



## Lake Erie / Lake St. Clair Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee

Established by the Department of Natural Resources to improve and maintain the fishery resources of Lake Erie, Lake St. Clair, and the St. Clair and Detroit Rivers through better communication and partnership.

### **Agenda Belle Isle Nature Zoo 176 Lakeside Drive, Detroit, MI 48207 April 21, 2016**

#### **10:00-10:05 Welcome and introductions (Bob Neely, Chair and Jim Francis, DNR-Fisheries)**

Welcomed new members:

Joel Piatek – Lake St. Clair Guide/Tournament Angler  
Eric Grajewski – Michigan Musky Alliance  
Tim Muir – Lake St. Clair Walleye Association, Alternate  
Jerry Comfort – Lake St. Clair Walleye Association, Alternate  
Dean Botek – Michigan Darkhouse Angling Association

#### **10:05-10:15 Review the agenda and meeting minutes from October 2015 (All)**

- No changes to the agenda
- Notes from the October 2015 meeting were approved
- Review of Action Items:

Bob Neely sent a letter (September 1, 2016) to the MDNR Chief of Parks on behalf of the committee regarding shore fishing at the Selfridge Boating Access Site (BAS) and the need for development of a BAS at Belle Isle. No response or acknowledgement was received from Parks, so a follow up letter was sent (December 1, 2016). In March, Jim Francis followed up with Chief Dexter regarding a lack of response to either letter. Chief Dexter raised the question to Chief Olson, who indicated he never saw the letters. A copy of each letter was provided to Chief Olson at that time. However, to date, a response has still not been received. Jim Francis requested that Chief Dexter make another inquiry of Chief Olson and we are waiting a reply.

Stan Bydlos reported that he attended the January 21, 2016 meeting of the Belle Isle Park Advisory Committee and read Bob's letter during the public comment section. Gerry Comfort also spoke at the public comment session in support of a BAS on Belle Isle.

Committee members had several suggestions, including writing another letter to Chief Olson or writing a resolution to MDNR-Parks and Recreation Division. After a discussion, the committee agreed that Jim Francis would follow up with Chief Dexter and report findings back to Bob Neely. At that time Bob would determine if any further action is necessary.

10:15-10:30 **Review Terms of Reference (TOR) document (All)**

- The TOR were last updated in April 2012, so it was time for a review.
- Currently, members are appointed by the Chair of the Advisory Committee and the Chief of Fisheries Division. There was discussion whether the authority for appointing members could be delegated from the Chief to the Basin Coordinator.  
**Action Item:** Jim Francis would follow up with Chief Dexter to see if he wanted to delegate membership decisions to the Basin Coordinator.
- The current TOR state that the meeting dates will be set the previous October. However, the way we have been operating, the Chair and the Basin Coordinator have been selecting a date in April and October that accommodates the facilities and speakers. There was agreement that this works well, as long as the date is announced well enough in advance. The TOR will be revised to reflect that the meeting notification will be made at least four weeks prior to the meeting date.
- **Action Item:** – Jim and Bob will work on changing the language in the TOR and bring to the October meeting for adoption.

10:30-11:15 **Great Lakes Net Pen Aquaculture – Where is the Process Currently? (Ed Eisch, MDNR-Fisheries)**

- Ed provided the latest update on commercial net pen aquaculture in Michigan.
- There are reports available at <http://www.michigan.gov/aquaculture>.
- Two proposals were submitted to raise rainbow trout – one in Bays de Noc and one in northern Lake Huron.
- There is room for the aquaculture industry to expand in Michigan.
- There are a few issues that currently restrict expansion: no local food (pellet) source, financing is difficult to obtain (most critical impediment), and a lack of infrastructure to process larger quantities of fish.
- A Science Panel was convened to evaluate ecosystem effects, environment effects of fish waste, and fish disease implications on wild stocks.
- Tribal representatives expressed concern about negative impacts to the resources and threats to tribal fisheries. They stated that if the State of Michigan develops the permitting process, then they would want to be part of that process.
- A synthesis report is available that summarizes the QOL (Quality of Life) process, including summarizing the science review panel report, economic reports, and regulatory overview  
[http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdard/Synth-Paper- NetPENS-09Mar2016\\_516439\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdard/Synth-Paper-NetPENS-09Mar2016_516439_7.pdf)
- Based on current law, commercial net pens cannot legally operate in the Great Lakes.
- The QOL agencies are currently recommending against pursuit of net pen aquaculture in the Great Lakes.
- Ed restated that QOL agencies believe there is room for the expansion of aquaculture in Michigan, but not net pen aquaculture in the Great Lakes at this time.

