

Northern Inland Lakes Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee

Established by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, to improve and maintain fishery resources of the Inland Waterway lakes and rivers, as well as Black, Grand, and Long lakes through better communication and partnership.

Northern Inland Lakes Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee Meeting

Friday, October 13, 2023

Tuscarora Township Hall

Indian River MI

Approved meeting minutes

Attendees: Frank Krist (Chair), Tim Cwalinski (DNR Fisheries, notetaker), Neal Godby (DNR Fisheries Facilitator), Jim Burke (BLPA), Brad Kessel (Mullett Lake), Brenda Archambo (Sturgeon For Tomorrow), Tyler Bruning (USGS Hammond Bay), Franklin Bajenske (USGS Hammond Bay), Tom Ludwig (Long Lake), Paul Borg (Grand Lake), Ron Dulak (BLA), Roger Bergstedt (BLA), Nick Torsky (DNR LED), Wayne Blomberg (PCLA), Matt Klungle (DNR Fisheries), Pat Van Daele (DNR Fisheries), Theresa Krist J(HBAAA), Irv Dedow (BLA), Nick Johnson (USGS Hammond Bay), Rich Hill (DNR Parks and Recreation), Kevin Taylor (DNR Parks and Recreation), Mike Parrott, Bob Miller, Steve Roznowski (Long Lake Assoc.), Gina Burke (BLPA), John Walters (NRC), Roy Tassava (MAPS), Doug Larson (MSU), John Gannon (MAPS), Ron Kardosh (PCLA), Jeff Newcoop (BLA), Bob Garant (LLIA), Karl Awiscus (HLSIA), Judy Watts (HLSIA), Mark Jarvie (TU), Marcella Domka (TOMWC), Mike Vignau (DU), Ed Baker (DNR Fisheries), Judy Watts (HLSIA), Erin McLean (BLA),.

Welcome, Introductions.

Frank and Neal opened the meeting, and the attendees each introduced themselves and their affiliation (see above).

Cheboygan Dam Update (Rich Hill, DNR Parks and Recreation Division)

Rich provided information on the fire at the private Cheboygan Tissue Plant and its current impacts on water level management at the DNR owned Cheboygan River dam. The tissue plant powerhouse accounts for 20-30% of the daily flow through the adjacent site. The fire that occurred at the plant in September was not at the hydro plant, but at an adjacent warehouse owned by the tissue plant. However, Consumers Energy, which provides power to the plant itself, has turned off electricity to the plant making the powerhouse inoperable. Thus, DNR is responsible for sole management of the water levels for downstream, which also account for seasonal water management in upstream Mullett Lake as well as the Cheboygan River and Lower Black River. Target water levels for Mullett Lake, as managed by the structures downstream, were established in 1934. These are not legal lake levels, just target levels. Water levels are recorded daily with adjustments made on a daily basis. DNR has an operating guide they work off for water level management, but now need to manage for water not currently flowing through the private hydro facility. This has become a challenge

recently and they try to stay away from reactionary adjustments. The collaborative water level management between facilities by the private hydropower facility and DNR dam are based on a 1982 agreement. If more adjustments are needed, the DNR Cheboygan Dam is used, with information logged, and impacts to downstream and upstream navigability considered. There are more noticeable water level changes to the river with the tissue plant currently inoperable. Kevin Taylor of DNR Parks and Recreation Division is the new supervisor of the Cheboygan Field Office and will take on future water level management oversight. The tissue plant is overseen by FERC (Federal Energy Regulatory Commission). It is challenging for DNR personnel to determine the future operation of the tissue plant since it is not under DNR oversight. DNR manages their share of water level management through the DNR dam with equal considerations to river and upstream lake conditions, which is always a challenge.



Rich also mentioned:

- A bid is in place to make updates to the other structure on site, which is the Cheboygan lock system. This is sandwiched between the private tissue plant and DNR Cheboygan Dam.
- The Pickerel-Crooked Lake lock on the Crooked River is subleased to Emmet County. The Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) worked directly with the county on its operation. This lock is currently not in use.
- DNR will consider water level management with any private entity that currently owns, or will own in the future, the Alverno Dam on the Lower Black River. The private sale of Alverno Dam (as well as Tower and Kleber dams) on the Black River system is pending.
- The Black River marina site was purchased for a DNR boat launch access in recent years. The engineering designs for this site are completed and have been vetted by the public over the last two years. DNR PRD is awaiting funding for the implementation of these designs. It is hoped this will be completed in the next two years.

Bass Regulation Reminder (Jim Burke BLPA, Neal Godby and Tim Cwalinski, DNR)

A handful of BLPA (Burt Lake Preservation Assoc.) members submitted a bass statement to the NLCAC prior to the meeting stating concern with overharvest or removal of bass from beds prior to the completion of spawning season. The concerns stated that removing bass from beds and predation of eggs or fry from invasive gobies must have an impact on smallmouth bass populations in Burt Lake (and possibly other large waterbodies), particularly where gobies are present and tournament fishing occurs. The Conservation Director of the Michigan BASS Federation provided a lengthy letter contradicting the thoughts of the BLPA statement. This letter was also provided to the NLCAC members before the meeting.

Harvest of bass (and delayed catch and release from tournament anglers) can occur starting the Saturday before Memorial Day through December 31. This is a statewide regulation with exceptions for a later harvest date in a small number of locations in Michigan (Lake St. Clair, St. Clair River, Detroit River, and Beaver Island Archipelago). This is a long-standing regulation.

