Additional Questions & Answers from April 30 DNR Live: FISH Event

The information below reflects questions and answers the DNR was unable to answer during its April 30 DNR Live: FISH event.

1. **If I have something I want to share with the DNR's Fisheries Division, how can I make my voice heard?**
    - There are several ways you can get in touch with the DNR. One way would be to contact your local DNR office (visit any page at www.michigan.gov/dnr and click on "Contact DNR" at the top of the page to find the office closest to you). Another way would be to send an email to DNR-Fisheries@michigan.gov.

2. **Why does the Lake Erie walleye possession limit change each year?**
    - Michigan's daily creel limit for walleyes on Lake Erie is based on its share of the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for the lake, which is determined each year by the Lake Erie Committee under the guidance of the Great Lakes Fishery Commission. The TAC is generally based on overall abundance of walleyes; the committee establishes quotas for each jurisdiction based on the percentage of habitat for adult walleyes in each jurisdiction's waters of the lake. The daily limit is based on a formula that projects how many walleyes anglers can keep but still remain within the quota.

3. **Are there any plans to create additional spawning areas on the Detroit and St. Clair Rivers?**
    - There are plans to create more spawning areas. In the last few years two spawning areas have been created in the Detroit River, off Belle Isle and Fighting Island. This year, construction will begin on another spawning reef off the Fort Wayne reef. Two additional spawning areas in the Detroit River are proposed in the next few years. One spawning area has been created on the St. Clair River, in the middle channel. Three or possibly four more are proposed for this river system.

4. **Why does the southern part of the Lower Peninsula have so few walleye lakes?**
    - Walleye historically were native to more northern lakes due to lower fish diversity and better spawning habitat. Northern Michigan lakes tend to have rockier substrate with good wave action or are connected to rivers for spawning. Southern Michigan lakes just do not have that rocky substrate for spawning, and there are high populations of bluegill, black crappie and largemouth bass that would eat the small walleye fry. As a result, pretty much all southern Michigan lakes require walleye stocking.

5. **How come the DNR doesn't stock Higgins Lake with walleye?**
    - Because Higgins Lake is a deep, cold lake, it is more suitable for stocking coldwater species like lake trout and rainbow trout. While walleye might survive to some extent, Higgins Lake would probably never be a great walleye lake. Also, we tend not to stock walleye into lakes where we stock trout, as walleye can be heavily predaceous on the stocked trout (which are expensive to rear!).

6. **Why is there a possession limit on smelt, which is considered an invasive species? Wouldn't we want to get rid of this fish?**
    - That is correct that smelt are invasive and that generally invasive species are targeted for removal. However, smelt do provide a considerable food source for top predators such as trout and northern pike. The possession limit for smelt was developed in 2008 in concert and agreement with Michigan's tribal governments due to concern over greatly reduced spawning runs compared with historic levels. Plus, smelt harvest had been previously unregulated, and during periods of high abundance when spring spawning runs were high, this resulted in cases of wanton waste. Therefore, a possession limit was established to delineate an acceptable level of individual take.

7. **Why are there variations from county to county in regards to fishing regulation enforcement? For example, using so-called "bass lures" out of season?**
    - Regulations are the same in all counties if someone is targeting bass out of season. If they are they would be in violation of attempting to take or for taking bass out of season.

8. **If I legally hook a fish in the mouth, and my catch has other hooks or markings that show it has been foul hooked before, can I keep the fish?**
    - Yes, as long as the fish takes the hook in the mouth. Hooking the fish on the side of the mouth would not be a legal take.

9. **If I wanted to catch rusty crayfish for consumption purposes do I need to follow the rules about not possessing and/or transporting them while they are alive?**
    - Rusty crayfish may not be transported live. This regulation is in place to prevent further spread of this invasive species. The DNR recognizes the use of this species for consumptions purposes and is currently evaluating this regulation.

