Appendix F: Fisheries Division's responses to public comments on the draft plan

Fisheries Division would like to thank everyone that reviewed and provided comments to the draft *Management Plan for Walleye in Michigan's Inland Waters*. During the course of the external review process the division received many useful comments and suggestions related to Walleye management in Michigan. Fisheries Division is appreciative of the time that anglers took to provide their perspectives and thoughts that were reviewed, and when relevant used to inform and revise the draft plan.

The public review period was open from February 19, 2021 through April 1, 2021 and the Division received more than 275 written comments on the draft *Management Plan for Walleye in Michigan's Inland Waters*. Summaries of written comments and division responses are organized into general categories (i.e., regulations, stocking, management background, habitat, lake specific interests) and provided below. All comments specific to local water bodies were forwarded to local Fisheries Division management biologists for additional detailed responses that provided lake-specific management history. The detailed responses from Fisheries Division to individual anglers are either not included below or only briefly summarized. Finally, detailed, and substantive comments received by tribal co-managers and stakeholder groups (i.e., Citizen Advisory Committees) were also responded to separately by division staff and were not all included within this appendix.

Comments Related to Regulations:

General Fisheries Division Response: The regulations toolbox was created to provide a set of relatively simplistic statewide options to address differing management objectives (e.g., concerns related to abundance and/or size structures). The toolbox is relevant to several of the regulatory comments below that suggest alterations to existing regulations because these options will be available for consideration in the future.

Additionally, Fisheries Division wants to make anglers aware that the effectiveness of any fishing regulation is linked to compliance, overall angler effort and harvest dynamics, and the available habitat and productivity of a specific water. Therefore, Walleye populations throughout the state are expected to respond in a variable manner to different regulation types because of these factors.

Comment: The regulation options chart showing "increased minimum size limit (MSL) and decreased daily possession limit (DPL)" which got less support than the narrative section implied, was not surveyed in its separate two components. Strictly decreased DPL with the same MSL would likely get more support.

> **Fisheries Division Response:** The angler surveys were used to help inform, which regulations were added to the toolbox in Appendix D. The specific regulation with increased minimum size limit (MSL) and decreased daily possession limit (DPL) allows for additional protections for Walleye populations when deemed necessary. The DPL and MSL were not separated as options in the regulations toolbox because that would have added complexity to the regulatory options and would likely reduce the overall effectiveness of the more restrictive regulation.

Comment: Along with the minimum size there should also be a maximum size to preserve and increase the breeders. A slot limit from 15- 24 inches, everything smaller or larger must be released. The spawning should also be protected, a walleye season from May 31 to Feb 28. Closed fishing to walleye from March 1 to May 30.

> **Fisheries Division Response:** Adding an option that included a slot limit was considered, but not added to the draft plan because Fisheries Division expects that the increased minimum size limit (MSL) and decreased daily possession limit (DPL) option will provide similar protections from harvest and achieve similar biological outcomes for Walleye populations in Michigan. However, based on feedback received during the external review process that highlighted other states were achieving desired outcomes (e.g., reduced exploitation rate, increased abundance of spawning individuals, and angler support) after implementing protected slot limits in certain waters, Fisheries Division decided to amend the final version of the plan and included an option for an experimental slot limit. Additionally, the online angler survey and external review process illustrated conceptual angler support for this regulation type. Finally, Fisheries Division feels that the current seasons in the Lower and Upper Peninsulas provide adequate protection for spawning Walleye, and therefore the existing seasons were retained.

Comment: Would be nice to see walleye left open year-round with a slot limit imposed on the west Michigan rivers. It is about the only time some people get a chance to fish for these fish and it seems like a waste to not have them open for fishing. How about a slot limit of 15-22 inches with one over 30 inches and a 2 or 3 fish limit.

> **Fisheries Division Response:** Adding an option that included a slot limit was considered, but not added to the draft plan because Fisheries Division expects that the increased minimum size limit (MSL) and decreased daily possession limit (DPL) option will provide similar protections from harvest and achieve similar biological outcomes for Walleye populations in Michigan. However, based on feedback received during the external review process that highlighted other states were achieving desired outcomes (e.g., reduced exploitation rate, increased abundance of spawning individuals, and angler support) after implementing protected slot limits in certain waters, Fisheries Division decided to amend the final version of the plan and included an option for an experimental slot limit. Additionally, the online angler survey and external review process illustrated conceptual angler support for this regulation type. Finally, the closed season on the rivers in western Michigan are deemed necessary to provide seasonal protection for spawning Walleye. These protections result in reduced exploitation and increased survival of spawning individuals, and therefore increased benefits for Walleye fisheries into the future.

Comment: Switch to slot limits for walleye. After fishing in areas of the country that have slot limits for fish, I've always wanted to switch to this model. I feel that 9/10 times it leads to bigger fish and a healthier regenerating population.

> **Fisheries Division Response:** Adding an option that included a slot limit was considered, but not added to the draft plan because Fisheries Division expects that the increased minimum size limit (MSL) and decreased daily possession limit (DPL) option will provide

similar protections from harvest and achieve similar biological outcomes for Walleye populations in Michigan. However, based on feedback received during the external review process that highlighted other states were achieving desired outcomes (e.g., reduced exploitation rate, increased abundance of spawning individuals, and angler support) after implementing protected slot limits in certain waters, Fisheries Division decided to amend the final version of the plan and included an option for an experimental slot limit. Additionally, the online angler survey and external review process illustrated conceptual angler support for this regulation type.

Comment: Not supportive of a slot limit because no one will be able to take home any walleye because the majority of walleye taken are 15-19 inches. So, if you protect those fish and can only keep a couple bigger ones us fishermen will not be happy.

Fisheries Division Response: Based on feedback received during the external review process that highlighted other states were achieving desired outcomes (e.g., reduced exploitation rate, increased abundance of spawning individuals, and angler support) after implementing protected slot limits in certain waters Fisheries Division decided to amend the final version of the plan and included an option for an experimental slot limit. Additionally, the online angler survey and external review process illustrated conceptual angler support for this regulation type in Michigan. This is an experimental regulation option and is not expected to be implemented on a high number of waters, and therefore unlikely to significantly reduce harvest opportunities for most anglers targeting Walleye.

Comment: Expressed interest in an option where a slot size for Walleye is considered. As I'm sure you are aware, the Providence of Ontario, Canada has some of the most productive walleye waters in the world, they utilize a slot system which allows anglers to keep a total of four fish. Fish can be up to 18" and one the four fish can be over 18.1" (depending on the zone). This slot size protects the prime breeding stock.

Fisheries Division Response: Adding an option that included a slot limit was considered, but not added to the draft plan because Fisheries Division expects that the increased minimum size limit (MSL) and decreased daily possession limit (DPL) option will provide similar protections from harvest and achieve similar biological outcomes for Walleye populations in Michigan. However, based on feedback received during the external review process that highlighted other states were achieving desired outcomes (e.g., reduced exploitation rate, increased abundance of spawning individuals, angler support) after implementing protected slot limits in certain waters, Fisheries Division decided to amend the final version of the plan and included an option for an experimental slot limit. Additionally, the online angler survey and external review process illustrated conceptual angler support for this regulation type.

Comment: Simplify the regulations book (i.e., Annual Fishing Guide).

Fisheries Division Response: Simplistic regulations is a goal that Fisheries Division strives for, but often diverse fish populations and diverse angler interests leads to diverse regulations in the Annual Fishing Guide. The development of the regulation toolbox was

meant to minimize the adoption of several regulatory exemptions, and therefore reduce the complexity of Walleye regulations throughout the state. Fisheries Division believes the toolbox provides simplicity and the necessary options to properly manage and regulate the diverse Walleye populations in the state.

Comment: In stocked lakes I think the 13" limit and (5) fish creel is probably ok. Since they will not naturally reproduce, and you will stock them to suit populations why limit size any further? The longer a fish is in a lake that does not naturally reproduce I would assume the more time it has to die from natural causes.

Fisheries Division Response: The goal of stocking efforts in waters that don't have natural reproduction is sometimes meant to create harvest opportunities. Often these waters can only be stocked infrequently, or the effectiveness of different stocking events can be highly variable because of annual environmental conditions. These factors influence the longevity of the fishery that the stocking event creates. Therefore, the 15-inch minimum size limit and 5 fish daily possession limit provides time for the fish to grow and creates longer lasting fisheries that are desirable to anglers. It also provides a consistency among Walleye regulations, which has multiple social and enforcement benefits.

Comment: Return the size limit to 14 inches. You can only keep one fish per day over 18 inches on inland waters. that will allow the spawners time to grow.

Fisheries Division Response: Fisheries Division believes that allowing harvest of 14-inch Walleye would have negative implications for the average population. The average Walleye, especially females, becomes mature at lengths greater than 15 inches. Therefore, if the minimum size limit was 14 inches the harvest would include fish that did not have an opportunity to reproduce at least once. The protection of the spawning population could be enhanced using one of the other options provided in the regulation toolbox.

Comment: I propose that we put in place a slot limit similar to what they do over in Minnesota. This would increase number and size of walleye and would call for a decrease of stocking needed by the state which would open up funds to be driven elsewhere in places of need for our outdoor community. I think it would be best to cut the number from 5 walleye to 3 per day for a limit and only have 1 over 25". With the other 2 being 18" or under. This would allow the brood stock of the best spawning walleye)19-24" class to be able to reproduce and grow the average size of a given lake and also increase the amount of natural reproduction.

Fisheries Division Response: Adding an option that included a slot limit was considered, but not added to the draft plan because Fisheries Division expects that the increased minimum size limit (MSL) and decreased daily possession limit (DPL) option will provide similar protections from harvest and achieve similar biological outcomes for Walleye populations in Michigan. However, based on feedback received during the external review process that highlighted other states were achieving desired outcomes (e.g., reduced exploitation rate, increased abundance of spawning individuals, angler support) after implementing protected slot limits in certain waters, Fisheries Division decided to amend

the final version of the plan and included an option for an experimental slot limit. Additionally, the online angler survey and external review process illustrated conceptual angler support for this regulation type.

Comment: Enhance enforcement presence on popular walleye lakes. (multiple comments)

Fisheries Division Response: Law Enforcement Division has limited conservation officers throughout the state and those officers have multiple responsibilities for enforcing fish and game laws in Michigan. This can lead to a reduced presence at any specific waterbody. Fisheries Division encourages anglers to use the Report All Poaching (RAP) phone line to report any potential issues regarding compliance with fishing regulations.

Comment: Interested in the walleye season being extended to April 1 for inland water? It would improve angler success and fishing. Another thought would be leave it open year-round and reduce the limit during the spawn.

Fisheries Division Response: The season closure from March 15 to the last Saturday in April on inland waters is in place to protect spawning populations of Walleye that would otherwise be highly vulnerable to harvest. Extending the possession season for Walleye on inland waters was not considered because the spawning protections continue to be an effective management tool for protecting Walleye populations during a critical time of year for Walleye reproduction.

Comment: Interested in regulation option 3 because of the reduced daily possession limit to protect Walleye from overharvest.

Fisheries Division Response: Fisheries Division appreciates the feedback on preferred regulation options.

Comment: On lakes not suitable for natural reproduction due to habitat, slot limits are not favorable. I enjoy walleye as a sportfish and as food. Protecting the 18 - 22-inch fish for example is biologically irrelevant other than size. As spawners, they would not contribute anything by doing so as natural structure/habitat for egg development would not happen and therefore wouldn't contribute any biological numbers benefit to the lake.

Fisheries Division Response: Stocked lakes are likely to maintain the statewide regulation of 15-inch MSL and DPL of 5 fish because that regulation typically aligns with management goals for stocked waters. Additional regulatory options are included in the toolbox to account for different management goals.