DNR has responded with information/talks to the NLCAC regarding bass fishing regulations and tournament fishing on two separate occasions, in 2018 and 2022. These responses can be found in past meeting minutes. DNR Fisheries Division has:

- Seen an increase in bass fishing in Michigan in the last decade or more,
- Worked closely with BASS over a decade ago to review bass regulations and provide for more fishing opportunities outside the harvest season (catch and immediate release all year),
- Currently monitors bass fishing tournaments statewide (mandatory registration) for over five years,

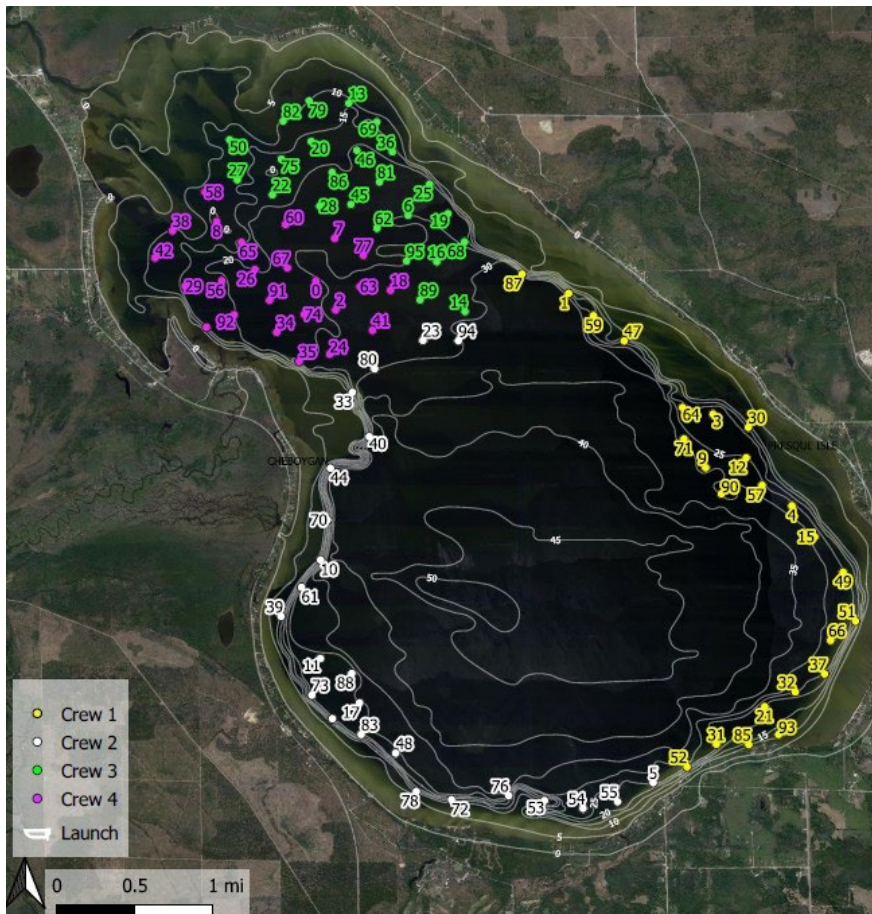
- Recognizes that the invasive round goby is established in many large inland lakes,
- Recognizes that some bass spawning occurs past the opening harvest date and some bass predation and competition from round goby occurs regionally or at select lakes,
- Recognizes that the same current bass regulation is established throughout Michigan (north to south),
- Believes that smallmouth bass sizes are increasing in some large lakes where gobies are present since they are a primary diet item now, and that large sizes of bass equate to higher fecundity (egg mass and numbers), likely making up for increased predation from gobies at smaller sizes,
- Believes bass are likely to be a larger component of inland lake systems if climate change occurs and lake systems change (as compared to species such as cisco and walleye),
- Believes there are no significant impacts from these factors (goby presence, fishing pressure) to bass populations at the overall population level.

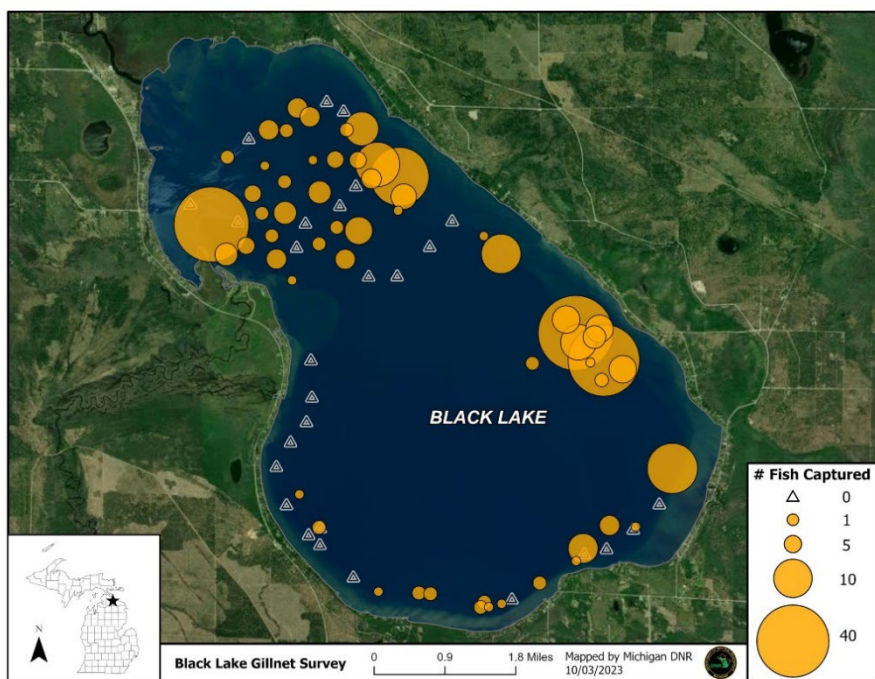
In the end both parties agreed to disagree. Local DNR Fisheries personnel suggested that if BLPA wished to pursue their concerns further, there is another venue for it. This would be the Warmwater Resources Steering Committee established by DNR twenty years ago. BLPA was asked to consider narrowing down their issue statement with specific suggestions. If this is done, their issue statement and concerns can be pursued at a statewide (not local) committee which has broader statewide representation, including BASS and other organizations. Neal will work with BLPA to determine when the next statewide Warmwater Resources Steering Committee meeting occurs. It has been dormant for a year or two due to personnel changes in DNR Fisheries Division.