11:15-12:00 **Angling Customers and R3 Efforts (Jody Simoes, MDNR-Marketing and Outreach Division)**

- The number of licensed anglers peaked in 1988 for the US and that was largely due to the Baby Boomers generation. Overall the number of licensed anglers has dropped about 10% since then. Michigan fishing license sales peaked in 1985 and has dropped an alarming 31% since that time.
  - The percentage of people that purchase both fishing and hunting license is decreasing as well.
- 1.1 million Michigan fishing licenses were sold in 2015 – a 1% increase relative to 2014, but about average over the past 5 years
- Customer analytics like month that licenses are sold, location where licenses are purchased, and type of licenses bought, can contribute to understanding customers.
- Many anglers don't buy a license every year - churn rate.
- A survey (mail) of anglers has been ongoing since 2008. The goal is to track who our customers are and what do they do.
  - The most sought after species were panfish (72%), bass (69.7%), walleye (52%), northern pike (43.5%), trout (34.2%), and salmon (31.4%)
- A Great Lakes angler survey was done to collect information about Great Lakes anglers. The survey also included a choice experiment, designed to evaluate management outcome preferences.
- A group has been formed to investigate/implement methods for Recruiting, Retaining, and Reactivating (R3) anglers and hunters. This group is in its infancy and they are still trying to figure out their process for action.

12:00-12:15 **Law Enforcement Division update (Sgt. Kris Kiel, MDNR-Law Enforcement)**

- Kris Kiel represented LED, along with Ray Gardner, the Wayne County conservation officer.
- Kris talked about some of the misconceptions that people have about why decisions are made in regards to regulations. He explained that that he, like many of our officers, tries to educate people about the "why" and he also charged the committee with this same task given that they are well informed.
- Kris was asked if he thought the newer spillway regulation was working. He replied that most anglers are familiar with the regulation and it has really helped to protect northern pike and walleye that utilize that water during the season closure.
- He mentioned that Macomb County is slated to get a third CO.
- Kris was asked about the muskie harvest tag and whether it is difficult to enforce. He responded that it is not difficult at all to enforce. Many muskie anglers target fish in Canadian waters, so the harvest tag is not even a factor. If an angler has a muskie in possession and is fishing in Michigan waters, then the fish is required to be tagged – even if the intentions are to release the fish later.

12:15-1:00 **Lunch—provided by DNR**

1:00-1:45

**Are there really too many muskie in Lake St. Clair? (Todd Wills/Jim Francis, MDNR-Fisheries)**

- Todd and Jim gave the same presentation the previous week at the Michigan Sea Grant workshop for Lake St. Clair.
- Pre-settlement, the ecology of Lake St. Clair favored muskie, pike, and bass. By the 1950s, there was a shift in habitat (turbid water and reduced aquatic plants) that favored walleye over muskie and bass. By the mid-1990s, the water clarity increased again and there was a dramatic increase in the aquatic plant community – favoring bass and muskie over walleye. These changes in the ecology of Lake St. Clair are one of the biggest determining factors to the type of fish community the lake will support.
- Prior to the 1980s, the muskie fishery was considered a harvest fishery. But beginning in the 1980s, some muskie anglers began practicing catch and release. And today there is a very strong catch and release ethic – very little harvest.
- Zebra and quagga mussels have significantly changed the ecology of Lake St. Clair
- A key indicator of a population being over carrying capacity (too many), is a reduction in growth rates. However, muskie growth rates are good and they are still favorable compared to historic growth rates when there were less muskies.
- There have been no apparent disease-related mortalities since 2006.
- Spawning success and survival of young muskies appears to be good.
- In addition to fish and habitat, social values play a role in fisheries management tools like regulations.
- Diet evidence indicates muskie have a diverse diet that is dominated by non-game species.
  - A muskie diet study by a UM graduate student (2014-15) found they were eating primarily white perch, white bass, suckers, and minnows. Yellow perch only made up 3% of the diet.
  - An age-0 muskie diet study in fall 2015 found primarily goby, gizzard shad, and pumpkinseed. Yellow perch only made up 6% of the diet.
- Michigan only manages 1/3 of the lake, the other 2/3 is managed by Ontario.
- Since 1992 – no muskies have been stocked into the St. Clair – Detroit River System – it is all natural reproduction.
- Several new projects have been added that will further inform muskie management – including a muskie recruitment index survey, development of a near shore fishery assessment, collecting additional muskie diet data, and a creel survey on Lake St. Clair in 2016.
- Comments after the presentation:
  - Even though the fishery is largely catch and release, there is still a fair amount of hooking mortality
  - Is there a different population of muskellunge that we can compare to? Maybe one that is also part of the Great Lakes? That might provide us with a better benchmark for comparing age structures.
  - The presentation showed that various forage fish are decreasing, why?

- Todd Wills answered that it is likely due to a change in the food web. A similar trend is observed in Saginaw Bay and it seems to be a regional change.
  - There was a discussion about reintroducing spearing for muskellunge and what kind of process can be pursued to open up this kind of discussion among stakeholders.

