



# ***Strategic Plan 2023 – 2029***

## **CHARTING THE COURSE**

Michigan Department of Natural Resources  
Fisheries Division's framework for managing  
aquatic resources

**[Michigan.gov/Fishing](https://michigan.gov/Fishing)**

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# Welcome

Michigan's aquatic resources are considered diverse by many anglers, who appreciate their impressive appeal and their role in creating lifelong memories.

In 2017 the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Fisheries Division developed an ambitious five-year strategic plan to guide our actions in protecting and enhancing those world-class resources through 2022. As that time period was coming to a close, we evaluated the effectiveness of that plan, together with our constituents, to determine steps for moving forward.

That evaluation process indicated that this plan, "Charting the Course," had provided the right direction to effectively and efficiently manage Michigan's diverse aquatic resources for current and future generations. As a result, we have spent the past year enhancing that plan to produce actions slated for the next seven years. Challenges, such as climate change and invasive species, will continue to be a focal point for the division to address.

The division's 2023-2029 strategic plan will continue to prioritize our work as we strive to protect, rehabilitate and enhance the state's fish populations and to provide some of the most diverse freshwater fishing opportunities in the world.

A hearty thank you goes out to the numerous individuals and organizations who have invested their time and energy in this plan, as well as the work that follows. We are excited about the next seven years and hope that you are too.

Sincerely,

Jim Dexter, Chief  
DNR Fisheries Division



# Mission

To protect and enhance Michigan's aquatic life and habitats for the benefit of current and future generations.

# Vision

To provide diverse freshwater fishing and recreational opportunities, supported by healthy aquatic environments, which enhance the quality of life in Michigan.

# Values

Integrity • Leadership • Accountability • Inclusion • Diversity

## Michigan Department of Natural Resources

### DNR Mission:

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources is committed to the conservation, protection, management, use and enjoyment of the state's natural and cultural resources for current and future generations.

### DNR Goals:

- Protect natural and cultural resources.
- Ensure sustainable recreation use and enjoyment.
- Enable strong natural resource-based economies.
- Improve and build relationships and partnerships.
- Foster effective business practices and good governance.

# Overview

This strategic plan charts the course for Fisheries Division's programs and activities for the next seven years. The plan identifies priorities that focus our actions and resources to more efficiently and effectively fulfill our mission – to protect and enhance Michigan's aquatic life and habitats for the benefit of current and future generations.

Originally developed in 2012, the Fisheries Division strategic plan was revised with guidance from employees, partners and the public. These groups were surveyed to assess the division's programs and activities, and the results were used to develop the strategic direction outlined in the plan.

Incorporating engagement into the process ensures that our employees and stakeholders are working toward common goals and have a shared vision to provide diverse freshwater fishing and recreational opportunities, supported by healthy aquatic environments, which enhance the quality of life in Michigan. This plan is representative of the work done by Fisheries Division and our partners, without whom our efforts would be less successful.



The revised strategic plan recognizes several challenges that we, as a division, will face over the next seven years. Fish populations and their habitats will encounter increasing stress from the establishment and continued spread of invasive species, disease outbreaks, habitat changes due to landscape development, climate change and competing water uses. In addition, we are likely to experience a reduction in angler recruitment if participation trends observed over the past 10 years continue. Finally, our operations will be affected by a significant turnover in staff due to retirement and a need to address energy efficiencies. The division's revised strategic plan is responsive to these challenges, aims to create efficiencies and takes advantage of new opportunities to address current and emerging issues.

Elements of the 2018-2022 strategic plan are retained in the 2023 – 2029 strategic plan. The 2023-2029 plan outlines five goals for the division that will protect and enhance Michigan's aquatic life and habitats and provide sustainable fishing opportunities today and into the future. Similar to the previous plan, within each goal are a set of objectives and strategies that will direct the work of Fisheries Division. These elements are all equally important. The plan also identifies a list of representative actions that will help us fulfill our mission and vision. These actions will be evaluated each year and will help us measure our success.