Black Lake Juvenile Sturgeon Netting Results 2023 (Ed Baker, DNR Fisheries)

Ed provided results from the three-week July survey on Black Lake completed by DNR (local management unit, tribal coordination unit, research biologist), Little Traverse Bay Band tribe, and Michigan State University. Four boats were used each day surveying in four different quadrants of Black Lake (NE, NW, SE, SW). The survey used large mesh daily gill net sets that were checked every 1-2 hours with 6- and 8-inch mesh. They did not use 10-inch mesh nets which would have captured larger adults. The goal of the estimate was to capture smaller, subadults, not mature, lake sturgeon approximately 52 inch or less. There already is an established population estimate of adults (sexually mature) from annual tagging in the spring spawning run. DNR and MSU have been rearing and stocking fingerling sturgeon in the Black River/Black Lake system for over twenty years. The last subadult estimate with gill nets was completed in 2013. The 2023 effort was to evaluate stocking success from the last 10 years of stocking. Ed provided preliminary results (more to work on from the data). Stocking numbers were reduced from 3250 fingerlings annually to 500 annually in 2013 based on high survival rates and considerations to future population size and growth. There currently is a Black Lake Sturgeon Management Plan that is a guiding document for DNR, MSU, and various tribal agencies to future sturgeon size goals in Black Lake.

The survey efforts were considered a great success with a quality estimate produced (mark and recapture methods) and minimal sturgeon mortality (3 fish). Crews captured 350 unique fish less than 170 cm (67 inches), with 9 recaptures. This provided a preliminary estimate of 4,600 lake sturgeon in Black Lake smaller than 133 cm (52 in). This number of sub-adults will be coupled with the adult estimate (approximately 1,200) from the spring spawning run and reviewed for future management purposes. The data will be reviewed among the various managing agencies (DNR and five tribal governments). It should be noted that the shared Black Lake harvest quotas of fish is based solely on the adult estimate. See two maps below.





Ed shared some interesting results that the estimate of sub-adults from the netting efforts included a surprising number of wild fish. It is possible that more adult spawning females are flooding the system with wild recruits, thus allowing for better wild fish survival coupled with wild larval fish that are brought into the streamside hatchery in the spring and reared to the fall when they are stocked (500 fall fingerlings). Data analysis continues this winter.

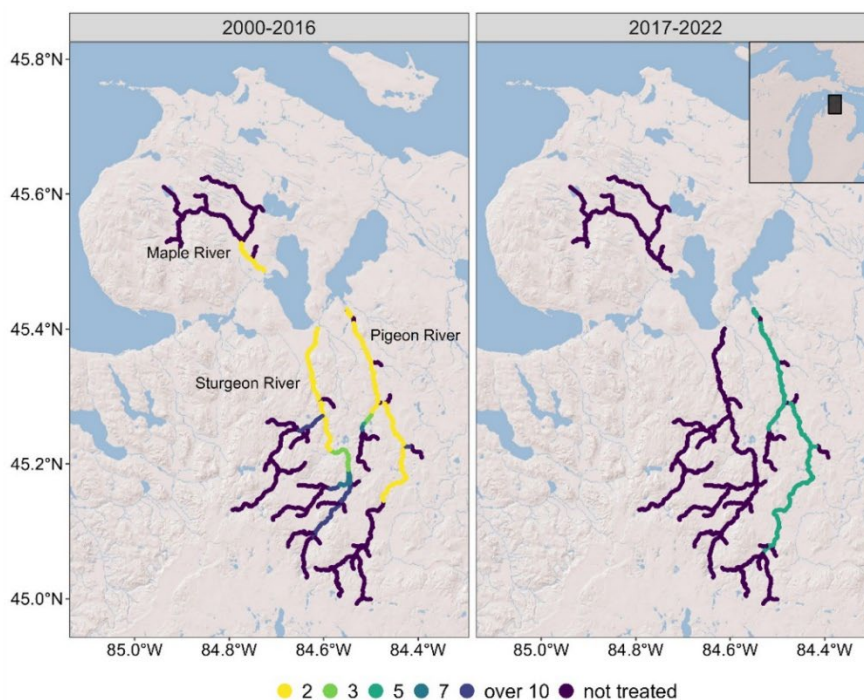
A similar effort is scheduled for July 2024 on Mullett Lake where fish are also stocked annually (500 fall fingerlings/year). The effort on Mullett will consist of the same gear type (gill nets), but larger mesh (6, 8, and 10-inch) will be used to capture an estimate of both sub-adults and adults.

