up with inflation.

Great Lakes Extra Three Rod Proposal

- The Great Lakes Salmon Initiative proposed adding a voluntary Great Lakes Boat Trolling license that would allow an additional three rods.
- This license could match the cost of the regular fishing license, which is \$26 now.
- This would be for a Great Lake boat only.
- Revenue should go back to DNR, Fisheries Division for Great Lakes Management such as cormorant control.
- Any change to the license structure must go through the legislature.
- The Fisheries Division funding structure needs a review and update as the fishing license fee has been flat for decades.
 - What other voluntary licenses would anglers support? Habitat stamp? Salmon stamp? Trout stamp? Walleye stamp?
- Chief Claramunt will work with Great Lakes Salmon Initiative on this proposal and is interested in any ideas to improve and change the current license structure.

Steelhead One Fish Bag Limit Proposal on Select Streams

- There is an amendment to FO-200 by Commissioner Nyberg that would reduce the steelhead daily bag limit to one fish per day on select Lake Michigan streams.
- The NRC will decide at their November 9th meeting.

Next Meeting:

- April 10th, 2024 at Jay's Sporting Goods in Clare.

Adjourned at 3:30 PM

Contact Jay Wesley if you would like copies of the presentations or need more information on any of the agenda topics.

wesleyj@michigan.gov

616-490-5090