10. **I'm hearing more and more about starry stonewart. What is the DNR doing to prevent its spread?**

- Starry stonewort is an invasive species that is abundant in certain areas of the Lower Peninsula. The State of Michigan recently published an Aquatic Invasive Species Management Plan and you may locate this plan online on the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality's website at www.michigan.gov/deq. Click on "Water" then "Great Lakes then Aquatic Invasive Species." Control efforts (mechanical or chemical removal) for starry stonewort are currently underway in some areas and have historically been led at the local or regional level. The management responsibility (including financing the effort) usually rests with the owner of the infested property.

11. Will there ever be any fish stocking/restoration on the Rouge River in Southeast Michigan?

- Fish are currently stocked each year in Johnson Creek, a headwater tributary of the Rouge River system. Restoration habitat occurs annually on the river with many communities initiating clean-up activities locally.

12. What is the status of Lake Erie's walleye population and trends?

- The best and most complete source for the status of walleye in Lake Erie is the annual report the Walleye Task Group produces. This group is facilitated by the Great Lakes Fishery Commission. The 2012 report can be found online here: http://www.glfc.org/lakecom/lec/WTG_docs/annual_reports/WTG_report_2013.pdf.

13. How did salmon and steelhead get into the Elk River in Northern Michigan? There is a dam in the way of them making it to Lake Michigan.

- The DNR considers the Elk River to be below the dam in Elk Rapids, just upstream of East Grand Traverse Bay. The Elk River there is obviously open to Lake Michigan fish and does get a good steelhead run, mostly because the DNR stocks some there. But for Elk Lake or the Torch River, which are upstream of the dam and therefore inaccessible to Lake Michigan fish, it's a different story. Basically, there is a natural steelhead population in both Elk and Torch lakes. They spawn in the Torch River, Rapid River and the smaller creeks in the system. As far as salmon go, the only salmon in there are Atlantic variety, and that's because the DNR stocks them into Torch Lake on an annual basis.

14. Has a natural muskie population ever been documented to have a negative impact on any other fish species?

- Not that the Department of Natural Resources is aware of. Predator populations are limited to available prey, so the populations tend to adjust through lower reproduction rates due to slower growth.

15. Has the DNR ever considered shutting down rivers in the spring for walleye spawning?

- The current fishing regulations prohibit fishing for walleye between March 15 and the last Saturday in April in the Lower Peninsula and between March 15 and May 15 in the Upper Peninsula. These dates generally encompass when walleyes spawn. Sometimes due to climate fluctuations fishing for walleye during their spawning runs is possible, but this situation is rare.

16. What is the health of the walleye population on Little Bay de Noc like?

- The walleye population in Little Bay de Noc is stable, and maintained through both stocking and natural reproduction. The DNR's Fisheries Division and many stakeholders have developed a comprehensive management strategy for Little Bay de Noc that uses recent data to develop stocking decisions (found here: http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-153-10364_52259_63282-282188--,00.html).

17. Is it legal to fish for steelhead in Shalda Creek on Sleeping Bear National Lakeshore land prior to the trout season opener?

- Yes. Shalda Creek, from the Little Traverse Lake outlet downstream to Lake Michigan, is a Type 4 stream. That means it can be fished year-round. Rainbow trout (steelhead) and salmon may be kept year-round, but brown and brook trout may only be kept during the regular trout season from the last Saturday in April through September 30.

18. What is the DNR doing to educate the public about reasonable harvest and resource protection from violators?

- The Michigan Department of Natural Resources does numerous things to educate the public about resource protection; including press releases, the annual fishing guide, information online, and having conservation officers out in the field talking with the public.

19. What baseline data collection has or will take place in the state's streams, ground water and lakes/wetlands prior to any high volume hydrofracking taking place?

- The DNR's Fisheries Division has several long-term monitoring projects and other, shorter time scale studies in place that will help us evaluate any potential effects from hydraulic fracturing operations. Our lake and stream "status and trends" programs

(funded through the Game and Fish Fund and Federal Aid in Sportfish Restoration programs) provide for standardized sampling across a broad distribution of Michigan's aquatic resources to evaluate changes in fish populations and fish habitats over time. In addition, the DNR's State Wildlife Action Plan and associated studies funded through the State Wildlife Grant program (e.g., "Protecting instream habitat by development and support of a water withdrawal decision-support tool in Michigan") specifically address the potential effects of anthropogenic perturbations to groundwater resources. As a result of these and other dedicated efforts, the DNR is in a good place from which to evaluate the effects of past, present and future energy extraction operations on Michigan's aquatic resources.

