



Lake Michigan Citizen's Fishery Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes

Location: Jay's Sporting Goods

Date: October 9th, 2024

Attendees:

Denny Grinold, Jay Wesley, Jim Fenner, Justin Vanderlinde, Jim Bos, Mike Radcliffe, Tim Hossack, Ed Blissick, Jeff Dehn, Bill Winowiecki, Mark Williams, Tom Andris, Frank Krist, Theresa Krist, Dean Jessup, John Stegmeier, Brian Gunderman, George Freeman, Jim Bedford, Dave Petersen, Mark Johnson, Dan O'Keefe, Nick Torsky, Dennis Eade. Via TEAMS – Paul Jensen, Addie Myers, Patrick Hanchin, Ben Turschak, Steve Lenart, Ed Erdelac, Gregg Mariuz Lawrence Atkins, Mike Pajtas, Ed Eisch, Kendra Kozlauskos, Lucas Nathan. Kevin Hughes Scott Heintzelman.

Advisor Reports:

- Lake Huron fishery was good with a mixed bag of Chinook salmon, coho salmon, steelhead, lake trout, Atlantic salmon, and walleye.
- Pentwater was excellent with lots of you Chinook and coho all year; bigger kings should up in July.
- Ludington king fishery was great with 18-to-20-pound fish common. Good coho fishing most of year and great steelhead fishing this fall. Some coho were eating gobies. There were a few brown trout around this spring. We are seeing good numbers in the Sable River.
- South Haven was excellent in July and August from 60 to 110 feet of water. Some nice sized kings. Lake trout fishing was slow in spring, and the yellow perch fishery has been poor.
- In Glen Arbor, lake trout fishing was down after missing two stocking events during Covid. There were young salmon around making for consistent fishery. There were a few coho salmon around in the fall. This was probably the best fishery that we have seen in 8-10 years.
- East Grand Traverse Bay had a good brown trout fishery. The spring bass fishery is getting more popular, and anglers are getting concerned about mortality. Lake trout were spread out. Salmon fishing was good as well as the cisco fishery.
- Frankfort had a lot of bait all season in 30 ft of water. Public access is becoming more difficult with the average angler due to launch fees. There were a lot of gobies in stomachs.
- Muskegon and Whitehall had great salmon fishing out to 90 ft of water. Steelhead fishing has been good this fall.
- Holland fishing was superb with Chinook salmon, coho salmon, and steelhead.
- Grand River had some summer run steelhead with some fall fish starting to come in.

- Angler Diary Program saw better steelhead numbers in 2024.

Great Lakes Advisors Report:

- Working on increased funding from Canada for the Great Lakes Fishery Commission. There are adequate funds for sea lamprey control but not for committee meetings, research, or invasive species. It appears that this program will be transferred to Global Affairs.
- A sustainability study at UofM is looking at large and small pumped storage potential in the Great Lakes like the Ludington Pumped Storage Facility.

Predator Prey Ratio and Prey Update:

- The standard weight of 35-inch Chinook salmon is decreasing.
- Average weight of age 3 females at the weirs is decreasing.
- Charter boat catch rates for Chinook salmon is increasing.
- Chinook salmon dominates the harvest at 50% followed by lake trout, coho salmon, steelhead, and brown trout.
- Age 1 and older alewife is decreasing.
- The Predator Prey Ratio is higher and in a cautious area.
- Predation mortality on alewife is greater than 0.55 and is driving the population down.
- The 2024 acoustic survey was mostly bloater chubs and few alewives. The 2023-year class did not show up in the survey in most of the lake except for St. Joseph area.

Steelhead Model:

- The steelhead Statistical Catch at Age Model was reviewed in detail.
- Estimated 40 to 50% wild steelhead in Lake Michigan.
- The proportion of wild steelhead increased with the survival of stocked fish decreasing. Are wild steelhead better able to survive post mussel period with clearer water and less overall prey?
- There have been recruitment dynamic changes due to ecosystem changes.
- Tributary harvest of steelhead is much higher than Lake Michigan. There was similar catch in Muskegon and Manistee rivers as the entire Lake Michigan fishery.

Steelhead Research Update:

- There seems to be a shift in stream residency time with more age 1 steelhead leaving the river rather than at age 2. Why is this? Out-migration time? Growth and conditions in the nursery streams?
- Smolt survival is an important consideration especially with the divergence of survival between hatchery and wild steelhead. Predator tag study is necessary, and the DNR will continue to seek funding for this.
- Smolt production models (Rutherford Model) will be updated.