Effective implementation of the strategic plan will require incorporating the plan into all aspects of the division's operations. The strategic plan will be used to evaluate the current staffing plan and identify realistic time and resource requirements to accomplish our goals. The strategic plan will also serve as the guiding framework to identify priority actions in annual work plans, develop employee performance objectives and document progress in annual accomplishment reports. Tying the plan directly to these activities will ensure it is being constantly evaluated, so each year we will have a better understanding of what we have accomplished and what we have left to achieve. Successful implementation will also require an awareness about and investment in the plan by all division staff. Connecting employees with the division's strategic plan is therefore essential.

We are excited about this plan and the course it charts for the division as we continue to strive and accomplish our mission now and into the future. This plan will enable us to strategically address natural resource challenges and take advantage of emerging opportunities while providing outstanding customer service. We look forward to working with our partners and others to implement these goals, objectives and strategies. Our collective efforts will benefit the aquatic resources in Michigan and improve the quality of life for all.



## **Goal one: Ensure healthy aquatic ecosystems and sustainable fisheries**

This goal recognizes that healthy lakes and streams and proper management are necessary to support aquatic life, exceptional fishing opportunities and to enhance quality of life.

**Objective one:** Conserve and manage aquatic species and their habitats.

**Strategy one:** Protect and enhance natural reproduction of native and desirable naturalized aquatic species through habitat protection and rehabilitation.

**Strategy two:** Stock fish and other aquatic species as appropriate to achieve sustainable aquatic communities, rehabilitate populations and meet management needs.

**Strategy three:** Develop and adhere to guidance documents for management of aquatic species and habitat.

**Strategy four:** Participate in and influence decisions about habitat protection and rehabilitation through stewardship efforts.

**Strategy five:** Develop and implement adaptive management to respond to natural changes and those caused by human activity.

**Strategy six:** Protect and enhance nongame and rare species.





**Objective two:** Create, maintain and enhance diverse fishing opportunities.

**Strategy one:** Identify areas where fishing access is needed, prioritize locations and work with partners to address these needs.

**Strategy two:** Use fish stocking to create new or enhance existing fishing opportunities.

**Strategy three:** Implement fishing regulations to manage the state's fisheries and create unique fishing opportunities.

**Objective three:** Implement an aquatic invasive species management program.

**Strategy one:** Prevent introductions of new aquatic invasives species.

**Strategy two:** Control the spread of existing aquatic invasive species.

**Strategy three:** Monitor existing aquatic invasive species populations.

**Objective four:** Ensure sustainability of fish populations that support commercial and tribal fishing.

**Strategy one:** Oversee the licensing, regulation and administration of the state-licensed commercial fishery.

**Strategy two:** Ensure implementation of formal and informal fishery management agreements with tribal governments.





## Representative Actions

- Survey fish populations and habitats in the Great Lakes, inland lakes, and streams throughout the state to monitor the status of fish communities and to inform priority actions such as fish stocking, regulation changes, habitat improvements and the presence of invasive species.
- Conduct environmental permit reviews and provide comments and recommended conditions to regulatory agencies to protect the health of fish and aquatic systems.
- Protect and rehabilitate aquatic habitats through prioritization of projects with internal and external partnerships, utilizing any potential funding sources.
- Update the status of species and habitats identified in the Wildlife Action Plan, a partner-developed, strategic framework to cooperatively conserve fish and wildlife habitats, especially those already in decline
- Continue to revise and implement Fisheries Division's Climate Action Plan and incorporate the implications of climate change into management decisions.
- Collaborate with the Quality of Life Invasive Species Program to implement early-detection monitoring, and implement the statewide policy for aquatic invasive species response when high-risk invasive species are detected. Additionally, as deemed necessary, implement the mutual aid agreement for combating aquatic invasive species threats to the Great Lakes – St. Lawrence River Basin.
- Work with tribal partners to develop and implement agreements for fisheries co-management.
- Update current state statute for commercial fishing.
- Maintain and improve fish culture techniques and biosecurity to produce healthy fish needed for stocking targets.
- Implement recommendations from the division's dam evaluation report.



## **Goal two:** Promote effective communication, outreach and education

This goal focuses on the need for and value of strategic communication with a variety of audiences and the importance of educating the public to cultivate future generations of anglers and aquatic resource stewards.