Comment: I believe that implementing a slot limit would help the Walleye population drastically in North Lake Leelanau especially with the size of the fish. Could still keep 5 fish 14-19” nothing between 19”-25” and one over 25”.

Fisheries Division Response: Adding an option that included a slot limit was considered, but not added to the draft plan because Fisheries Division expects that the increased minimum size limit (MSL) and decreased daily possession limit (DPL) option will provide similar protections from harvest and achieve similar biological outcomes for Walleye populations in Michigan. However, based on feedback received during the external review process that highlighted other states were achieving desired outcomes (e.g., reduced exploitation rate, increased abundance of spawning individuals, angler support) after implementing protected slot limits in certain waters, Fisheries Division decided to amend the final version of the plan and included an option for an experimental slot limit. Additionally, the online angler survey and external review process illustrated conceptual angler support for this regulation type.

It should be noted the length ranges that were mentioned in this comment would be difficult to achieve because on average Walleye in Michigan's inland lakes rarely reach > 24 inches, which is highly dependent on a lake's overall productivity.

Comment: I would like to see restrictions on lines and gear for smaller inland Lakes under 200 acres in size. Examples in Otsego County are Big Lake 120 acres, Dixon Lake 80 acres, Opal Lake 122 acres, Lake twenty-seven 112 acres, etc. These should have a two-line per person limit AND NO use of planer boards which eat up a huge swath of lake when others are trying to fish the limited area, drop-offs, points, and other limited structure on these small waters.

Fisheries Division Response: This recommendation is linked with a widely used method of take (i.e., trolling) and outside the scope of a species-specific statewide management plan. Fisheries Division recommends this subject be addressed at a local level to determine whether it is warranted and to gauge angler support.

Comment: General need to reduce fishing pressure and harvest to protect spawning fish. Also need additional enforcement to increase compliance of regulations.

Fisheries Division Response: Fisheries Division acknowledges that some Walleye populations need additional protections that the statewide regulation doesn't offer. The regulations toolbox has options included that would reduce harvest and protect the mature portion of a population.

Comment: Recommend that DNR opens the season up all year in lakes without natural reproduction.

Fisheries Division Response: The goal of stocking efforts in waters that don't have natural reproduction is commonly related to creating harvest opportunities. Often these waters can only be stocked infrequently, or the effectiveness of different stocking events can be highly variable because of certain environmental conditions. These factors influence the longevity of the fishery that results from a particular stocking event. Therefore, the season closure provides protection from harvest and time for the fish to grow, which creates longer lasting fisheries and that is desirable for anglers. It also

provides a consistency among Walleye regulations, which has multiple social and enforcement benefits.

Comment: I understand the survey results regarding slot limits, but I've had the opportunity to fish in Minnesota on lakes with slot limits and found it a great way to keep a few fish for eating while maintaining brood stock and the opportunity for trophies. I'm by no means a trophy hunter. However, I understand that others are and it's always nice to have the opportunity to hook a monster. Most of the other perspectives in the presentation seemed to be based on data and science but the length requirements and harvest limits seem to be left to opinion. I don't know for a fact that a slot limit is necessarily better for natural reproduction but I have to imagine that it would be beneficial if data were generated and/or analyzed. The information provided on stunted growths for larger populations and personal experiences on lakes like Hubbard Lake in Alpena County make me believe slot limits could be a useful tool on some bodies of water if not for the entire state. It just seems inconsistent with managing healthy populations in general to leave it up to opinion. It's additionally frustrating if you don't also apply the same opinion-based input for class 1 lakes.

Fisheries Division Response: Adding an option that included a slot limit was considered, but not added to the draft plan because Fisheries Division expects that the increased minimum size limit (MSL) and decreased daily possession limit (DPL) option will provide similar protections from harvest and achieve similar biological outcomes for Walleye populations in Michigan. However, based on feedback received during the external review process that highlighted other states were achieving desired outcomes (e.g., reduced exploitation rate, increased abundance of spawning individuals, angler support) after implementing protected slot limits in certain waters, Fisheries Division decided to amend the final version of the plan and included an option for an experimental slot limit. Additionally, the online angler survey and external review process illustrated conceptual angler support for this regulation type.

Fisheries Division wants to make anglers aware, however, that the effectiveness of a slot limit is typically linked to overall angler effort and harvest dynamics and the productivity of a lake. Abundant Walleye populations that are experiencing slow growth might be linked with the low overall productivity of a lake or low angler effort and harvest. If either of these two factors exist, it would be difficult for a slot limit to be effective because the lake isn’t productive enough to produce large “trophy” fish and harvest wouldn’t be high enough to reduce competition among individual Walleye in the population. The trophy potential for any given lake will be dependent on the productivity and the overall exploitation of a population. The trophy potential is highest when productivity is high, and exploitation is relatively low because the productivity will provide ample food resources for fast growth and low exploitation will allow the fish survive to grow to an older age and greater length.

Comment: Interested in a daily possession limit (DPL) of 3 to help protect walleye populations.

Fisheries Division Response: Fisheries Division appreciates the feedback on preferred regulation options. There is an option for a reduced DPL in the regulation toolbox that is embedded within the plan (see Appendix D) and the goal of that regulation is provide protections when deemed necessary.

Comment: I believe slot limits gives the angler fish to eat while leaving the big spawners to replenish the lake. It also increases the opportunity for young and old fisherman to catch a trophy.

Fisheries Division Response: Adding an option that included a slot limit was considered, but not added to the draft plan because Fisheries Division expects that the increased minimum size limit (MSL) and decreased daily possession limit (DPL) option will provide similar protections from harvest and achieve similar biological outcomes for Walleye populations in Michigan. However, based on feedback received during the external review process that highlighted other states were achieving desired outcomes (e.g., reduced exploitation rate, increased abundance of spawning individuals, angler support) after implementing protected slot limits in certain waters, Fisheries Division decided to amend the final version of the plan and included an option for an experimental slot limit. Additionally, the online angler survey and external review process illustrated conceptual angler support for this regulation type.

Comment: Interested in slot limits to thin out smaller fish because only catching Walleye that are under 15 inches.

Fisheries Division Response: Adding an option that included a slot limit was considered, but not added to the draft plan because Fisheries Division expects that the increased minimum size limit (MSL) and decreased daily possession limit (DPL) option will provide similar protections from harvest and achieve similar biological outcomes for Walleye populations in Michigan. However, based on feedback received during the external review process that highlighted other states were achieving desired outcomes (e.g., reduced exploitation rate, increased abundance of spawning individuals, angler support) after implementing protected slot limits in certain waters, Fisheries Division decided to amend the final version of the plan and included an option for an experimental slot limit. Additionally, the online angler survey and external review process illustrated conceptual angler support for this regulation type.

The productivity of lake and harvest are often the deciding factors for Walleye growth in Michigan's inland lakes. Small Walleye are often the result of a lake with low productivity and/or high angler harvest. Fisheries Division recommends contacting the local Fisheries Biologist for more specific information on Walleye populations that consistent of primarily small fish (i.e., <15 inches) because that size structure might be linked with a lake's productivity, angler harvest, or both and a regulation recommendation would require that local knowledge.

Comment: I would like to see a slot limit statewide. 22-26 inches would not be legal fish. Only keep one over 26 inches and 5 under 22 inches and total limit of 6 fish.

Fisheries Division Response: Adding an option that included a slot limit was considered, but not added to the draft plan because Fisheries Division expects that the increased minimum size limit (MSL) and decreased daily possession limit (DPL) option will provide similar protections from harvest and achieve similar biological outcomes for Walleye populations in Michigan. However, based on feedback received during the external review process that highlighted other states were achieving desired outcomes (e.g., reduced exploitation rate, increased abundance of spawning individuals, angler support) after implementing protected slot limits in certain waters, Fisheries Division decided to amend the final version of the plan and included an option for an experimental slot limit. Additionally, the online angler survey and external review process illustrated conceptual angler support for this regulation type.

Finally, the lengths described would not likely lead to desired benefits in the population's size structure because the average length-at-age for inland Walleye populations (described in the plan) indicates that Walleye only rarely extend lengths greater than 22 to 24 inches. Therefore, the expected outcomes of 5 fish DPL of fish under 22-inches would be consistent with the statewide regulation of 5 fish DPL and 15-inch MSL because it is currently rare for anglers to be catching Walleye greater than 22-inches in inland waters.

Comment: I support a size limit similar to what Ontario uses. Keeping one walleye over 18" and then a few smaller walleye is enough. Protect the larger females for reproducing.

Fisheries Division Response: Adding an option that included a slot limit was considered, but not added to the draft plan because Fisheries Division expects that the increased minimum size limit (MSL) and decreased daily possession limit (DPL) option will provide similar protections from harvest and achieve similar biological outcomes for Walleye populations in Michigan. However, based on feedback received during the external review process that highlighted other states were achieving desired outcomes (e.g., reduced exploitation rate, increased abundance of spawning individuals, angler support) after implementing protected slot limits in certain waters, Fisheries Division decided to amend the final version of the plan and included an option for an experimental slot limit. Additionally, the online angler survey and external review process illustrated conceptual angler support for this regulation type.

Comment: Forgo the 5 fish limit and change that to a 17" three (3) fish limit on inland waters.

Fisheries Division Response: Fisheries Division appreciates the feedback on preferred regulation options.

Comment: I was disappointed to not see a protected slot option. When you look at the quality of walleye fishing in Wisconsin and Minnesota, one of the common denominators is protected slots to protect the spawning fish that proliferate the populations. Why don't we get to vote for that option in Michigan? Many of our strong and limited natural reproduction walleye lakes

could greatly use these protections. I think we should have slots such as can't keep fish 20-27", with one allowed over 27 for a trophy. With that I feel a 4 fish limit is appropriate.

Fisheries Division Response: Adding an option that included a slot limit was considered, but not added to the draft plan because Fisheries Division expects that the increased minimum size limit (MSL) and decreased daily possession limit (DPL) option will provide similar protections from harvest and achieve similar biological outcomes for Walleye populations in Michigan. However, based on feedback received during the external review process that highlighted other states were achieving desired outcomes (e.g., reduced exploitation rate, increased abundance of spawning individuals, angler support) after implementing protected slot limits in certain waters, Fisheries Division decided to amend the final version of the plan and included an option for an experimental slot limit. Additionally, the online angler survey and external review process illustrated conceptual angler support for this regulation type.

Comment: My biggest concern is what is decided on the size limit and the bag limit. Where I have seen the best fishing (size and quantities), there has always been some type of slot, one over and three under a certain size and/or a possession limit not a daily limit. Canada changes by lake and many of those lakes are fished hard. I know their lakes and climate are better suited for eyes in most cases but the fact that they manage by lake has proven to be successful. They also close sections of lakes off to fishing and change them up every couple years. Many states around us have figured this out and I think we are in a great place to continue building on the work already done. I just hope we take a granular approach to this so we can create some amazing fisheries for many generations to enjoy.

Fisheries Division Response: Adding an option that included a slot limit was considered, but not added to the draft plan because Fisheries Division expects that the increased minimum size limit (MSL) and decreased daily possession limit (DPL) option will provide similar protections from harvest and achieve similar biological outcomes for Walleye populations in Michigan. However, based on feedback received during the external review process that highlighted other states were achieving desired outcomes (e.g., reduced exploitation rate, increased abundance of spawning individuals, angler support) after implementing protected slot limits in certain waters, Fisheries Division decided to amend the final version of the plan and included an option for an experimental slot limit. Additionally, the online angler survey and external review process illustrated conceptual angler support for this regulation type.

Comment: I would like to see a slot limits for walleye 15-18 inches limit 5 on inland waters. This would protect allow for more potential for trophy walleye opportunities.