Inland Waterway Sea Lamprey Update (Nick Johnson, USGS)

Nick provided an overview on the sterile male sea lamprey program and the different roles agencies have in the process (USGS, USFWS, Great Lakes Fishery Commission). The Great Lakes Fishery Commission (GLFC) is the organizing force for sea lamprey control and contracts to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the work to be completed. USFWS conducts larval lamprey assessment and control on all life stages. The USGS is sub-contracted to conduct research on control and assessment tools for various lamprey life stages. An overarching goal of the agencies is to reduce lamprey, with considerations given to reducing chemical lampricide use on rivers and lakes. See the two slides directly below for the number of sea lamprey found in the Waterway before and after the program began and the overall outcomes.

The sea lamprey of the Inland Waterway lakes is unique in that the adult lamprey (though in smaller numbers) typically spend their short life stage in these inland lakes, and do not migrate downstream to Lake Huron. The small number of adults in these lakes can produce large numbers of eggs and juvenile lamprey in the Pigeon, Sturgeon, and Maple rivers and their tributaries. USFWS has been treating these rivers with lampricide for many years but has been trying to transition to a different form of management in these rivers through the sterile male release program which is less costly. The sterile male program has been successful from 2017-2023, but sterile males were not released in the rivers in 2020 due to the pandemic. Thus, the Sturgeon River was treated with lampricide in 2023 due to assessments beforehand suggesting high numbers of larvae in the river. The treatment was deemed successful, but questions remain on how many lamprey were actually killed during the treatment.

This committee (NLCAC) provided a letter of support to the managing agencies encouraging the continuation of the sterile male program in the waterway (2023). The GLFC has a board which discusses its policy of lamprey control and where to use the sterile male program. Sea lamprey control through the use of sterile male releases will continue to be used in the Inland Waterway through at least 2024. The USGS has set aside resources to continue sterile male release in the region through at least 2029. Nick will be scheduling a one-day workshop with the controlling agencies and sister agencies (DNR) and possibly members of this committee to collaboratively define the future timeline of this sterile male program in the waterway.



Sterile male preliminary outcomes...

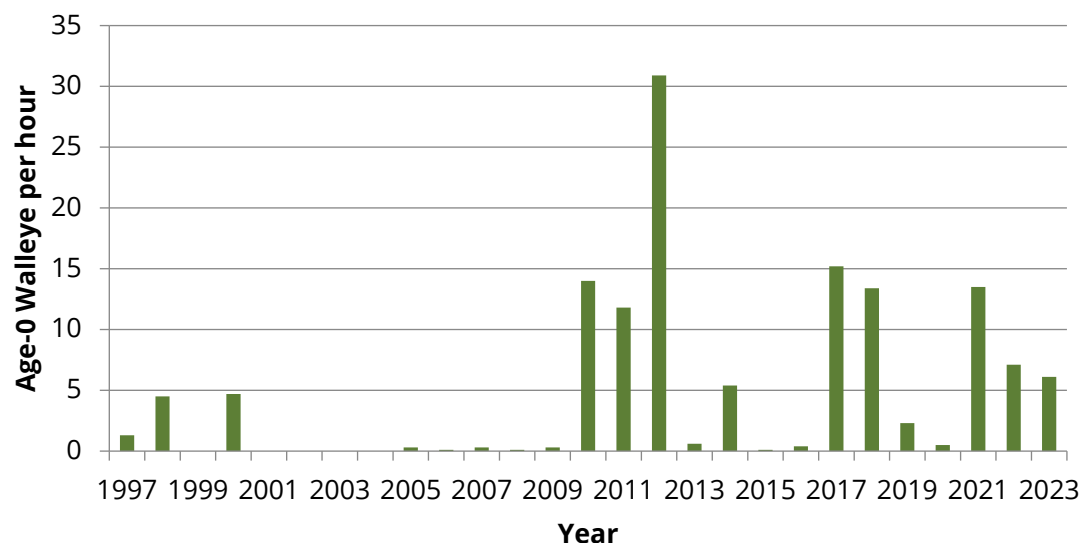
- Sterile male release effective in Sturgeon and Maple.
 - Nearly impossible to find larval sea lamprey spawned in years when sterile males were released.
- Sterile male release was less effective in Pigeon River
 - 80% less larval lamprey present and lampricide was delayed.
 - But distribution of larvae expanded upstream of former Song of Morning Dam.
- Pandemic outcomes still to deal with...
 - Sterile males were not released in 2020. Evidence of larval sea lamprey spawned in 2020 in Sturgeon and Maple.