- The Little Manistee Weir return numbers are often used mistakenly as a measure of run size. A study with Central Michigan University will evaluate video and acoustic technology to numerate the run and could be used to estimate smolt out-migration. AI will also be used to help identify fish.
- Funding for creel can also help understand catch and harvest rates on Michigan steelhead rivers.

Cleaning Fish on the Great Lakes:

- Anglers have had some interest in cleaning fish on the Great Lakes like what Wisconsin and New York anglers.
- Fish offal is considered litter under Michigan laws.
- There were several issues with fish cleaning stations this year from shut down fish grinders to overflowing fish gut freezers.
- The Lake Michigan Citizen's Fishery Committee would like member fishing groups to pursue a change in the law to allow fish to be cleaned on the Great Lakes.
- Discussion:
 - Would Law Enforcement Division support?
 - It would be a change and would require an officer to be able to identify the species and number.
 - Would this provide nutrients to the lake? Even if it does not it would hurt.
 - Concerns if you must take a bucket of carcasses out the next day for a charter with stink and flies.
 - Lots of discussion of the pros and cons of fish grinders and what to do with that waste (i.e. field, landfill, wastewater treatment plant) and concerns with Mercury.

DNR Updates:

- Coho salmon mass marking will start with yearlings stocked in 2026 and will go for five years. All states are involved, and there will be a micro-chemistry component to get a better understanding of where wild Coho salmon are produced.
- The Niles fish ladder gate has been stuck open all summer. A new motor for the gate will be installed this fall.
- The new Law Patrol boat was delayed and is expected to be delivered in spring of 2025.
- Anglers are encouraged to report tribal net issues and to participate in the Tribal Citizen's Fishery Advisory committee rather than stir up issues or great rumors.
- Little Manistee Weir Chinook salmon egg takes are going well with Michigan and Illinois complete. There are lots of jacks, and we are overall heavy to males.
- The Boardman Weir has had three harvests.
- Grand River fish ladders have had some salmon in them, but the run has stalled with low water.

Stocking Plan for 2025:

- Although there are signs that predator biomass is increasing and that alewife biomass is decreasing, the Lake Michigan Committee agreed to keep stocking numbers the same in 2025.
 - Lake Trout 2,110,000
 - Brown Trout 306,000
 - Steelhead 660,000 yearling plus up to 150,000 fall fingerlings
 - Coho Salmon 1,570,000
 - Chinook Salmon 1,000,000

Pink Salmon Trends:

- Reports of Pink Salmon catches on the open lake fishery and in tributaries seems to be on the increase.
- Pink Salmon caught as far south as St. Joseph.
- Typically, they are a more common catch in northern Lake Michigan and in U.P. streams like the Manistique River.
- Nearly 3,000 Pink Salmon were caught in Lake Michigan in 2022 and that number is expected to be higher in 2024.
- Lake Michigan catch is still lower than high catches since 2004 that reached over 12,000 for Lake Huron and 13,000 for Lake Superior.
- Pink Salmon have a diverse diet but could compete for alewife.
- There is also concern with hybridization with Chinook Salmon.

Net Pen Review:

- Net pens have been in operation at most Lake Michigan stocking ports since the mid-1990's.
- The objective of net pens is to allow fish some time to acclimate after being stocked, to imprint fish to the port to help with fall returns, and to increase growth.
- Hatchery staff occasionally conduct Fish Quality Assessments on Chinook Salmon prior to being released from net pens.
- Most net pens do provide growth in length while condition is more variable.
- More recent Fish Quality Assessments show fish with more abnormalities.
- Are southern ports becoming too risky with higher flows and temperatures?
- Should Chinook Salmon be held for less time in net pens?
- Wisconsin recently conducted a study on net pens and found that survival was sometimes better in pens and sometimes better with direct stocking.
- Michigan is conducting a small study in the Little Manistee River.
- The committee recommended updating the guidelines for net pens, so that volunteers can keep better tabs on the fish.

Avian Predator Notification:

- The DNR is increasing efforts to harass birds at stocking sites.

- Bangers have been made available for volunteers.
- DNR, Wildlife Division is on call to assist with harassment reinforcement at stocking sites that are safe to do so.
- The notification contact information was reviewed and updated.

Next Meeting:

- TBD.

Adjourned at 3:05 PM

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

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