Fisheries Division Response: Adding an option that included a slot limit was considered, but not added to the draft plan because Fisheries Division expects that the increased minimum size limit (MSL) and decreased daily possession limit (DPL) option will provide similar protections from harvest and achieve similar biological outcomes for Walleye populations in Michigan. However, based on feedback received during the external review process that highlighted other states were achieving desired outcomes (e.g., reduced exploitation rate, increased abundance of spawning individuals, angler support) after

implementing protected slot limits in certain waters, Fisheries Division decided to amend the final version of the plan and included an option for an experimental slot limit. Additionally, the online angler survey and external review process illustrated conceptual angler support for this regulation type.

Comment: Remove the season closure on Lake Superior waters to be consistent with the other Great Lakes waters.

Fisheries Division Response: The management of Great Lakes Walleye populations was not within the scope of this plan. That aside, Lake Superior has cooler and less productive waters compared to the other Great Lakes. This difference influences the productivity of Walleye populations, and typically means that populations in Lake Superior are not as abundant as populations in Lake Erie and portions of Lake Huron and Lake Michigan. Additionally, based on feedback from anglers in the Upper Peninsula they are supportive of restricting harvest and providing protections for Walleye populations during the spawning season. Therefore, the removal of the season closure in Lake Superior waters was not considered during the development of the plan.

Comment: Recommend two fish DPL and only 1 over 18" to protect spawning fish.

Fisheries Division Response: Fisheries Division appreciates the feedback on preferred regulation options.

Comment: In general, we are pleased with the 15-inch minimum size limit in the Upper Peninsula. It is easy to follow and allows for females to mature. It would be tempting to change to a 13-inch minimum size limit, but the faster growing females would quickly get picked off before reaching sexual maturity. Damage would be done to the fishery as you need two to tango, thus resulting in having no chance at any natural reproduction. We are afraid this tool would be used as a quick fix to keep the public happy when a strong year class of fish reaches 13 inches. This would only last a year or two and the end result would cause more harm to the fishery as a large percentage of a year class would possibly be removed before being allowed the opportunity to spawn. Having a different size limit between different lakes would further complicate the issue if some natural reproduction were occurring.

Fisheries Division Response: The 13" minimum size limit is one option of several that is included in the regulation toolbox. It should be noted that any regulation option that differs from the statewide norm would be viewed as an exception and would require ample biological and social data to justify the recommendation. The various regulation options were included in the toolbox to make the regulations throughout the state consistent and allow Fisheries Biologists to recommend regulations that align with potentially differing management objectives in lakes managed for Walleye within their units.

Comment: Slot limits are a poor choice for most of the inland waters of the Upper Peninsula. A lot of fisherman see slot limits working on the Great Lakes or in states that have the ability to grow larger fish. They come back to the U.P. and recommend them to everyone. On most inland lakes of the U.P. we have slow growth this is not conducive to a slot limit system. We think the DNR needs to educate fisherman that slot limits have a place, but only where they will work effectively.

> **Fisheries Division Response:** Adding an option that included a slot limit was considered, but not added to the draft plan because Fisheries Division expects that the increased minimum size limit (MSL) and decreased daily possession limit (DPL) option will provide similar protections from harvest and achieve similar biological outcomes for Walleye populations in Michigan. However, based on feedback received during the external review process that highlighted other states were achieving desired outcomes (e.g., reduced exploitation rate, increased abundance of spawning individuals, angler support) after implementing protected slot limits in certain waters, Fisheries Division decided to amend the final version of the plan and included an option for an experimental slot limit. Additionally, the online angler survey and external review process illustrated conceptual angler support for this regulation type.

Comment: Regarding the no possession regulation for Walleye. This regulation has become quite popular at Deer Lake located outside of Ishpeming. The lake was contaminated so no possession was allowed. After quite some time the test showed improvement and the contaminates were shown to be below the threshold levels. Local and regional interest was shown to have the lake remain a no possession lake. We see this as a hard to establish change unless walleyes are introduced to manage panfish. Property owners and fisherman would be opposed to losing a lake where they could keep walleyes, ss would most of us if was our fishing lake.

We have found from past experience that regulation changes have been put in place with no evaluations conducted before or after changes took place. We have also seen regulations remain in places years after it was proven they were not helping the fishery.

We strongly recommend studies and public meetings with stake holder approval, be conducted prior to using tools in this toolbox. We also recommend an automatic expiration date of 5 years on these regulation changes. After 5 years the DNR can re-evaluate the changes and provide the information to the public. The public with help from the DNR can then decide if they want to continue with the new regulation or revert to the original.

> **Fisheries Division Response:** The regulation process is interactive and relies on gathering and reviewing survey data as well as being informed from angler feedback. Fisheries Biologists make recommendations for regulation changes when deemed appropriate based on all the relevant information. Fisheries Division does not feel that every regulation needs to expire after 5 years and that the current regulation process is sufficient. Specific to Walleye management, Fisheries Division feels that in most cases 5 years would be too short of a duration to fully see population changes stemming from a management action because of the Walleye life history characteristics. Instead, Fisheries Division would anticipate 8-10 years before expected changes were realized, and therefore the division recently modified the management prescription cycle from 6 years to 10 years to account for this point.

Comments Related to Stocking:

General Fisheries Division Response: As indicated in the plan, stocking is an important tool to create, restore, and supplement Walleye populations in Michigan. The available resources for stocking are limited and often depend on the partnerships with conservation groups across the state. Annual fingerling production is highly variable and can be limited in certain years, and therefore Fisheries Division is often required to make difficult decisions on where to stock to make best use of these statewide resources to achieve the different management objectives. Fisheries Biologists make every attempt to prioritize stocking events in waters where they expect to achieve the most desirable outcome, and that typically means stocking in waters that have habitats that are suitable for Walleye.

Comment: Expressed interest in collecting walleye from Saginaw Bay and stocking them elsewhere.

> **Fisheries Division Response:** Historically Fisheries Division collected Walleye eggs from the Tittabawassee River, but in the late 2000s the egg collection at that river was ceased because of fish health concerns (i.e., Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia (VHSv)). The existing egg collection operations don't have the same fish health risks and provide sufficient fry to the rearing ponds and hatcheries throughout the state.

Comment: Stock class 1 lakes in southern MI that have had stocking efforts in the past that created a fishery.

> **Fisheries Division Response:** The intent of the draft statewide plan was not to eliminate stocking efforts in lakes that have had a history of success, but instead meant to prioritize waters based on habitat criteria that is expected to result in a greater likelihood of a successful stocking event. This plan has a statewide scope and Fisheries Division believes habitat plays a critical role in the success of stocking, and therefore statewide habitat and predicted Walleye suitability was used in the plan to inform and prioritize stocking decisions. The revised plan includes language that speaks to this issue and describes that the division will not eliminate stocking Walleye in lakes where success has been demonstrated.

Comment: Increase production capacity in the hatcheries. Wolf Lake Hatchery is being underutilized.

> **Fisheries Division Response:** Fisheries Division appreciates the interest in increasing fish production. The division was recently fortunate to receive legislative funding to increase the capacity to raise Walleye at the Thompson State Fish Hatchery. Previous to this funding, the Department did seek funding for increased production at the Wolf Lake Hatchery, but to date this request has not been fulfilled. Currently the division is working within our budgetary limits to rear fish that are stocked into Michigan's waters to bolster a diverse array of fisheries (e.g., salmon, trout, Walleye, Muskellunge).

Comment: Stock walleyes in lakes that already have walleyes, so other fish species aren't negatively influenced because of predation.

> **Fisheries Division Response:** Walleye stocking is a complex science and Fisheries Division's stocking decisions are based on several factors. The plan describes the factors that are considered when making Walleye stocking decisions and they include the existing fish community. It is important to recognize, however, that stocking Walleye in lakes with a naturally reproducing Walleye population is not advised.

Comment: Regarding lakes classification. While reviewing the list of lakes in appendix A we found some lakes that we feel have been misclassified. We are referring to the difference between natural reproduction lakes, and lakes requiring stocking. Part of the reasoning for this is there are a number of lakes that do quite well without stocking for years but will eventually fail. These lakes require "periodic maintenance stocking". After stocking for a few years, the lake may again have good natural reproduction for 10 to 15 years and not need stocking. There are actually very few lakes in the U.P. that have had long term survival of walleyes without this "periodic maintenance stocking". This can easily be verified by looking at the stocking data base. We urge the DNR to continually evaluate lakes and perform maintenance and supplemental stocking if lakes show unsuccessful multiple low year class survival. Input from fisherman should also be used to help identifying lakes that may be seeing low natural reproduction. We agree that a number of things can change the successful natural reproduction of a lake, even without degrading from invasive species or climate change. Lack of wind to provide waves which oxygenate the eggs. Lack of warm weather and sunshine to provide growth for plankton. The lakes that are the most consistent are those that are connected to a river system that allows for spawning in the rivers.

We urge the DNR to be flexible in defining the categories in appendix A, and to update the list as needed, based on continued evaluations. A procedure should be included in the management plan as how to define when a lake has gone from a self-sustaining (cat.1-2) lake to one needing Periodic Maintenance stocking.

> **Fisheries Division Response:** Fisheries Division agrees that natural reproduction for Walleye populations is highly variable in lakes on an annual basis. Even the most robust Walleye populations do not produce strong year classes each year. Walleye populations and fisheries often rely on periodic strong year classes to enhance populations for potentially 5-10 years into the future. The classifications listed in Appendix 1 is a snap-shot in time of the natural reproduction categories for each lake based on available survey data or professional judgement (which is often informed by angler reports), but those categories will likely change in the future and could have been different in the past. This snap-shot will allow Fisheries Division to assess trends in Walleye populations through time when this type of classification is completed in the future.
>
> Maintenance stocking is a management tool that has been used in the past and will likely continue to be used in the future. This type of stocking is referenced as "enhance small populations" in the plan when describing how stocking is used to achieve management goals and is also recognized within the stocking guidelines appendix. It is also important

to note, however, that supplemental or maintenance stocking intended to supplement natural reproduction is generally the least effective type of stocking approach for Walleye, and therefore is typically not recommended based on the available science related to Walleye stocking effectiveness (see Raabe et al. 2020). This is partially the reason why throughout the plan it is recommended that stocking occurs only on rare occasions in lakes with naturally reproducing populations.

Comment: Only stock in public waters.

Fisheries Division Response: Fisheries Division only stocks fish in public waters. If there are specific concerns, please contact Fisheries Division and we would be happy to provide clarity. It is also important to recognize that fish stocking does occur in private waters, but those efforts are led and funded by private groups.

Comment: Stock more fall fingerling to try and increase survival.

Fisheries Division Response: Fisheries Division is interested in expanding fall fingerling production in the future to try to increase the survival of stocked Walleye. The division has space and budget limitations that currently limits our ability to produce large numbers of fall fingerlings. As such, the division continues to primarily stock spring fingerlings. Some of the Fisheries Management Units are attempting experimental stocking with fall fingerlings and have had some success. The division is also interested to work with partners to identify new ponds and collaborations that could help bolster fall fingerling production.

Comment: I believe a bit more scientific approach is valid to determine whether stocking makes sense rather than taking an ad-hoc or simply a public opinion approach to stocking. A lake survey needs to occur prior to approving stocking plus a monitoring program to verify if objectives were met and impact to existing fishes was not detrimental. I understand there is a cost to field surveying, but it just makes too much sense to field survey prior to stocking and field monitor after stocking.

Fisheries Division Response: Walleye stocking is a complex science and Fisheries Division's stocking decisions are based on several factors. The plan describes those factors and has adapted the overall stocking strategy to include lessons learned from other midwestern states. One such example, is the addition of the stocking decision tree that will help inform and prioritize Walleye stocking events in the future. Fisheries Division agrees that a monitoring strategy for every lake pre- and post-stocking would be ideal. However, the staffing levels and resources needed to implement such a strategy is beyond what is currently feasible. Therefore, Fisheries Division intends to use data from historic stocking events that were successful, lessons learned from other states, and identify patterns that are expected to increase the likelihood of successful future stocking events in inland lakes.