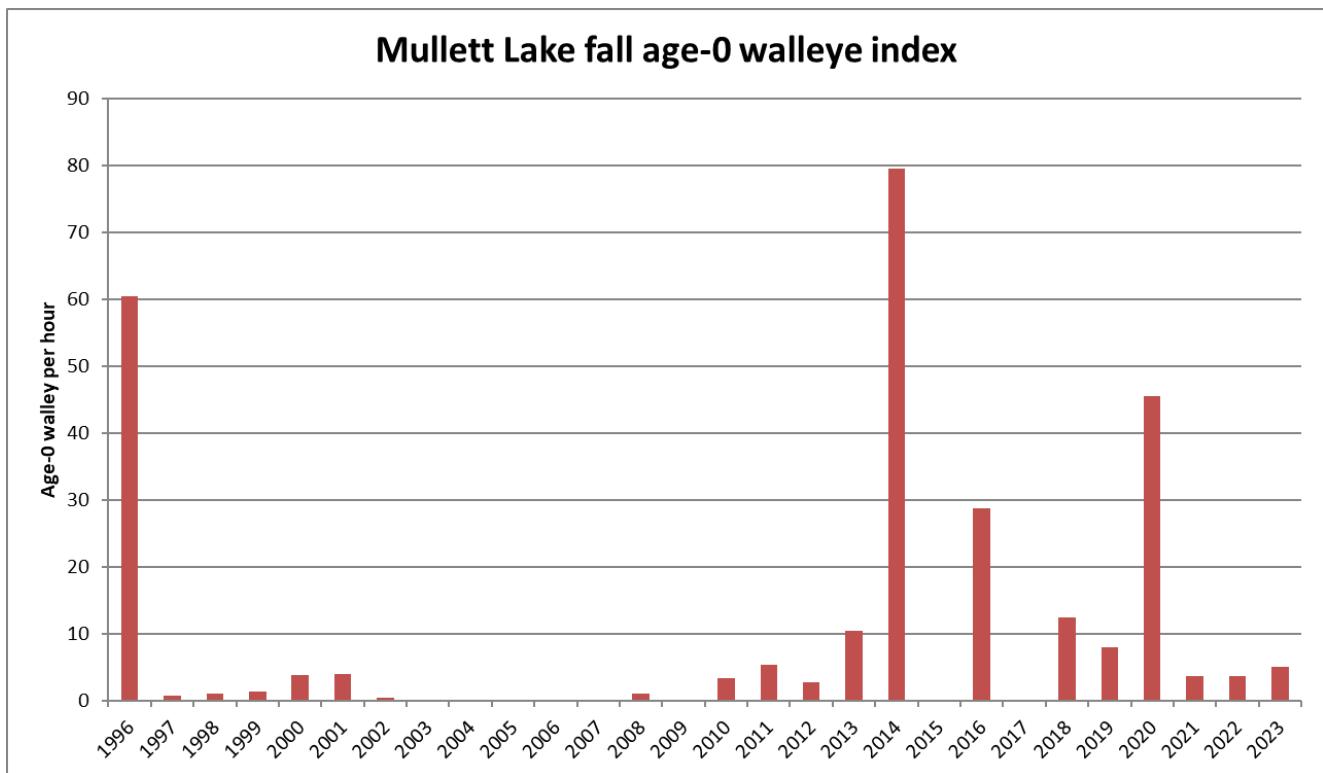
Fall Juvenile Walleye Survey Results at various lakes (Neal Godby, DNR Fisheries)

Fall assessments to determine strength of the 2023 walleye year class were conducted at Black, Mullett, Burt, Long, and Grand lakes this fall. Work was completed collaboratively between DNR (local management unit and Tribal Coordination Unit) and various tribes (Soo Tribe, LTBB). Effort consisted of one or two nights of nearshore electrofishing at night. Most adults are out in deeper water at this time, so they are not an index of adult numbers. Some juveniles (age-0, or age-1) are near shore or on shoals where the electrofishing is conducted. The path of shocking and capture area is only the width of a boat. These indexes are useful for determining variability of year classes from year to year for individual lakes, and to assess survival of stocked fish (if a lake is stocked). Age-0 walleye at these lakes by September/October are typically 5-7 inches long.