**Objective one:** Improve internal and external communication.

**Strategy one:** Identify and address communication needs and gaps.

**Strategy two:** Maintain an internal communication plan and continue to develop communication resources.

**Objective two:** Increase public awareness of Michigan's diverse fisheries.

**Strategy one:** Promote diverse fishing opportunities statewide by providing targeted and timely information and updates to specific regions, demographics, interest groups and the media.

**Strategy two:** Instill awareness and appreciation of Michigan's fish, fishing heritage and fishing opportunities into the culture, education and consciousness of all Michigan residents.

**Strategy three:** Increase the number of people visiting fisheries related facilities (weirs, hatcheries, etc.).



**Objective three:** Increase participation and interest in fishing among all demographic groups.

**Strategy one:** Identify and address what deters people from fishing or from buying fishing licenses.

**Strategy two:** Work with other DNR divisions to increase fishing license sales.

**Strategy three:** Provide education and outreach through existing and new programs.

## Representative Actions

- Develop compelling content to feature on the DNR website and social media.
- Use current and emerging tools and technology to communicate (e.g., email, social media and video).
- Promote the DNR Hunt Fish app and the use of the digital version of the Michigan Fishing Guide.
- Prioritize engagement and outreach strategies that include diverse stakeholders.
- Support recruitment, retention and reactivation (R3) framework for advancing fishing in Michigan.
- Explore methods used by other states and organizations for engagement with staff and the public.
- Work with producers of outdoor shows and provide content for the DNR YouTube channel to highlight unique fishing opportunities and outreach videos.
- Develop and distribute educational materials about healthy ecosystems, species of greatest conservation need, climate change and stewardship opportunities.

## Goal three: Improve and build strategic resource partnerships

Managing the wealth of aquatic resources available in Michigan can't be done alone. The DNR's Fisheries Division values the partnerships it has developed and continues to develop and recognizes the critical needs they meet to help us accomplish our goals.

**Objective one:** Achieve fisheries management goals through partnerships.



*Photo credit: Stephen Lengnick, USGS volunteer*



**Strategy one:** Assume leadership roles and fully participate in fisheries management and regulatory processes involving interjurisdictional resources (e.g., Great Lakes, interstate, U.S./Canadian and tribal).

**Strategy two:** Work with partners to optimize fish production, habitat rehabilitation efforts, and decision support tools.

**Strategy three:** Support department efforts to increase angler recruitment, retention and reactivation through external partnerships.

**Objective two:** Promote aquatic resource stewardship and watershed management.

**Strategy one:** Support programs that educate the public about aquatic resources and stewardship.

**Strategy two:** Participate in statewide and regional planning initiatives.

**Strategy three:** Facilitate watershed management by developing diverse partnerships.



## Representative Actions

- Collaborate with partners to access additional funding opportunities to support division priorities.
- Build and strengthen internal relationships with other divisions, departments, and agencies to accomplish our high-priority projects.
- Work with tribal natural resource agencies to cooperatively manage aquatic resources.
- Develop and maintain relationships with local and regional groups (e.g., sport fishing clubs, lake associations, conservation districts, watershed councils, local governments).
- Work with partners to rehabilitate and manage native species (e.g., Arctic grayling, cisco, lake sturgeon, muskellunge, freshwater mussels and walleye).
- Participate in the Great Lakes Fishery Commission's lake and technical committees.
- Engage citizen advisory committees and angler-based organizations for fisheries management recommendations.
- Participate in the Invasive Carp Regional Coordinating Committee.
- Work with partners to secure Great Lakes Restoration Initiative funds and other funding for habitat, fisheries restoration, improved public access and aquatic invasive species projects.

## Goal four: Develop strategically focused assessments and decision support tools.

Fisheries Division values adaptive management and decision-making that is transparent and based on sound science.

**Objective one:** Conduct comprehensive assessments of fish and other aquatic life, habitat and aquatic resource users, and prepare timely reports.