Comment: Interested in stocking walleye in south to reduce the need to travel north to fish walleye on inland lakes.

> **Fisheries Division Response:** Fisheries Division intends to identify and stock waters in southern Michigan that we believe provide suitable Walleye habitat. These lakes will provide unique fishing opportunities for this species in southern Michigan. The plan speaks to this issue within the goal related to providing diverse Walleye fisheries. Some stocking efforts have shown to be successful in the past and those will continue, and the division will look for other potential opportunities. It is important to note, however, that southern inland lakes typically have lower habitat suitability for Walleye and Walleye fishing opportunities will continue to be rarer compared to opportunities in the northern portions of the state.

Comment: For the non-existent and limited natural reproduction lakes, supplemental stocking should be increased. Stocking is key in these lakes and without the populations die and so does everything else associated with fishing efforts on a lake and the ripple effect on the economy of the areas.

> **Fisheries Division Response:** Walleye stocking has been shown to be most successful when trying to create new populations, and the effectiveness is reduced when stocking for the purpose of supplementing a low-density population. The Raabe et al. (2020) citation provided in the plan is a useful peer reviewed article that provides a review of Walleye habitat criteria and stocking in the midwestern states. This isn't to say that Fisheries Division will not conduct stocking events to supplement Walleye populations, it's simply to state that when other priorities exist, and resources are limited there will likely be supplemental stockings that will be deferred to future years to address higher priorities.

Comment: I would like to see stocking cease in many of the lakes that support no natural reproduction and more time/effort spent on fisheries with at least some natural reproduction and suitable habitat.

> **Fisheries Division Response:** Walleye stocking has been shown to be most successful when trying to create new populations, and the effectiveness is reduced when stocking for the purpose of supplementing a low-density population. The Raabe et al. (2020) citation provided in the plan is a useful peer reviewed article that provides a review of Walleye habitat criteria and stocking in the midwestern states.

Comment: Appreciate your efforts to better the Walleye fishing down in the middle/ lower half of Michigan. Whenever I want to target Walleye I always have to drive 3 plus hours north and it would be amazing if some local lakes nearby were stocked. If you do end up stocking some lakes in the middle/ lower half of Michigan it would be awesome to see a list of the lakes that were stocked.

> **Fisheries Division Response:** Fisheries Division intends to identify and stock waters in southern Michigan that we believe provide suitable Walleye habitat. These lakes will provide unique fishing opportunities for this species in southern Michigan. The plan

speaks to this issue within the goal related to providing diverse Walleye fisheries. Some stocking efforts have shown to be successful in the past and those will continue, and the division will look for other potential opportunities. It is important to note, however, that southern inland lakes typically have lower habitat suitability for Walleye and Walleye fishing opportunities will continue to be rarer compared to opportunities in the northern portions of the state. Also, text was added to the plan that informs people about how to access DNR stocking data using the online Fish Stocking Database.

Comment: Don't stock Muskellunge in waters with a Walleye population.

Fisheries Division Response: Walleye stocking is a complex science and Fisheries Division's stocking decisions are based on several factors. The plan describes the factors that are considered when making Walleye stocking decisions, and the existing predator community is one of those factors. It should be noted, however, that in certain-productive waters Muskellunge and Walleye can coexist successfully.

Comment: More detailed processes and procedures need to be developed and followed to ensure consistence development and sustainability of Walleye Lakes – Vs using - Professional Experience

There appears to be a conflict between "Professional Judgment", "Professional Expertise" and surveyed lakes when determining the status of which lakes are naturally reproducing and which require stocking.

Example: In 2018 the DNR resumed stocking Iron Lake in Iron County. The Fisheries Division also requested Wildlife Unlimited of Iron County to pay for the stocking of fall fingerlings into Sunset Lake to jump start the fishery. This was done for 2 years, 2018 and 2019, at a cost of $15,000.00 to Wildlife Unlimited.

Fisheries Division Response: For clarity, the Fisheries Division was contacted by Wildlife Unlimited of Iron County regarding their funding and interest in stocking walleye. Fisheries Division did not request the group to pay for stocking, but instead worked with that group to determine lakes that would potentially be acceptable to receive the mentioned fall fingerlings and Sunset Lake was mutually agreeable and selected.

Continued Comment: The new management plan appendix "A" has these two lakes listed as class 1 & 2 for natural reproduction. This indicates that they have adequate natural reproduction and should not be stocked with fingerlings.

So, was it "Professional Judgement" mentioned from page 6 which determined the lakes had natural reproduction, the "Professional Expertise" from page 11 which is used in lake classification, or was it the "Professional Expertise that was used in place of survey data as mentioned on page 12? Or was it the recommendation for the 6-year prescriptions that were wrong?

Procedures need to be listed and followed to ensure proper decisions are made regarding resources. Evaluation based on "Professional Experience" would lack consistency. Everyone needs to follow the science; it works much better this way.

> **Fisheries Division Response:** For clarity, Fisheries Division uses the available survey data as a primary source of information when making decisions. Survey data, however, is not always available or sufficient (i.e., outdated) to fully inform a decision. Therefore, the professional judgement of our Fisheries Biologists is a method that is often required and incorporates more informal information stemming from angler reports or lake associations. Professional judgement and survey data are used in tandem, and judgement is never used in place of existing survey data. Lastly, professional judgement is a recognized method in the published and peer-reviewed fisheries literature and is particularly useful when survey data is lacking or limited.

Comment: A procedure from an old Northern Lake Michigan Management Plan gives what we consider a good example:

Initial walleye fingerling introductions should include annual stocking for the first three years, followed by one additional stocking in year five. If no significant walleye year-classes have developed or if evidence of angler harvest has not been confirmed by the end of the tenth year, stocking should be discontinued. If a walleye fishery develops, alternate year stocking is recommended. If natural reproduction develops, it should be monitored with fall recruit electrofishing surveys per Michigan Fisheries Survey Manual protocol on an alternate year schedule. Two strong year classes should be found in a six-year period before stocking is suspended. Waters in this category should be monitored to determine if natural reproduction will become self-sustaining. Based on the walleye management history for the Western Upper Peninsula, these should be periodically monitored for a ten-year period to determine if they are truly self-sustaining.

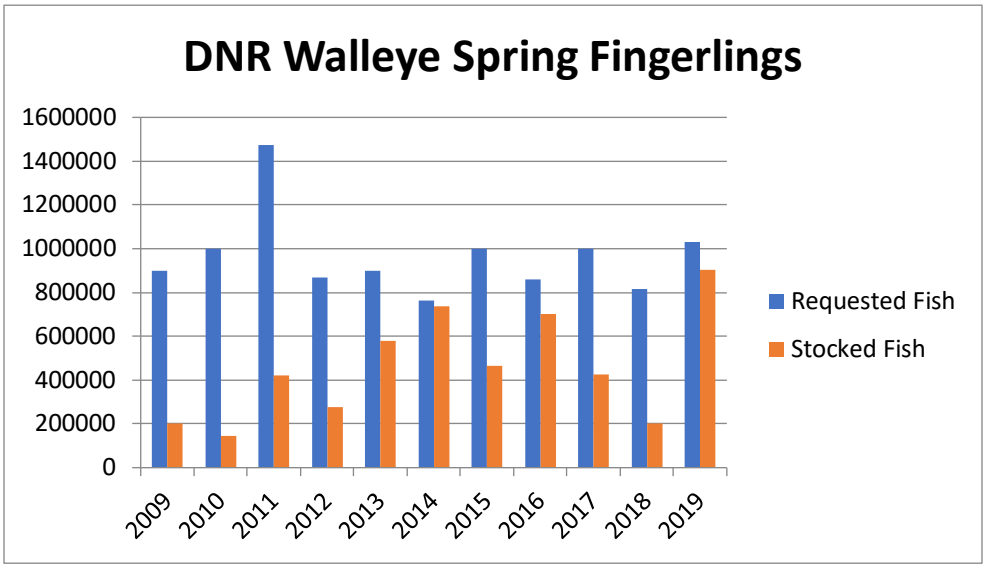
> **Fisheries Division Response:** The draft plan was meant to provide general guidelines and recognize the importance of evaluating stocking events, when possible. Fisheries Division agrees with this type of strategy described in the NLMMU plan for evaluating stocking success, but this intensive strategy will not be feasible for every lake that receives Walleye stocking throughout the state. Therefore, this intensive level of evaluation was not described within the statewide plan because evaluation strategies will vary and will be based on available staff resources and the specific goal for stocking.

Comment: A lot of lakes in the U.P. have been under a hit and miss rotation of stocking. It is almost impossible to properly evaluate a lake if it is not being stocked on a bi-annual basis over a six-year period. The procedures were written to ensure proper evaluation.

> **Fisheries Division Response:** Fisheries Division agrees that thoroughly evaluating every stocking event would be ideal, but that would be impossible given the other work the division needs to complete and the number of lakes that are stocked each year. Fisheries Division is dedicated to conducting as many evaluations as feasible and will use tools such as marking (with OTC) and working with angler groups to implement evaluations that are

not as time and labor intensive. For example, to properly evaluate a stocking event with marked fish would not require the same intensity of sampling.

Comment: Regarding Walleye rearing pond failures – refer to Figure below.



Under Management Goals and Objectives Goal 5. An objective should be added to the plan to address the systemic walleye rearing pond failures in the Upper Peninsula.

Fisheries Division Response: Fisheries Division agreed with this idea and acknowledged the importance of Walleye production in the state and that is why the Division has created several productive relationships with sportsmen's groups to maintain ponds and rear Walleye each spring. In some areas of Michigan, the majority of spring fingerlings that are stocked are produced in partner operated Walleye ponds. There are some areas and ponds in the state that are more productive than others, but ultimately there is annual variability in weather conditions and that directly results in variable Walleye production from the different ponds each year. The plan does have a goal that addresses the need for continued production of Walleye to stock into our statewide waters and also has objectives linked with evaluating and making refinements when necessary, to optimize that production. The plan also addresses the importance of critical partnerships to maintain Walleye production on an annual basis.

The shear abundance of lakes in Michigan makes meeting management goals a challenge. It should be expected that Fisheries Biologists will have prescriptions that go unfilled based on operational and production limitations on an annual basis. The draft plan was meant to guide the division on how to prioritize waters that receive stocking to better align the prescription process with attainable goals.

Additionally, Fisheries Division has actively sought additional funding from the legislature to bolster fish production capacity within state owned facilities to address this need for managing Walleye. Fortunately, funds were recently received and 2021 will be the first year of Walleye production at the newly upgraded coolwater facility at the Thompson State Fish Hatchery. Additionally, production within hatchery systems would likely address the

variable production because hatchery systems generally have the ability to control various elements of the rearing process, especially within enclosed facilities.

Comment: The U.P. management units have a dismal record of rearing spring fingerlings. Over the last 11 years the number of walleye spring fingerlings produced, has failed to meet the needs to ensure required stocking of inland lakes. The DNR Fisheries have reared on average only about 48% of the required fingerlings needed for the whole U.P. Cold spring weather has been the response given when questioned on why production is low. The Wisconsin DNR Fisheries, tribal fisheries and private hatcheries have all had normal survival of their fingerlings during this same time frame, as have co-operative rearing operations. The most successful ponds in the DNR U.P. management units are those maintained by volunteer organizations. Why can't the U.P. fisheries management units' rear fingerlings?

Fisheries Division Response: Fisheries Division recognizes the critical importance of various organizations (i.e., Walleye groups/clubs – sport and environmental groups) for assisting with producing Walleye. These partnerships allow the division to increase overall production and still be able to conduct other necessary spring fisheries surveys to manage our diverse fisheries.