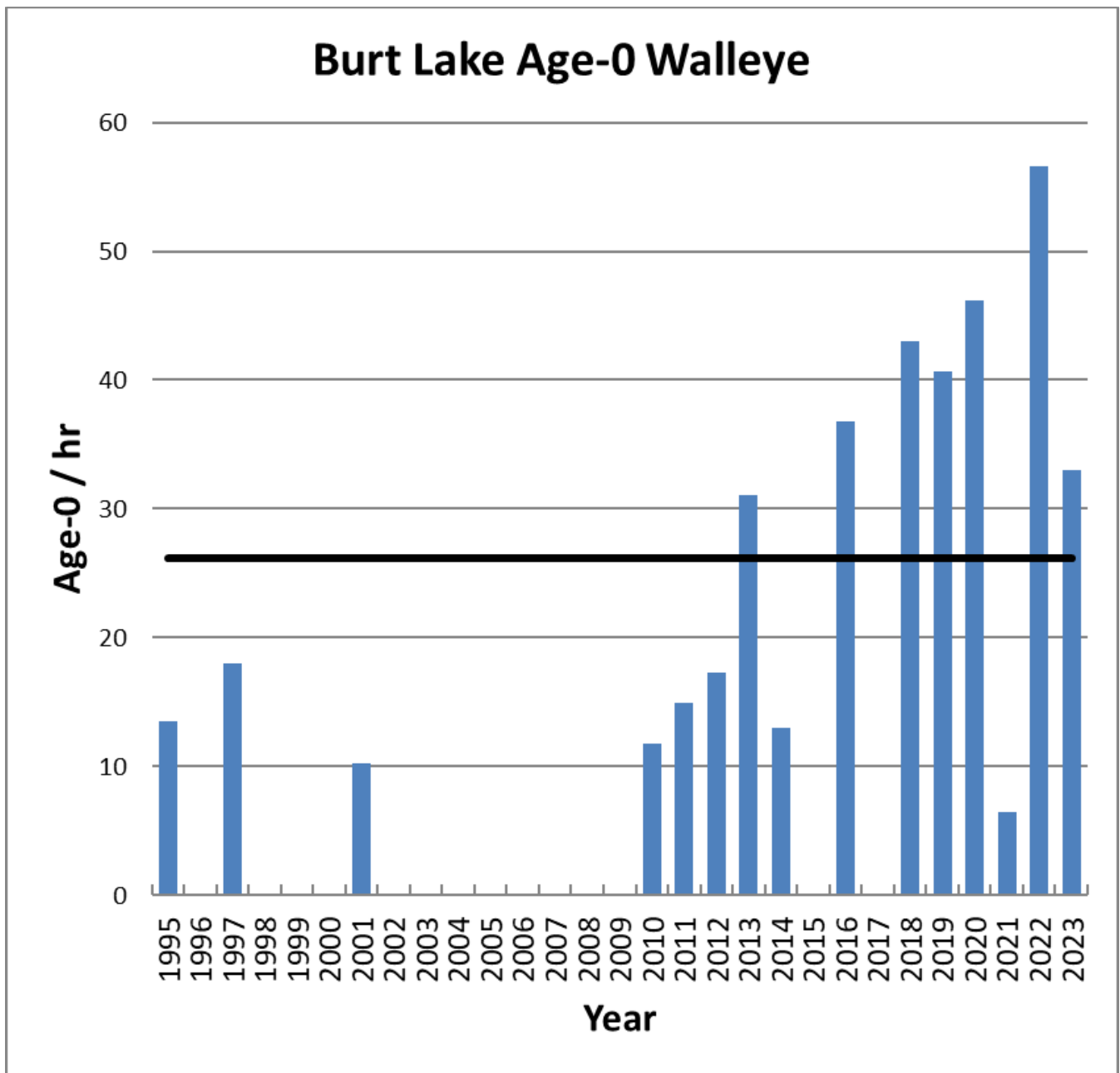
Black Lake Age-0 Walleye



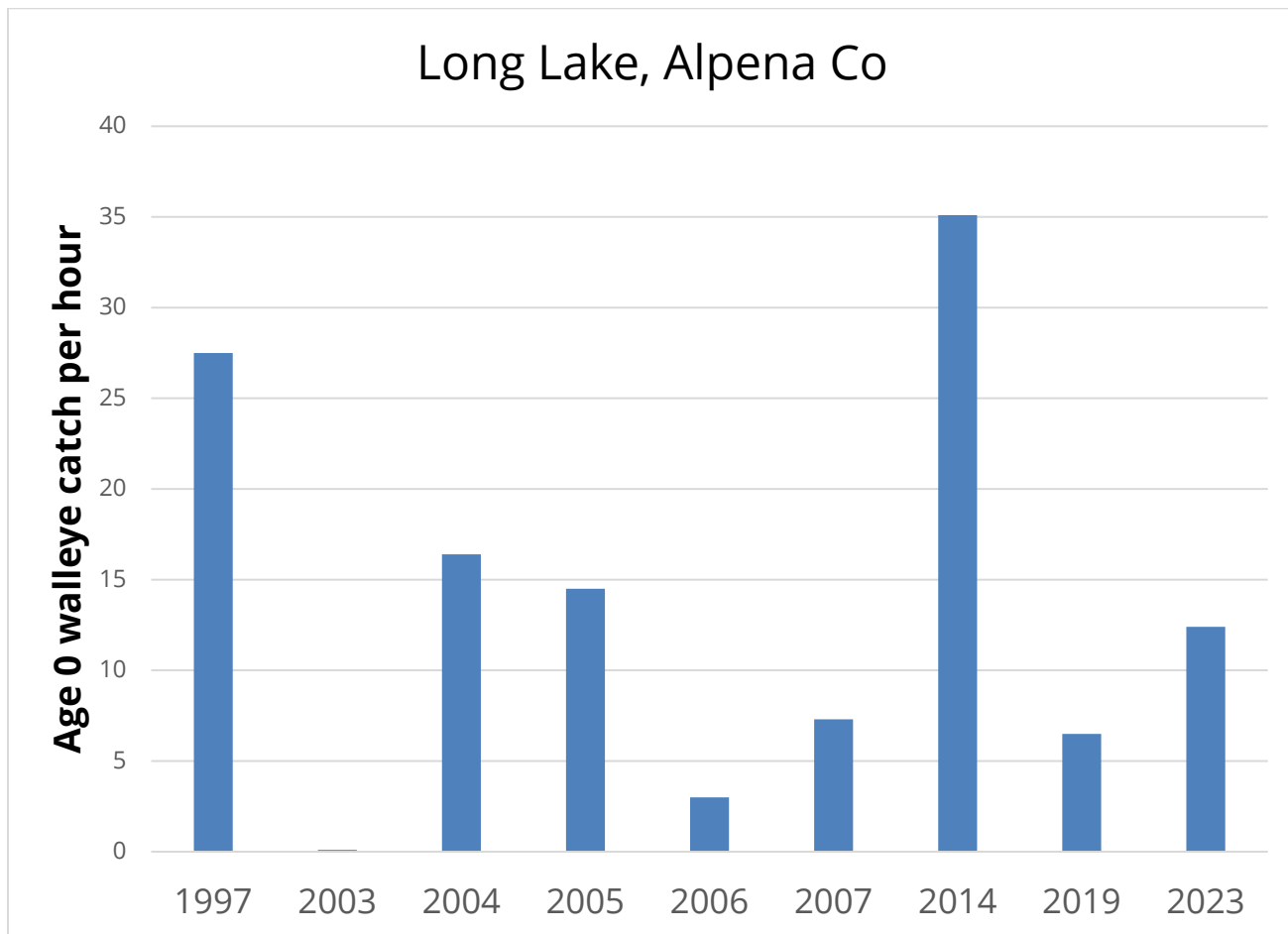
Black Lake -Natural reproduction (or survival of naturally produced fish) has declined dramatically for this lake in the last couple decades. The fall electrofishing circuit in 2023 was over 15 miles of shoreline nearly covering the entire lake over two nights (DNR and Soo Tribe). Black Lake was stocked with approximately 360,000 spring fingerlings (OTC marked) by the Soo Tribe in 2023. It was also recently stocked in 2021 and 2022. Larger catch rates (number/hour) of age-0 walleye correspond with stocking years. The catch rates were not overwhelming for age-0 fish in these stocking years, but acceptable and much higher than in non-stocking years (sometimes none were caught). DNR analyzed a 2023 sub-sample (n=20) of age-0 fish for OTC analysis (chemical used to stain the bones of stocked walleye, indicating stocking origin). All fish were positive for OTC (stocked origin). One other note of interest was a fairly good catch of age-1 walleye in 2023, which was almost equal to the age-0 catch of the same year class in 2022. There are acceptable year classes established here from stocking from 2021-2023 and fish should be showing up in catches in 1-2 years.