1:45-2:00

**Annual LED Update (Larry Desloover, MDNR-Law Enforcement)**

- Shared commercial fishing law enforcement activities from around the state.
  - Tribal netting
  - Illegal nets
- Talked about actions that they participated in to help stop invasive species trade/transport.
  - Red swamp crayfish being sold and used as bait
  - Shipment checks at Detroit Metropolitan Airport
- Training new recruits on how to identify certain invasive species as well as native species

2:00-2:30

**Fisheries Division Update (Jim Francis, MDNR-Fisheries)**

- Reminder that we are now on a two-year cycle for the fishing regulations guide. So the guide you receive this year will be good for next year as well. Any regulation changes that might need to be made will take place through press releases and updates on the electronic version of the guide on our web page. This is a cost saving measure.
- The Bass Tournament Registration requirement began January 1, 2016. Beginning in 2018, there will be mandatory registration for all tournaments, not just bass.
  - There was a suggestion that we could use these contacts to target AIS messaging to tournament participants.
- The combined possession limit for bass, walleye, pike, and flathead catfish was changed (individual possession limits now) as of October 9, 2015. This change was originally proposed by this committee.
- The possession limit was increased from 2 to 5 northern pike on the St. Clair – Detroit River System, as of October 9, 2015. This too was a proposal by this committee.
- The Governor’s budget includes a \$12.2 million appropriation for fish production infrastructure improvements.
  - Major upgrades at the Little Manistee Weir
  - Improvements for steelhead at Thompson State Fish Hatchery
    - Increase production of 200,000 additional steelhead
  - Coolwater production improvements at Thompson State Fish Hatchery
    - Produce an additional 250,000 spring fingerling walleye and 15,000 fall fingerling muskellunge

2:30-3:15

**Committee Member Round Table (All)**

- Mary Bohling brought up the Michigan Sea Grant, Lake Erie Workshop that was later that day.
  - A question was asked about the best way to stay informed about when activities like that workshop are scheduled. One way is to check the MI Sea Grant Website and another is to contact Mary to get on the email distribution list.
- Ralph brought up Gino's Surf and Lounge and wanted to stress that efforts should continue to be made to secure this property for public use.
  - Jim Francis recapped what efforts have been pursued so far.
  - It was recommended that stakeholders contact Mark Hackle to stress their desire to obtain this property
- There were more comments about increasing the amount of access to the SCDRS and all in attendance agreed that more access is important for the area.
  - There was a suggestion to write letter to generate support – potentially to Rep. Candace Miller
- Would it be possible to coincide the perch spearing season with the pike spearing season? What is the history of the perch spearing regulation?
  - The perch spearing regulation has been a part of the management of Lake St. Clair for a long time and it is not clear how that regulation initially came about. It will require further investigation.

3:15-3:30

**Open discussion, summary of meeting, future meeting topics and locations (Bob Neely)**

- Next meeting will be scheduled for early October

Lake Erie / Lake St. Clair Citizens  
Fishery Advisory Committee

Belle Isle Nature Zoo  
April 21, 2016

Attendees:

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| Name             | Affiliation   |
|------------------|---|
| Mary Bohling     | Michigan Sea Grant                                    |
| Dean Botek       | Michigan Darkhouse Angling Association                |
| Bob Burns        | Friends of the Detroit River/Detroit Riverkeeper      |
| Stan Bydlos      | MUCC District 8/Lake St. Clair Walleye Association    |
| Jerry Comfort    | Lake St. Clair Walleye Association                    |
| Frank Corl       | Downriver Bass Association                            |
| Mike Eichbrecht  | Michigan-Sportsment.com/Charter Captain               |
| Matt Einheuser   | Clinton River Watershed Council                       |
| Jim Felgenauer   | Sturgeon For Tomorrow                                 |
| Jim Francis      | MDNR-Fisheries  |
| Bill Furtaw      | MUCC  |
| Eric Grajewski   | Michigan Muskie Alliance                              |
| Ralph Kandt      | Wholesale Bait Dealers                                |
| Rick Kretzschmar | National Professional Anglers Association             |
| Charles Legarski | Muskies Inc Chapter 58                                |
| Tim Muir         | Lake St. Clair Walleye Association                    |
| Bob Neely        | Chair   |
| Joel Piatek      | Charter Captain / Michigan-Ontario Musky Club         |
| Chuck Pistis     | GLFC Advisor  |
| Dave Reault      | Michigan Bass Federation                              |
| Matt Shackelford | DTE Energy  |
| Gerald Sickon    | Michigan Steelhead and Salmon Fishermen's Association |
| Henry Walters    | Michigan Charter Boat Association                     |

Staff:

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|-------------------------|----------------------|
| Larry Desloover         | MDNR-Law Enforcement |
| Ray Gardner             | MDNR-Law Enforcement |
| Cleyo Harris            | MDNR-Fisheries       |
| Jan-Michael Hessenhauer | MDNR-Fisheries       |
| Kris Kiel               | MDNR-Law Enforcement |
| Todd Wills              | MDNR-Fisheries       |

Guests:

|              |                                 |
|--------------|---------------------------------|
| Ed Eisch     | MDNR-Fisheries                  |
| Jody Simoes  | MDNR-Marketing and Outreach     |
| Nick LeMire  | Wholesale Bait Dealers          |
| Eric Diesing | Clinton River Watershed Council |

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