For clarity, division staff does rear fingerlings and could expand with additional volunteer groups or further support from our legislature for future expansions. The comparison to WI is a dissimilar comparison because they have received substantial funding (multi-million dollar investment) for implementing the WI Walleye Initiative, which was fully provided by their state legislature.

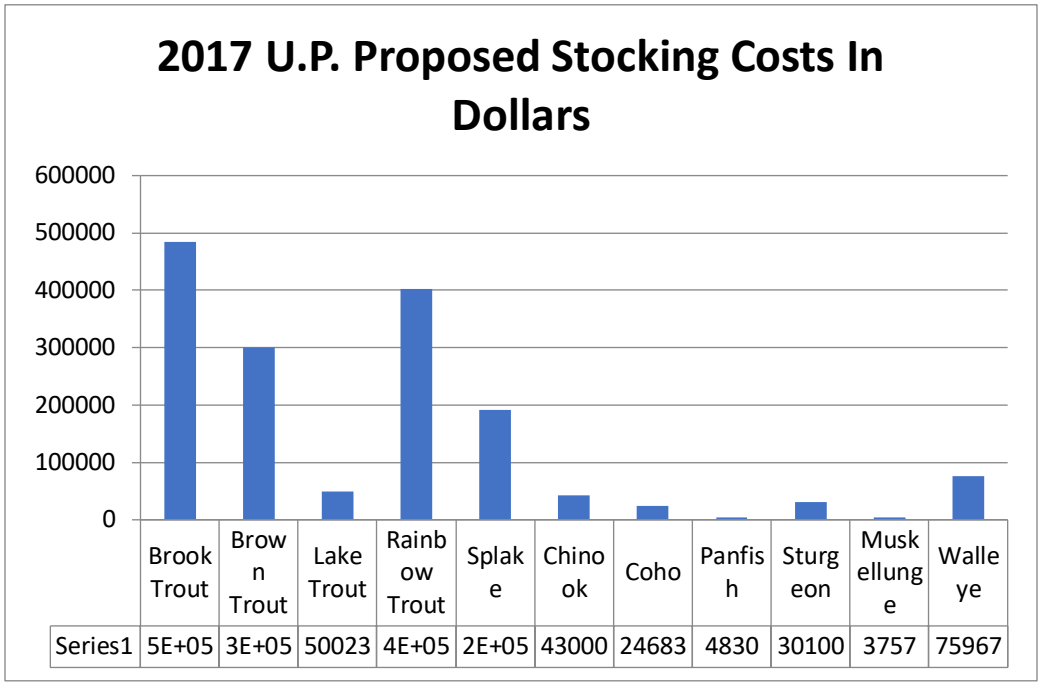
Comment: Not stocking lakes due to lack of walleye fingerlings has had a major impact on these fisheries. All the waters of the U.P. have suffered, inland as well as the Great Lakes.

The Thompson Fish Hatchery has added new walleye rearing capabilities. It should produce an estimated 250,000 spring fingerlings. Although a step in the right direction, more fingerling production is needed to meet the demands of the walleye stocking program in the Upper Peninsula. 2019 appears to have been a good year and the figures presented on the chart for 2019 may not be accurate due to differences of provided data. The DNR may have met the prescription goal. We congratulate the DNR for their efforts in 2019, although trending in the right direction, one year out of 11 is not a successful program. This is a big issue that needs to be given a top priority to correct a problem that has gone on for far too long.

Note: The 2020 stocking was absent all together as covid 19 prevented the egg collection, and rearing process from taking place.

Fisheries Division Response: See responses to previous comments.

Comment: Regarding the cost of rearing Walleyes – refer to Figure below.



Under **Status and Trend Surveys** the plan states:

"in more recent years the MDNR has needed to be more strategic by accounting for the tradeoffs between the cost of increased stocking rates and the expected contribution to a fishery because reduced budgets no longer allow for the extensive stocking activities that were historically common."

The state received increased fishing license dollars beginning in 2014. The state stopped offering a $15 annual restricted fishing license but reduced the cost of a year-long, all-species fishing license from $28 to $25. We were told this would allow the state to provide better fishing opportunities to the anglers. From our perspective We were sold a bogus bill of goods. Saying the DNR has a reduced budget and needs to reduce stocking just does not cut it.

We are made to believe we are lucky to get any walleye fingerlings stocked at all, and if we do get any fingerlings, we should be happy about it, and not question anything. We agree that angler's dollars should be spent to benefit anglers. Money should not be wasted needlessly on items that will not provide a return. But some perspective needs to be shown about the cost of the walleye program compared to other fisheries. This will allow anglers to see where the DNR is spending their dollars.

The DNR spends approximately 10 million dollars a year for hatcheries/fish rearing. The Upper Peninsula receives about 1.5 million of those stocking dollars. Based on the DNR's average cost of 6.54 cents to raise a walleye spring fingerling, around $26,000 is being spent annually on spring fingerlings for the Inland waters of the Upper Peninsula. See Figure 2 for typical percentage of monies spent on U.P. waters for various fisheries. Please note although the chart shows $76,000.00 going towards walleyes, most of that effort is going to the Great Lakes. Only $26,000.00 of the total $76,000.00 is being spent on inland lake walleye spring fingerlings. Based on the popularity

of walleye fishing, we find it hard to understand why more stocking dollars are not being directed toward this fishery.

So how does the whole state pan out? Using the figures include in the management plan, an annual cost of $330,000.00 for all phases of walleye rearing, and a hatchery annual budget of 10,000,000.00 The average percentage on monies spend on walleye rearing is 3.3 % of the annual budget. It is unclear if this figure represents all Michigan waters, or just the Inland lakes and rivers. In either case we find this number actually quite low. The cost of walleye stocking should not be used as an excuse to not stock walleyes where they may provide a fishery. Walleyes are one of the 3 most sought out fish in Michigan and should be treated more favorably.

> **Fisheries Division Response:** The comparison for cost is not appropriate because of the drastically different rearing procedures and life histories of the species being raised and stocked. For example, trout and salmon are in the hatchery systems for much longer and therefore have greater costs associated with them. Walleye costs are less because they are a less expensive product to raise. Fisheries Division also attempts to provide diverse fisheries throughout the state and there are variable costs for each species to provide the different desired fisheries across the state. Additional resources for coolwater production would require additional legislative appropriations or additional organizations to create partnerships with Fisheries Division to maintain ponds and rear Walleye.

Comment: The truth is that walleye spring fingerlings can be used in most cases to take care of the stocking needs. It is a very cost-effective program. Continued stocking in some cases is actually a lot more cost effective than projects to enhance natural reproduction. If you could stock a Lake with walleye spring fingerlings for 100 years for the cost of a habitat improvement project that last 5 years, which is the better choice?

The DNR the last few years, has begun to use more fall fingerlings. These larger fish are far more costly to raise. Independent hatcheries have produced the fall fingerlings at a cost of $2.00 to 2.50 each while the DNR's costs to raise the fish are about $4.74 each. Based on costs, fall fingerlings should only be used as a last resort, in cases where spring fingerlings have failed to produce a fishery. For example, the DNR spent an estimated $39,000.00 to $78,000.00 on fall fingerling walleyes in 2019 in the Upper Peninsula. This was in an attempt to restart lakes that failed due to lack of available fingerlings, or lakes that fit the class of needing a periodic maintenance stocking. If spring fingerlings were tried first, the cost would have been greatly reduced if successful. This is not to say that fall fingerlings were not needed but try the less costly approach first.

> **Fisheries Division Response:** Fisheries Division acknowledges this point and that is why spring fingerlings are the primary stage of Walleye that is raised and stocked in our waters. See previous comments about increasing the production of spring fingerling Walleye. Additionally, there is an interest in producing and stocking more fall fingerlings because the available science indicates greater survival rates (see Raabe et al. 2020, full citation provided in plan). The logistics (i.e., cost and space) of raising fall fingerlings is a challenge and Fisheries Division is going to continue to primarily stocking spring fingerlings for the foreseeable future.

Comments related to management efforts:

Comment: I'm completely convinced that Michigan has the potential to be one of the best places in North America to target walleye living in our abundant natural lakes. Currently the fishing opportunities in Michigan's inland lakes are very poor compared to similar lakes in Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and also Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan. I've fished all these places and can personally attest to the fact that the respective game and fish people work hard at creating noteworthy walleye populations. Great walleye fishing rarely happens by accident. We can learn much by taking a close look at what our neighbors in these states and Canadian providences have been doing for years to better manage their walleye populations.

> **Fisheries Division Response:** Fisheries Division frequently communicates with other states to discuss management approaches that work for them and to hear about efforts that are unsuccessful. It is important to recognize that other neighboring states and provinces have differing levels of productivity, habitat types, natural recruitment potential, prey resources, angler dynamics and all those factors influence Walleye population dynamics. For example, in Minnesota they have several large lakes that are productive, have ample prey resources, and have connecting rivers or sufficient nearshore coarse substrate that provides ideal spawning habitat. These lake criteria can therefore be expected to produce a more abundant population. When any of those factors are negatively influenced you can expect reductions in the potential for a robust Walleye population. The introduction of zebra mussels into Lake Mille Lacs in MN is a great example of how increased water clarity and reduced productivity can reduce a historically abundant Walleye population. Nonetheless, the comment is appreciated, and Fisheries Division will continue to manage our Walleye populations to the best of our ability based on best available science and angler input, recognizing our constraints related to Walleye populations may differ from other states and provinces for several reasons.

Comment: We strongly Recommend that a proper lake survey be conducted on any lakes that relied on "Professional Expertise" or "Professional Judgement" for lake classification in leu of survey data.

> **Fisheries Division Response:** Fisheries Division agrees and in an ideal world Fisheries Division would have current survey data from all of our waters, but that is impractical, and the Division has to work within our capacity.

Comment: While different states and providences may be dealing with different habitats, what these states and providences share is the belief that recreational fishing pressure distinctively impacts on walleye populations. When a fish tastes as good as walleye taste, they are always going to be in high demand among those who are interested in eating fish. More restrictive harvest regulations are the most effective means of controlling harvest and allowing walleye populations to sustain themselves at a high level. The number one mistake I see Michigan making is offering creel limits that are too liberal and using blanket creel limits (5 fish, 15 inch minimum) across far too many bodies of water. Some lakes in Michigan can sustain this kind of

harvest and many simply cannot. A strong look at harvest limits, size limits and slot limits based on specific fisheries, not blanket regulation is mandatory in my mind. To effectively manage individual lakes will require a lot more creel data than simply using survey data collected from general fishing license holders. What will be needed is gaining exact creel data based on specific fisheries and using that data to effectively manage those same specific fisheries. The blanket approach will not work as some of these fisheries will show great promise and others won't regardless of how many fish are stocked.

> **Fisheries Division Response:** The purpose of developing the regulation toolbox that is included in the plan was to address this specific concern. The current statewide regulation of a 5 fish daily possession limit and 15-inch minimum size limit has been in place for several decades and has been widely supported by our angling community. We do, however, recognize that our walleye populations are diverse in this state and think that the options in the regulation toolbox will allow our biologists to recommend regulations that best align with achieving population specific management objectives.
>
> It is important to recognize that the Natural Resource Commission (NRC) has the decision-making authority for sportfishing regulations, and they value the biological and social science regarding a regulation proposal. This often requires sufficient biological data and angler support to justify a recommendation for limiting harvest opportunities. Currently Fisheries Division doesn't have statewide data that would indicate walleye populations are exhibiting a declining trend, and therefore a statewide reduction in the daily possession limit would be difficult to justify to the NRC. If specific waters are of interest for certain regulations, then the division recommends anglers contact their local fisheries biologist. The local recommendations would be more tangible than statewide or regional regulation proposals, especially if fisheries assessments or angler reports indicate population declines in the lake(s) of interest.
>
> Fisheries Division also reminds anglers of their ability to participate at NRC meetings to convey their perspectives on regulations. The NRC meets each month, and they always welcome testimony from the public, so the division encourages anglers to convey their comments on walleye regulations during those meetings. Here is a link to the public appearance guidelines https://www.michigan.gov/documents/dnr/Public_Appearance_Guidelines_6.19.19_669545_7.pdf.