20. How do I find fish surveys that have occurred in Michigan?

- The DNR's Fisheries Division puts all of its research, technical and management reports – as well as other types of publications – into its online library. There you can find all sorts of documents related to fisheries management. Here is the direct link to the library: http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-153-10364_52259_19056---,00.html.

21. Would it be possible to establish a new fishing license option for multi-state anglers that's specific to Lake Erie?

- A multi-state fishing license has not been considered but may be possible in the future.

22. Would a slot limit for northern pike on Lake Cadillac allow for bigger fish?

- Possibly. The DNR believes the 24-34 inch protected slot limit is one of the better regulations options for inland lakes, if the desire is to grow numbers of larger pike. Obviously with a regulation like that, the tradeoff is harvest. In public meetings and discussions with Cadillac-area anglers, they've made it pretty clear they prefer the 24-inch minimum size limit. The majority of targeted northern pike fishing on Lake Cadillac is typically done in the winter with tip ups and spears, and those anglers place a high value on being able to harvest fish.

23. Why are fishing opportunities in Port Austin so limited when the area is putting such a large investment into the docks and surrounding area?

- The fishing opportunities in Port Austin are far from limited. People can fish from the breakwater, the gas dock at the mouth of Bird Creek, by boat from inside the harbor, on Lake Huron, and many other locations. Species to target include trout, salmon, walleye,

bass and perch. The DNR's Parks and Recreation Division is currently doing work to renovate the harbor which needs to be done every now and then.

24. Since many other states have had great success with artificial reefs, why can't the DNR do something similar in Saginaw Bay?

- Artificial reefs cost vast amounts of money to build, and must be placed in water deep enough to make sure they aren't a hazard to navigation. Saginaw Bay is very shallow and barges carrying stone can't even leave the commercial navigation channel throughout much of the inner bay. A reef near the channel would become a navigation hazard to ships, sailboats with deep keels, and other vessels.

25. What information is available to support 2013 fish consumption advisories for all Great Lakes species?

- The Michigan Department of Community Health produces the annual fish consumption advisory for the entire state. All of their information can be found at www.michigan.gov/eatsafefish.

26. Would it be possible for walleye plantings to occur in Jackson County?

- Yes, especially if the lake has a low abundance of predators. Currently, the DNR stocks spring fingerlings that typically have limited survival in southern Michigan lakes due to habitat and high predation from other fish. Contact the Plainwell Operation Service Center (269-685-6851) if you have lakes you would like to recommend. The DNR does currently stock the upper Grand River with walleye.

27. Are there are any efforts to incorporate man-made structures at Sterling State Park to assist with fish habitat?

- Last year a Great Lakes Restoration Initiative project was completed in the lagoons of Sterling State Park. This project deepened areas of the lagoon to provide more varied habitat for fish and also reconnected the water to marshes which are important spawning and juvenile fish areas. Both of these changes are beneficial to fish.

28. Are there any plans to plant brown trout and splake in Big Bay de Noc in the future?

- No, there are no plans to stock either brown trout or splake in Big Bay de Noc. There is an approved stocking prescription for walleye. No splake are stocked in Lake Michigan due to low historic returns combined with the expense of rearing. Brown trout are stocked in

nearshore Lake Michigan at the Manistique River, Hallstead's Resort (Delta County), Bark River and Menominee River.

29. Has the DNR planted walleyes in Duck Lake in Fruitland Township ever? Or do you plan to?

- No and no. Duck Lake is small and not suitable for stocking walleye. There can be movement of walleye into Duck Lake from Lake Michigan through a short connecting stream, but it is unlikely that many walleye are ever present in this small lake.

30. I think Lake Erie perch and Lake Huron salmon are being affected by invasive species such as gobies and zebra mussels. What's being done to prevent their spread – especially through bilge water in commercial freighters?