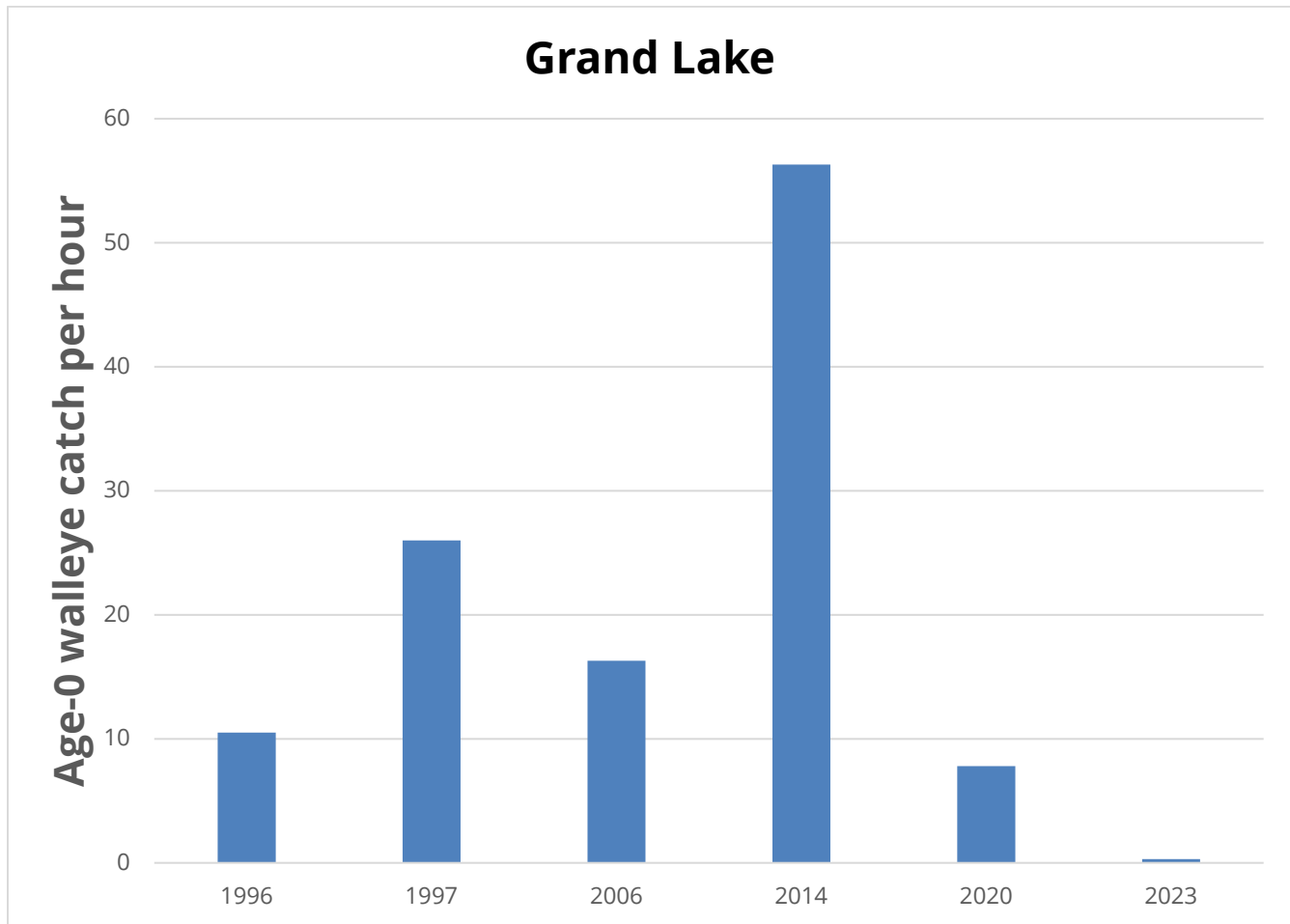
Mullett Lake – Mullett Lake was stocked with lesser numbers of spring fingerlings from 2011-2013 with limited results. We have seen very strong to acceptable year classes from 2014-2023. Notable strong year classes were in 2014, 2016, and 2019, 2020. This lake is not stocked and is producing wild fish routinely at varying annual levels. This was not the case (strong wild year classes) for a number of years following dreissenid mussel invasion. The 2021 through 2023 wild year classes were smaller, but present and likely suppressed from preceding strong year classes. We will continue to attempt to monitor this lake as time and personnel allow. The 2023 year class survey was conducted by DNR Tribal Coordination Unit (west shore) and LTBB (east shore).