Comment: I would argue that we don't need statewide data that indicates walleye populations are declining. You could confirm that information by simply talking to anglers who actually fish instead of using surveys. I believe and many agree with me that survey data has a tendency to be suspect at best. I've spoken with the NRC and they are completely against changing regulations and are content with the one size fits all approach. I believe they are dead wrong in this opinion and given the chance anglers will adapt to and support walleye regulation changes that have the potential to improve fishing today and for generations to come. To use a personal example, when I was in my teens and early 20's I made a lot of family fishing trips to Ontario. At the time the limit was six walleye, no size limit and 12 fish could be kept as part of a possession or transportation limit. Frankly, fishing was tough and it wasn't until Ontario lowered their walleye limit to four fish per day, dropped the possession limit entirely, closed fishing in select spawning

areas and started enforcing various slot limits on specific bodies of water that things started to change. Within a decade the number of walleye caught per angling hour skyrocketed indicating that angler efforts were having a significant impact on walleye populations and survival.

> **Fisheries Division Response:** The regulation toolbox was developed with the goal of being able to manage diverse walleye populations with a set of regulations that could provide fisheries that satisfy our diverse anglers in Michigan. Fisheries Divisions knows that some anglers are interested in high catch rates, some in trophy sized fish, while others are interested in simply catching and harvesting a few fish. Fisheries Division will review survey data and angler reports and recommend regulation options to the NRC that best align with desired goals and biological data.

Comment: Regardless of an angler's skill set, people like to catch fish. When a fishery is healthy, even novice anglers are going to be successful. When fisheries are not properly managed, fishing becomes tough and anglers get discouraged and quit fishing. Build it and they will come. It's that simple. While a lot of people are befuddled by making harvest limits more complex, these regulations force anglers to become active in the day-to-day management of a fishery. Involving people at this level is in my mind the key to creating an angling public that is more connected to the resource, more satisfied with their angling experiences and more willing to do what it takes to protect this resource for future generations.

> **Fisheries Division Response:** This is an issue that Fisheries Division is constantly grappling with, and that is the tradeoff between having regulatory exceptions (i.e., increased regulatory complexity) and having regulations that are more simplistic for anglers to comprehend and comply with. The division consistently hears from anglers that the annual Fishing Guide is too long and complex and that is why fewer people fish each year. While Fisheries Division doesn't necessarily agree with that argument, it is something the division tries to account for each year when considering regulation proposals. Fisheries Division is tasked with managing Michigan's fisheries resources for all types of anglers, which at times can be a delicate balance considering the diverse interests and viewpoints of our anglers.

Comment: I don't think that slot limits are complex. In fact, they are easy to understand and they involve the angler in the process of fisheries management, giving them skin in the game. Slots that provide a key age group the opportunity to survive and reproduce are fundamental to creating noteworthy walleye fisheries. With so many other states adopting slot limits as a fundamental foundation for their management efforts, how can the MI DNR or MI Natural Resources Commission come to a different conclusion? In my opinion, serious walleye anglers, the kinds of fishermen who will travel to find fish and invest in suitable boats, motors and electronics used in catching these fish, are most interested in catching lots of fish and not so much interested in taking home limits of fish for the freezer. By putting more restrictive limits on the harvest of walleye we are also investing in future populations. Walleye can't spawn if they are caught, kept and eaten before they ever have the opportunity to grow to the size required to maximize spawning efforts.

Fisheries Division Response: The statewide angler perception survey that Fisheries Division conducted about a year and half ago that was used to partially inform the development of this plan indicates that the majority of anglers are interested in harvesting the legal-size walleye that they catch. The division agrees that there are some anglers out there that are primarily interested in catching many Walleye, but the survey indicated that the majority of anglers are satisfied with catching a few Walleye per trip and interested in harvest opportunities. These survey results further justified our reasoning for developing the regulation toolbox to give our biologists a set of consistent regulatory options that could be recommended to add restrictive regulations to increase population protections when deemed necessary. If there are specific lakes with populations that anglers think are in decline or need additional protections please reach out to the local fisheries biologists to provide that useful feedback. Angler feedback is critical because Fisheries Division does have resource constraints and can't survey every lake each year, and doesn't have the resources necessary to implement a robust inland creel program. In most cases the division needs information and support from our anglers.

Comment: Perhaps a specific lake observation is in order here? Some years ago the Houghton Lake Property Owners Association conducted a weed kill operation. Not long after the weeds were effectively removed from large portions of the lake, anglers discovered they could easily catch limits of fish daily by simply trolling harnesses and or crankbaits using planer boards. In a very short period of time anglers fishing under our current regulations system caught and kept who knows how many walleye, potentially exceeding a reasonable harvest quota and damaging the walleye population in the process. The bonanza lasted a few years followed by an extended period of very tough fishing. These days with anglers dialed into the internet and social media, information about fisheries travels fast. Perhaps too fast, because in the case of Houghton Lake the fishing has not recovered to date. I also believe that while Michigan was and perhaps still is a leader in the science of developing walleye rearing ponds, they need to work harder at making sure stocking efforts take place at appropriate lakes, instead of using the Johnny Appleseed approach.

Fisheries Division Response: Fisheries Division agrees with this point and that is why we focused on habitat suitability and implementing stocking evaluations throughout the plan. It is also why the shallow-eutrophic lakes in southern Michigan (i.e., class 1 lakes) will no longer be prioritized for stocking, especially if stocking has been unsuccessful in that specific lake during previous stocking efforts.

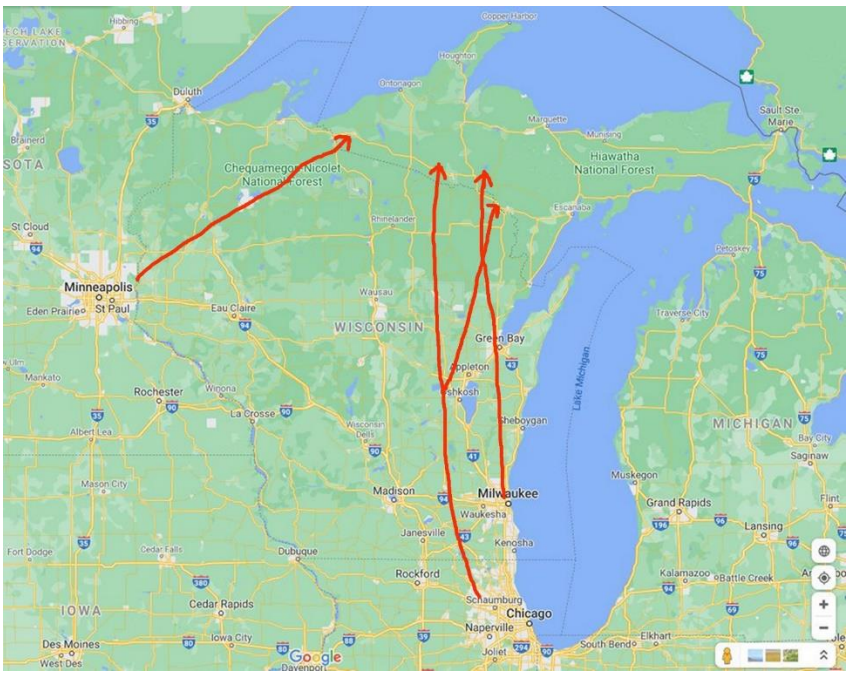
Comment: Michigan can do better at managing our walleye resources and Michigan fishermen can do their part by participating with and encouraging the use of modern fisheries management efforts. I'm a huge advocate for walleye stocking as I have seen it create noteworthy fisheries in relatively short amounts of time. While the cost of stocking is more expensive than depending on natural reproduction, in my mind the cost is justified in a number of ways. First off and perhaps most importantly, stocking paints the DNR in a positive light and lets people actually see where their license dollars are being spent. Stocking is also the most practical way to reclaim marginal fisheries or fisheries that have been damaged due to over-harvest.

Fisheries Division Response: Fisheries Division agrees and included a specific goal that is related to maintaining, and when possible increasing, production capacity for Walleye.

Comment: I believe that if we are to invest in stocking specific lakes with walleye fingerlings, those are the very lakes that should be receiving extensive management efforts in terms of harvest restrictions, slot limits, etc. It only makes sense to avoid the "put and take" philosophy of the past with a management plan that stocks fish and then takes the necessary steps to ensure those stocked fish have a chance to grow and potentially reproduce before they are subsequently removed from the fishery. I also believe that Michigan has spread the walleye fingerlings raised on rearing ponds to thin, rather than stocking the most promising lakes heavily. Any way you slice it, stocked fish have a fairly high mortality rate. To overcome this natural mortality, it's important to stock enough fish to significantly impact on the overall walleye population. They say that 10% of the fishermen catch 90% of the fish. I believe that because only a small percentage of anglers put in the time and effort required to develop the skills needed to be consistently successful. The good news is that small percentage of anglers are spending more money in pursuit of fishing than all the rest combined.

Fisheries Division Response: Habitat suitability will be a critical factor that is examined when Fisheries Division makes stocking decisions. The stocking rate will also be considered because we also know that stocking more fish per acre doesn't necessary result in greater survival and relative abundance (see Figure 10 in the plan) in years following stocking.

Comment: Regarding proximity to population centers and economic impact – refer to Figure below.



Under Management Goals and Objectives: Goal 1, Providing Diverse Opportunities for Walleye fishing.

While much attention appears to be paid to providing good walleye fishing close to the downstate populace. It would appear that no consideration was paid to "out of state anglers". The Western Upper Peninsula is closer to the population centers of Milwaukee, Chicago, and Minneapolis than it is to down state Michigan. These three metropolitan areas have a combined population of over 15 million people. We are not suggesting that all these people come to the U.P. What we are suggesting is that a fair number of people from these areas come to the U.P. during the summer. A lot of these people have cabins on local U.P. lakes. The comparative cost of a U.P. cabin on or off the water is significantly more affordable. A lot of these people have found they have to travel to the U.P. to find that, really country laid back (Yooper) atmosphere. They bring their friends and relatives. A lot of campers and vacationers also come here for the same reasons, to get away from the crowds and catch walleyes.

The tourist dollars really help the local economy in this economically challenged area of the state. Economic consideration effects, need to be included in the decision-making process. A new section on economic impact should be added.

> **Fisheries Division Response:** Fisheries Division agrees with this point and also understands the importance of non-resident anglers to Michigan's economy. Specific to the goal of providing diverse opportunities for Walleye fishing, the U.P., in comparison to Lower Peninsula, has more robust inland Walleye fisheries and there are relatively less needs for Walleye stocking because there is more documented natural recruitment in the U.P. lakes.

Comment: Recommend using the O'Neal 2017 MDNR technical fisheries report to convey the potential for using Walleye as a biocontrol to enhance panfish size structure.

> **Fisheries Division Response:** Fisheries Division adjusted text and incorporated the recommended citation in the plan.

Comment: Improve walleye management in Marquette County lakes because there are too few walleye and yellow perch and too many northern pike.