- Perch, salmon and many other fish species have been negatively affected by zebra mussels because this species actively strips nutrients out of the water and competes with other organisms utilizing the lowest part of the food chain. This causes a negative reaction up the food chain to species such as perch and salmon. At this time zebra mussels are so well established within the Great Lakes that there is nothing the DNR can currently do to manage them.
- Round gobies are an invasive species that have more positive effects than negative because they have provided an important food resource for many of the predator fish throughout the Great Lakes.
- To prevent the spread of these invasive species the State of Michigan populates a Prohibited Species List. Species such as round gobies and zebra mussels are listed as Prohibited and may not be possessed live. The Department of Environmental Quality manages ballast water issues and more information regarding the ballast water regulations can be found on the DEQ website at www.michigan.gov/deq.

31. Is spear fishing within a city's limits allowed?

- Michigan fishing regulations allow for spear fishing except on certain waters. Waters where spearing may not occur are listed in the annual Fishing Guide which you may find at www.michigan.gov/fishingguide. However, individual cities have the authority to develop ordinances that may prohibit a certain fishing activity. You should contact the city offices for the area you are interested in spearing.

32. Can a float tube be used on the Pine River in Lake County without obtaining a canoe permit?

- That depends on what access sites are being used. If you are using an access site that is administered by the DNR, then no permit to float is required. Those access sites include Edgett's, Skookum North and South, Silver Creek Campground, and Lincoln Bridge Campground. If you are using an access site that is administered by the U.S. Forest Service, then a permit to float is required. Those sites are further downstream and would include Elm Flats, Dobson Bridge, Peterson Bridge (M37), and Low Bridge.

33. Why do I still need to carry a receipt when I purchase minnows? What about if I net my own minnows?

- Yes, you still need to carry a receipt when you purchase minnows as a precaution and to limit the possible spread of a virus called VHS. You can learn more about this virus and all the rules and regulations regarding this virus at www.michigan.gov/vhs. If you net your own minnows it is strongly suggested you only use them within the waterbody from which they were harvested. If you plan to use these minnows in another waterbody then please review the VHS management areas on the DNR's website. The key points to remember are that: a) bait collected from VHS Free Management Area waters can be used anywhere in the state; b) bait collected from Surveillance Management Area waters can be used in Surveillance and Positive Management Areas, but not in VHS Free Management Area waters; and c) bait collected from Positive Management Area waters can only be used in the Positive Management Area.

34. Why doesn't the DNR plant walleye in Muskellunge Lake?

- Muskellunge Lake was stocked with spring fingerling walleye (average size 1.2 inches) in the early 1990s, which resulted in poor survival. Currently, larger walleye are stocked by the lake association through a Public Waters Stocking permit. These walleye average seven inches in length and have shown better survival. The DNR's Fisheries Division currently does not have a fall fingerling program to stock these larger walleye.

35. What are the stocking plans for walleye and muskellunge on the Cisco Chain in the Upper Peninsula?

- The DNR's Large Lake Survey of the Cisco lake chain in 2002 and 2003 (found online here: http://www.michigan.gov/documents/dnr/CiscoChain-of-Lakes_184269_7.pdf) found good natural reproduction of walleye and muskellunge. As a result, there are no plans for additional stocking of walleye and muskellunge in this lake chain at this time.

36. What are the DNR's plans to combat Eurasian Milfoil?

- Eurasian water milfoil is very abundant in the Lower Peninsula and is dispersing northward into the Upper Peninsula. This invasive plant has rapidly expanded and costs millions of dollars annually to control and manage. Mechanical and chemical removal options exist, but a more recent program has involved using a native insect called the weevil to control the plant. The DNR calls this form of management biological control. More information about what the DNR is doing to combat aquatic invasive species can be found online and within the Aquatic Invasive Species Management Plan.

37. What happened to the smelt season in Michigan? It seems almost non-existent.

- Smelt populations in Michigan have significantly declined over the past decade. The state's waters are continually changing and smelt populations are currently in low abundance.