**Strategy one:** Conduct surveys to evaluate/assess fish and aquatic life on the Great Lakes and inland waters.

**Strategy two:** Assess habitat in inland and Great Lakes waters.

**Strategy three:** Assess public opinions, attitudes and participation related to angling and aquatic resources.

**Strategy four:** Summarize and analyze survey data and prepare reports on a timely basis.



**Objective two:** Develop new and improve existing decision support tools to optimize the management of Michigan's fisheries and aquatic resources.

**Strategy one:** Continue development of spatial databases and web-based tools to support fisheries management.

**Strategy two:** Develop, refine and implement stock assessment models and tools for intensively managed species.

**Strategy three:** Assist agency partners to refine the water withdrawal assessment tool.

**Objective three:** Evaluate fisheries management actions.

**Strategy one:** Evaluate the success and cost-effectiveness of select stocking events and species.

**Strategy two:** Evaluate the success and cost-effectiveness of habitat improvement projects.

**Strategy three:** Conduct reviews of key regulatory actions.

## Representative Actions

- Modernize legacy database systems and extraction tools (e.g. Fisheries Information System Hub) for inland and Great Lakes data.
- Evaluate the appropriateness and cost effectiveness of fish stocking efforts by assessing survival, movement and contribution to the fishery.
- Collaborate with partner agencies and organizations on fish and habitat surveys that address shared priorities.
- Collaborate with research institutions to address information needs.
- Implement efficiencies identified in the division's review of fisheries assessments.
- Refine and implement the Resource Inventory Program and use standard protocols to address information needs and guide management actions.
- Refine and implement the Statewide Angler Survey Program to evaluate fishery dynamics and management actions.
- Produce Fisheries reports, Status of the Fishery Resource reports, and peer reviewed publications and make them readily accessible to the public.
- Maintain online information systems (e.g., Aquatic Habitat Viewer, Creel Portal, Fishing Tournament Information System) to allow staff to efficiently access data.
- Use existing acoustic telemetry arrays to assess Great Lakes fish movement, stock delineation and habitat use.
- Use processes such as structured decision making, where appropriate, to incorporate science and stakeholder values into resource management decisions.



## Goal five: Foster efficient division operations

The work of the 2023-2029 strategic plan should be done in the most effective and efficient ways possible. This goal provides direction for ensuring the division uses all of its resources to its fullest capacity.

**Objective one:** Align staff, physical assets and financial resources to accomplish Fisheries Division's strategic plan goals.

**Strategy one:** Regularly review, and revise as necessary, a division staffing plan that addresses current needs and anticipates future changes in staff.

**Strategy two:** Align and coordinate staff resources to maximize effectiveness across basins, units and sections.

**Strategy three:** Seek and incorporate new and emerging technologies and techniques.

**Strategy four:** Enhance and maintain equipment and facilities.

**Strategy five:** Review work plan activities on an annual basis, document accomplishments and identify areas in need of improvement.

**Objective two:** Streamline Fisheries Division programs and decision-making processes.

**Strategy one:** Conduct periodic reviews of all Fisheries Division programs.

**Strategy two:** Continue to support decision-making authority at the lowest appropriate level.



**Objective three:** Hire, train and retain employees within Fisheries Division.

**Strategy one:** Boost and monitor employee morale.

**Strategy two:** Create and maintain desirable work environments.

**Strategy three:** Implement a continual employee recognition program.

**Strategy four:** Encourage professional development and succession planning by providing training opportunities, promoting involvement in professional organizations and facilitating access to relevant information.

## Representative Actions

- Align work plan development with strategic plan goals while facilitating and encouraging coordination among sections, divisions, and departments.
- Promote virtual meetings and remote work options where appropriate.
- Promote diversity, equity, inclusion and justice, and foster an inclusive work environment that attracts a diverse workforce.
- Solicit staff training needs and align opportunities with job specifications/levels.
- Create opportunities for more staff to participate in decision making.
- Use available technology and pursue additional applications and tools for enhanced efficiency.
- Review the division budget to identify cost pooling, savings and redistribution opportunities (e.g., sharing equipment and facilities with other divisions), while continuing to pursue additional funding opportunities.
- Recognize employee accomplishments and service.
- Review and update the Fisheries Division staffing plan.
- Decrease carbon footprint and increase energy efficiency using solar and other technology.