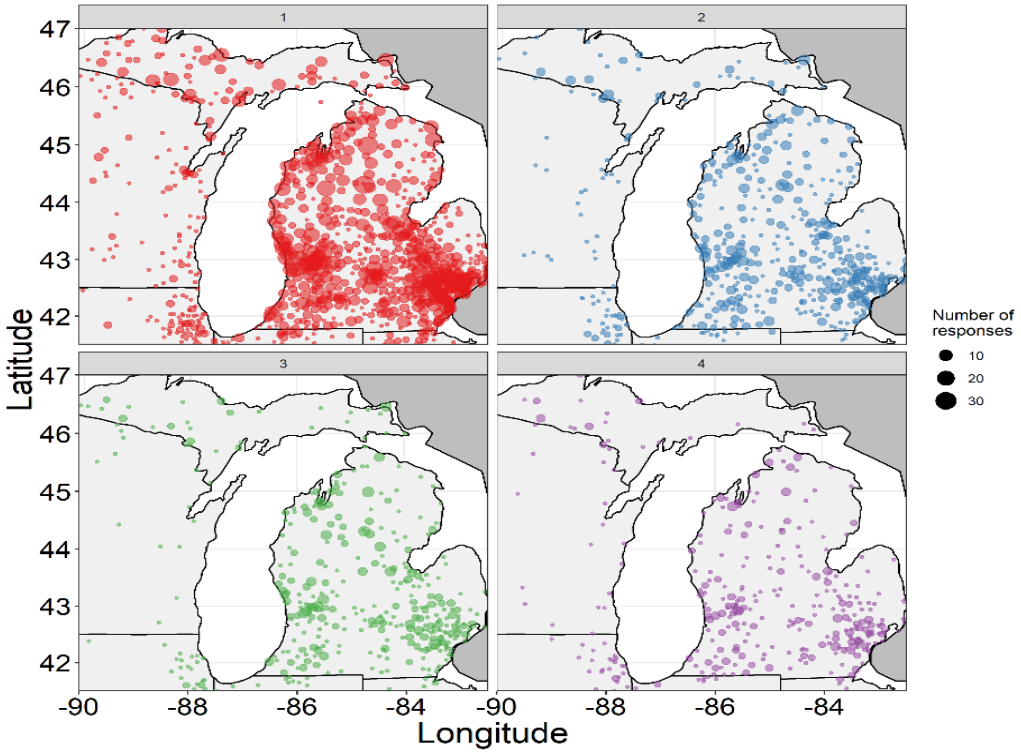
> **Fisheries Division Response:** Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

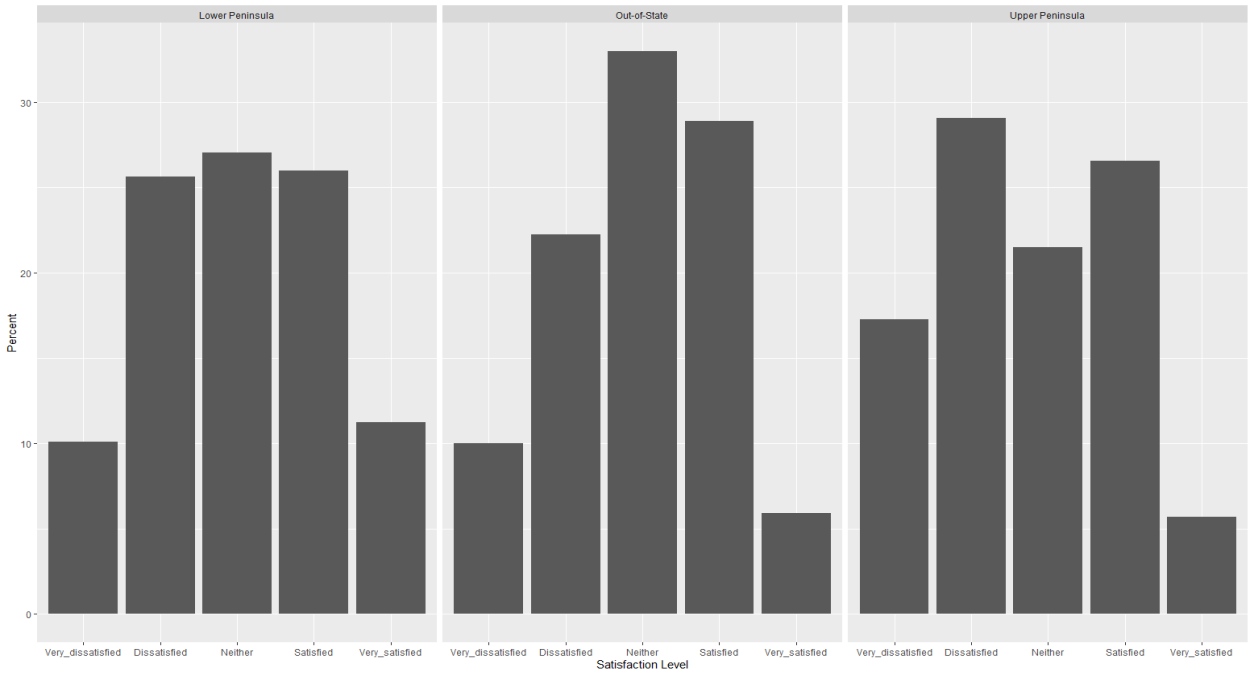
Comment: Angler Behavior and Perception Section. The information presented in the angler behavior and perception section is as important for the public as it is for MDNR. It helps from a social and public perspective to understand how management decisions are considered and the rationale for continuing or adapting management.

Background information on angler demographics, if collected, would be helpful.

Fisheries Division Response: The angler survey data was not summarized in the plan because to provide all the details for each survey (online or long-term mail) would result in a very lengthy document. The draft plan is already lengthy, which was one of the criticisms Fisheries Division received during the external review process. The surveys are described in general terms and provides the major conclusions that are relevant to the goals of this plan.

Specific to the interest in demographic data, we received hundreds of responses from anglers representing unique subsets of anglers (Upper Peninsula, Lower Peninsula, and out-of-state) and preferences/responses for the different questions were generally consistent across those groups. The example provided below shows the preference for the current statewide regulation (i.e., 15" min size limit and daily possession limit of 5 or Option 1 in the Figure below) and the various sections (i.e., 1-4 in the Figure with the map below) requested anglers to select their preferred option. You will see that regardless of location of the respondent (i.e., residency) there is consistency in regulation preference. For example, regulation 1 was most preferred (more and larger circles) for respondents in the Upper Peninsula (U.P.) and the Lower Peninsula (L.P.) and regulation 4 was least preferred regardless of U.P. or L.P. residency status.





Similarly, the pattern in satisfaction levels for Walleye fishing among anglers responding to the online survey was consistent among the different residency groups.

Comment: Figure and charts showing some of the results the text describes, in addition to the wording of the original questions, are helpful for readers of the plan too.

Fisheries Division Response: Per this suggestion the authors of the plan added an appendix that has all the questions that were asked during the online survey.

Comment: Some of the information is a little hard to follow. For example, in one instance 75% support some level of restrictions in certain scenarios, whereas in Figure 9, most respondents preferred the current regulation. Maybe it was just not clear to us.

Fisheries Division Response: The survey questions were unique with different scenarios for respondents to consider and the questions were meant to address different management questions. Therefore, results from the different questions need to be viewed separately.

Comment: It might be helpful in this section to include other avenues the DNR took to engage stakeholders and the participatory process to get to this version of the plan draft. For example, how did DNR solicit feedback to develop goals and objectives? A list of the user groups engaged and the meeting dates where specific feedback to the plan to date would be helpful too.

Fisheries Division Response: Fisheries Division drafted the plan and then provided information on the goals during several meetings. For example, the draft goals were presented to the Warmwater Resources Steering Committee (and later provided via email) and during the citizen advisory committee meetings in 2020 and early 2021. Additionally, Fisheries Division provided stakeholders the opportunity to review and comment on the draft goals during the public review period.

The review process was not described within the draft plan because itwould add length to an already long lengthy document and is generally addressed under Goal 3 that is related to maintaining and enhancing relationships with stakeholders and tribal governments.

Comment: Additional Section on Previous Walleye Management Goals and Objectives. It would be informative to include a section of the plan that reviews previous walleye management goals and objectives; including accomplishments, challenges, changing threats, how management and/or policy priorities have changed related to walleye management. For example, if habitat protection and restoration is a priority, what has DNR accomplished? If improving transparency and stakeholder engagement is a priority, what has DNR done to improve this? If improving hatchery capacity is an objective, what has been done and what is planned to further increase production.

Fisheries Division Response: This is the first time that Fisheries Division has developed a statewide plan for Walleye management, so previous statewide goals were never explicitly documented. Several challenges, changing threats, and management strategies are described in the historic management efforts and the status of our Walleye populations sections in the plan. This status information will be used in the future to determine accomplishments and identify areas for improvement. There have been other regional, or lake specific plans created, but the focus of those plans did not align with the statewide perspective in this plan and therefore were only referenced in the draft plan.

Comment: Remove bullheads to reduce predation on stocked walleye.

Fisheries Division Response: Fisheries Division has a policy and procedure for selective fish removals in public waters. The division recommends that this issue be addressed at the local Fisheries Management Unit level because selective harvest can be labor intensive, costly, and have negligible desired results. As such, contacts should be made to the local Fisheries Biologist for more information on this subject.

Comment: Consider predator-prey relationships for walleye management. Manage for prey species as well. Stock walleye only in lakes where they already exist.

Fisheries Division Response: The management of panfish is another high priority for Fisheries Division. The plan has strategies that address the need to comprehensively manage our fisheries. Examples include not stocking Walleye is specific waters that have high quality panfish populations as well as implementing Walleye stocking to try and increase panfish size structure. The stocking guidelines section of the plan also address the need to consider existing fish communities when making stocking decisions.

Comment: Increase focus on youth to recruit a new generation of anglers that care for the resources.

> **Fisheries Division Response:** The recruit of new anglers is included in this plan and is specifically addressed in the goal related to providing diverse opportunities for Walleye fishing and also the communications and outreach components of the plan. Fisheries Division believes that if barriers to accessibility are reduced and outreach on Walleye fishing opportunities are expanded that new anglers will have more opportunities to become engaged and be recruited to fishing.

Comment: Question about the Consent decree and confusion over timelines for inland versus Great Lakes decrees.

> **Fisheries Division Response:** Comment was sent and responded to by the Division's Tribal Coordination Unit.

Comment: Interested in more inland walleye fishing opportunities in the SLHMU because Saginaw Bay is typically not safe for ice fishing, especially with young kids.

> **Fisheries Division Response:** Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Maintain robust predator populations to reduce potential impacts of AIS (e.g., Asian carp species).

> **Fisheries Division Response:** Many aspects of the plan indicate that maintaining and enhancing Walleye populations is a top priority. The plan also speaks to the influence of aquatic invasive species (AIS) in lakes managed for Walleye. It is important to note that while predators can play a role in suppressing certain AIS it is not expected to be effective for controlling invasive or Asian carp species. For example, predation alone could not reduce an established population of bighead or silver carp because Walleye predation would not be able to increase the mortality rate high enough (to ~80% mortality annually) to have long-term suppression effects for those populations. The critical aspect for addressing invasive carp concerns is implementing effective prevention strategies.

Comment: Provide more information for anglers to determine which lakes are managed for Walleye by county. Similar to how some waters are designated as "Trout Waters".

> **Fisheries Division Response:** Fisheries Division agrees with this recommendation and the suggestion is addressed primarily in goal 3 of the plan. There are several strategies embedded within goal 3 that are meant to increase the amount of information available to anglers to promote Michigan's Walleye fisheries (in particular see strategy 3.5).

Comment: Invest in creel surveys and other assessments to evaluate stocking events.

> **Fisheries Division Response:** Fisheries Division implements creel surveys on some inland lakes and would like to conduct more of these surveys. Unfortunately, there are resource limitations that prevent the division from increasing the number of creel surveys conducted annually on inland waters. This limitation highlights the importance of goal 3 that addresses the need for maintaining and enhancing relationships and communications with anglers.