Burt Lake – Burt Lake is not stocked and has not been for decades due to consistent observations and high catch rates of age-0 fish nearly every year. The 2023 survey was conducted in September by the local DNR management unit crew and again found higher catch rates, particularly in most of the last few sampling events. These age-0 catch rates continue to be higher than any other nearby large lake. In fact, higher catch rates can be found in the last five years as compared to 10-15 years ago when walleye fishing was considered to be better.



Long Lake (Alpena County) – Due to travel time, this large lake is surveyed for juvenile walleye less frequently. Catch rates of juveniles (age-0) are variable in the years actually surveyed, but relatively higher in 2022 indicating a good year class.



Grand Lake – Due to travel time, this large lake is surveyed for juvenile walleye less frequently. Catch rates are variable over time, but a poor year class in 2023 was documented based on one night of shoreline sampling. We will make attempts to survey this lake in more consecutive years to see if trends are occurring. Yellow perch recruitment is important at this lake and drives the fishery. Having one year of a poor year class of walleye is not alarming and will only help perch recruitment.

Meeting Location Discussion – (All)

The NLCAC has traditionally met at the Tuscarora Township Hall in Indian River 1-2 times a year. It is a convenient location and mostly central for attendees. Room reservation and costs are getting a bit more complicated, as we now need to submit an application for the room/date and pre-pay. No other meeting locations were offered, and the group decided to continue with this meeting location. BLPA paid for the room for this meeting. Jim Burke (BLPA) offered to sign up and pay for the room for the next meeting in advance and in-person. BLA offered to give Jim the money to pay for the room for the next meeting. The other groups are willing to take turns reimbursing Jim for the room payment.

Roundtable – (All)

Burt Lake

- Jim Burke suggested sending all presentations for a meeting ahead of time to review and reduce the amount of time during the meeting. This was not agreed on by many as most people admitted they did not review the materials that were provided ahead of this meeting.
- At the request of Jim, DNR Fisheries provided an update on the Cornwall Dam (inland impoundment near Indian River) situation and the DNR's desire to renovate the facility in the face of funding shortages.

Mullett Lake

- Brad Kessel, angler and part-time resident of the lake, suggested that fishing pressure is still low on the lake. He has caught many walleyes on the lake this year, with most catches in the fall. Many legal fish and sub-legal fish have been caught.
- Steve Philip provided the catch of Mullett Lake fish this year from his family. They have caught 889 northern pike, 271 walleye, 41 smallmouth bass, and 2 steelhead. He considered it their best year. In general, pike were smaller in 2023, and found juvenile yellow perch in the steelhead stomachs.

- John Gannon stated that MAPS now has a strategic plan for greenbelt vegetation and shoreline improvement. Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council (TOM) is working with MAPS on a pilot study to examine the issue of road salt (brought up at the last meeting) in the lake and its point sources.

Hubbard Lake

- The Hubbard Lake Sportsmans Improvement Association (HLSIA) has been dormant for a number of years but is trying to reorganize. This was the first meeting that attendees (3) from this organization have participated in this meeting.

Pickereel-Crooked lakes

- Wayne Blomberg suggested no real issues with the waterbodies. They are continuing to monitor cormorant use of the lakes but there were less in 2023. Walleyes are not being caught in significant numbers at these lakes. DNR suggested that walleye are not a core fishery at these lakes but there are significant high quality panfish fisheries, and may at times receive walleye movement from Burt Lake as shown in past movement studies.

Grand Lake

- Paul Borg suggested that perch fishing spiked in September. Two fishing derbies were held over the year with many perch and some walleye caught. The small northern pike marsh on the northwest side of the lake was operated by a volunteer (Don Rygwelski) for many years. He is no longer able to operate it and has handed that role off to other members of the Sportsmans Club. Club members cleared out the small creek connecting the small marsh to Grand Lake recently.

Long Lake (Alpena County)

- Tom Ludwig mentioned there was a fishing derby on Long Lake this year with good results. Many walleyes in the 18-19 inch size range were caught. The bluegill fishing is getting better each year. The lake association owns and operates the control structure on the lake and has replaced some of the boards. Less cormorants were observed this year. LLA has built a number of fish shelters in recent years and placed in the lake under a permit that now has expired. This permit will be applied for renewal and structure clustering will be considered. Long Lake County Park on the east shore is scheduled for major improvements including a new boat launch and parking.

Black Lake

- Roger Bergstedt with BLA has been conducting temperature and dissolved oxygen profiles with new gear the BLA has purchased. They are looking at dissolved oxygen levels and how these might influence harmful algal blooms. The profiles are done at different times of the year and shared with DNR for long term base line data. A contractor has surveyed the lake for shoreline erosion and shoreline vegetation levels and will be providing this information soon. The BLA always has concerns over invasive species. No fishing reports for this lake were provided.

USGS (Nick Johnson)

- Nick provided an update on the various projects occurring at the Hammond Bay office and regionally. He briefly discussed the lake whitefish telemetry study, the Hammond Bay Interpretive Center, and genetic mark/recapture techniques for sea lamprey. Nick suggested advisors should watch the streaming movie “Relentless”, a movie about the history of sea lamprey in the Great Lakes and associated management.

DNR Law Enforcement Division (Nick Torsky)

- LED has put together teams to further investigate boaters who operate under the influence. He talked to local LED officers who did not mention any significant issues with fish or use in the waterway this year.

Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council (Marcell Domka)

- Marcella mentioned that TOMWC is recently contracting with MAPS through 2024 to investigate chloride sampling at different stormwater outlet sites around Mullett Lake.

3:25 pm Meeting was adjourned.