Comment: General comments regarding concerns on the data and methods used to justify the draft goals and objectives for the plan. Additionally, concerns were expressed regarding the process that Fisheries Division implemented to draft the plan.

> **Fisheries Division Response**: Fisheries Division greatly appreciates the time and thought that was put into drafting this response that highlights your concerns related to the draft. Fisheries Division acknowledges the importance of public feedback and external review for this type of management plan and intends to incorporate the comments that align with the intent of the plan.
>
> Fisheries Division provided specific responses to your concerns below, but also wanted to point out that some concerns are overly detailed and do not align with the intent of this statewide plan, which was to provide general guidance for managing Walleye in inland waters at a statewide level. This document was also meant to provide a status of the available data (social and biological) that Fisheries Division has and utilizes in walleye management.
>
> Furthermore, statewide data was not always available, so Fisheries Division was forced to provide recommendations that were based on the professional judgement of our Fisheries Biologists, which incorporates their knowledge of the best available science from published literature and angler reports. It is also important to recognize that Fisheries Division has to consider all fisheries throughout the vast waters of the state and work within our existing capacity. Therefore, Fisheries Division has to consider several trade-offs and often make difficult decisions when work plans are finalized allowing our staff to achieve the diversity of work that is conducted each year to achieve our mission.

<u>Comments Related to Habitat</u>:

Comment: We need to stop dumping pollutants such as PFOS etc. into our rivers, lakes and streams. These fish will never take off if the water itself is killing them. How do we initiate a significant clean-up effort to ensure our Michigan waters are clean, safe, and healthy moving forward?

> **Fisheries Division Response:** Fisheries Division agrees that water quality is an important element of managing our statewide fish populations. The division supports efforts to ensure that Michigan's waters are clean, safe, and healthy for the aquatic organisms that reside in them as well as for the recreational users.

Fisheries Division does not have regulatory authority on water contamination issues, but actively supports and provides information to the Departments of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) to help those regulatory agencies make informed decisions on water contamination issues, including PFAS and fish consumption advisories. Additionally, Fisheries Division actively participates on the Michigan PFAS Action Response Team (MPART) and the Surface Water Workgroup because water quality is a division priority and important to the health of Michigan's fisheries.

Fisheries Division has taken steps to evaluate the potential impacts of water quality issues on fisheries management actions. For example, there is a division directive to evaluate rearing or stocking fish in areas with elevated PFAS concentrations or more specifically, in areas with "do not eat advisories". This directive has led to the termination of Walleye spring fingerling production in select rearing ponds that have been documented to have PFAS in the water. Fisheries Division will continue to monitor water quality issues and adjust management efforts as appropriate to ensure fish health and appropriately address public health risks with DHHS and EGLE.

Comment: You do not mention habitat improvement in marginal natural reproduction lakes, is this not something feasible?

Fisheries Division Response: Protection, restoration, and enhancement of habitats supporting Walleye populations is the first goal in the plan and therefore identified as a management priority. Fisheries Division identifies several efforts that should be prioritized to achieve this goal and habitat improvement projects, such as increasing connectivity to spawning areas, are included. It is also important to recognize that not all habitat improvement projects in inland lakes are cost-effective or successful at achieving the desired outcomes, and therefore should be discussed with Fisheries Division prior to implementation.

Comment: Expressed interest to have a lake association add gravel to increase spawning habitat to a lake.

Fisheries Division Response: Fisheries Division works with several lake associations throughout the state to address fisheries management issues in inland lakes. Projects to install gravel to increase spawning habitat in inland lakes can be expensive and have been shown to have limited benefits in increased Walleye recruitment. Fisheries Division recommends that lake associations interested in Walleye should contact their local fisheries biologist to discuss options and rule out other factors that may be limiting Walleye populations prior to initiating an expensive habitat project.

Comment: Is any thought given to the effect of lake treatment for milfoil on walleye stocking success? I watched a local lake end up practically weedless after repeated treatments. Fishing suffered. Reduce or stop weed treatments (multiple)

Fisheries Division Response: Fisheries Division has identified habitat as a priority for managing Walleye populations in Michigan's inland lakes. Aquatic vegetation is a critical component of inland lake habitat, and as such, the division works closely with EGLE-Aquatic Nuisance Control program to review and provide feedback on treatment permits for aquatic vegetation. Fisheries Division recommends that 60 to 80% of native vegetation be preserved following treatments and only nonnative species being targeted for removal.

Comment: the USFS Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) program is making leaps in young forest creation, in all three national forests in MI, and there will be lots of future opportunity to improve fisheries habitat on USFS lands with GNA dollars at local level. Check in with your local FRD staff. Also, work with dam owners to help improve operations to benefit walleye populations and support sport fisheries.

Fisheries Division Response: Fisheries Division's Habitat Management Unit is aware of the Good Neighbor Authority (GNA), but thus far to our knowledge that program has been focused on forestry best management practices. The division is aware that there may be additional opportunities through GNA to support projects to enhance aquatic environments on USFS lands and the division we actively seek those opportunities when they become available.

Regarding hydroelectric dams, Fisheries Division works with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) and hydroelectric project owners to recommend operational conditions that protect aquatic resources and recreational opportunities. We work with FERC, the project owner, and EGLE to ensure drawdowns are only approved when necessary and minimized in duration to avoid negative effects.

The division encourages interaction with our staff to address these types of issues, so if there is additional opportunities or information that is relevant to managing Michigan's fisheries, please contact the local fisheries biologists.

Comment: Increase management efforts on lakes that receive a lot of Walleye fishing pressure. These popular lakes deserve having surveys conducted on them more frequently to track changes and make changes accordingly.

Fisheries Division Response: Fisheries Division typically conducts hundreds of surveys in rivers, streams, lakes, and Great Lakes each year. The division has limited resources to conduct these surveys and is responsible for the management of all the diverse fisheries that Michigan has to offer. Therefore, it is not always feasible to survey the same lake on a frequent basis because that would result in some fisheries never being assessed. Several of Michigan's large lakes that receive a lot of fishing pressure did receive survey efforts in recent years. The division will consider this recommendation during the annual work planning process, but again resource limitations hinder the division's ability to conduct more frequent surveys on all the lakes that are popular among our anglers because there are several.

Comments Related to Lake Specific Interests:

Comment: Grand Lake, Presque Isle County needs to be improved, walleye population is too low.

> **Fisheries Division Response:** Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Expressed an interest in having Coldwater Lake in Branch County stocked with Walleye. (multiple comments)

> **Fisheries Division Response:** Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Expressed an interest in having the lower Manistee River stocked with Walleye.

> **Fisheries Division Response:** Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock Lake Lancer near Gladwin, MI.

> **Fisheries Division Response:** Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Interested in catching more walleye in southeast MI instead of having to travel up north to catch this species.

> **Fisheries Division Response:** Fisheries is interested in providing diverse fishing opportunities for Walleye and that includes having Walleye fisheries distributed throughout the state to limit an angler's travel time. This priority is communicated within goal 5 of the plan. It is important to recognize, however, that habitat suitability is a limiting factor for Walleye populations in inland lakes in southern Michigan so it should be expected that fewer inland Walleye fisheries will be available in that geographic region.

Comment: Stock larger fry in Cass Lake. Currently have very low catch rate.

> **Fisheries Division Response:** Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist. Also, Fisheries Division currently has limited capacity to rear and stock fall fingerlings. Therefore, the primary life stage that is stocked continues to be spring fingerlings.

Comment: Angler primarily fishes Leelanau and has been fishing it for over 20 years, also am a licensed guide which I do trips year-round. I have come to find that the walleye population in North Lake Leelanau have highly declined the past 5-6 years. South Lake can be a steady fishery

but all smaller fish. I always thought North Lake should get a planting since it's never been planted (only south lake has).

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock in McClure basin in Marquette County.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock Houghton Lake on an annual basis. (multiple comments)

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock Sawyer Lake in Dickinson County on more frequent basis.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock Deer Lake in Oakland County.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock McLaren Lake because of low catch rates.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: I don't understand why so many walleye are stock in a river (Kalamazoo River) that the DNR advises to not eat the fish out of. If we can't eat the fish stop wasting the sportsman's money and find other places to stock fish. I understand that walleye don't do that great in some of our smaller southern inland lakes because they get to warm in the summer and other ecological issues, but I would really like to see some of these lakes to at least be tried. Miner lake in my opinion would be a good candidate to at least try and stock.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock more walleye in Diamond Lake Cass County. (multiple comments)

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock more walleye in Lake Fenton. (multiple comments)

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock walleye in Lake Esau. (multiple comments)

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock walleye in Lake May in Presque Isle County.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Walleye populations have declined in Murphy Lake in Millington, MI.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock more walleye into the Au Sable River near Cooke Dam. Fishing used to be better in the past. (multiple comments)

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock walleye in Clear Lake in Oxford, MI.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock Gull Lake in Kalamazoo County.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock Big Fish Lake in Marcellus.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock Todd Lake in Osceola County. (multiple comments)

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Interest in stocking Wixom, dependent upon what happens with that waterbody following the dam failure.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock Loon Lake in Oakland County.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Thunder Lake in Schoolcraft County needs additional stocking to enhance the fishery that has been depressed in recent years.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock Alcona Pond.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock Little Glen Lake in Empire.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Increase fishing access at Cass Lake. The boat ramp has unique "open" times that prevents fishing opportunities during early and late times of the day, which are ideal for Walleye fishing.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock Squaw Lake in Marquette County.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock Lake Medora in Keweenaw County.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock Vaugh Lake near Glennie Michigan.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock more waters in southern Michigan. 2 lakes in particular with ideal habitat (both have moving water) and overpopulated with little perch and bluegills are Portage Lake, St Joe County (Kline Resort would be another reason too) and Barton Lake in Kalamazoo County south of Vicksburg. Others would be Austin Lake in Kalamazoo County it is perfect habitat too.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock Murphy and Second Lakes in Southern Lake Michigan Management Unit.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock the Fence River/Michigamme Reservoir in the Upper Peninsula.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock Hamlin Lake.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock Lake Gogebic (multiple comments); fishing has been very poor for most species other than stunted Smallmouth Bass.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock McCollum Lake in Alcona County.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock Lake St. Helen because it is very rare to catch a Walleye, but the northern pike numbers are high.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock Platte Lake in Benzie County. (multiple comments)

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Keep stocking Lake Macatawa.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock Rose Lake in Osceola County.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock Portage Lake near Houghton, MI.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock Milakokia Lake near Gould City area.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock more walleye in Lake Missaukee.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock walleye in Big Twin Lake in Dowagiac.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock Wells Lake in Osceola County.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock Big Platte Lake in Benzie County.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock Green Lake near Interlochen MI.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock Big Whitefish Lake in Montcalm County.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock Silver Lake in Wolverine, MI in Cheboygan County.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock more walleye in Dickinson County and specifically in Lake Antoine.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Keep stocking Coldwater Lake in Isabella County.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock Woodland Lake in Newaygo County.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock Silver Lake, Stoney Lake, and Crystal Lake in Central Lake Michigan Management Unit.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock Muskegon Lake.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock Hardy Dam Pond.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock Payne Lake in Barry County.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Stock Dixon Lake, Big Lake, Big Bear all in Otsego County.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Recommendation to stock Walleye in Round Lake, Laingsburg, MI.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.

Comment: Expressed interest in having more information regarding the stocking strategy and success for Gun Lake. Also expressed an interest in stocking walleye in Gull Lake.

Fisheries Division Response: Comment was sent and responded to by the local Fisheries Biologist.