



## 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 March 21, 2018**

**10:00-10:05 Welcome and introductions (Bob Neely, Chair and Jim Francis, DNR)**  
Welcome back to Terry Picard. Introductions, including several guests.

**10:05-10:15 Review the agenda and meeting minutes from September 2017 (All)**

- Share what you learn with your respective organizations
- Add walleye bag limit on Detroit River to the agenda

A summary of the status of action items from the last meeting will be discussed

- Letter to Parks and Recreation Division regarding Selfridge and Belle Isle
  - Selfridge-removed a section of rail this winter to accommodate ice fishing access. Parks working on phase 3 and Fisheries will encourage them to improve the site further if possible.
  - Belle Isle - 147 people attended Management Plan meeting; well attended by groups from this committee. Top 10 votes for long-term goals did not include boat launch (wasn't an option for voting). Ralph notes that historically boat launches on LSC also required lots of support, many people against them, so fight for a launch is nothing new. There were some non-anglers that showed support for boat launch.
  - Jim passed out timeline for feasibility study. Fish Div. ensured that boat launch feasibility study and consideration of recommendations will be included in 10-year plan.

**10:15-10:45 Fisheries Research Update (Jan-Michael Hessenhauer and Andrew Briggs, MDNR-Fisheries)**  
Results of 2017 surveys on Lake St Clair and Lake Erie, and updates on muskie telemetry study, Lake St Clair perch management, and VHS. Annual report now available online.

- Andrew Briggs, the newest staff at the Lake St Clair Fisheries Research Station, introduced himself and provided a brief background

#### Lake Erie

- 2017 August forage fish trawl – highest catch in 2014-2017 time-series. White perch made up more than half of catch. Also, high gizzard shad numbers.
- Walleye gill netting – 2017 total catch slightly below long-term average, yearling catch lowest in last 4 years.
- Lake harvest – Yellow perch sport harvest rate continues to be phenomenal, second highest in time series (since 1986). Perch charter harvest highest since dataset beginning in 1991. Walleye sport and charter harvest on par for last 10 years.

### Lake St. Clair

- Decline in numerous species across years, correlated to increase in water clarity.
- Sturgeon – total of 167 caught in 2017 sampling. Angler harvest has been increasing - 11 sturgeon harvested in 2017.
- Yellow perch – fall trawls showed a measurable year class for 2017. Trap net catch highest on record. Charter catch declining and very low since 2009. 51% of sport angler harvest from 2013 year-class and 27% from 2014. Growth of LSC perch in 1995 was above state average, but since 2008 it has been below. Will use several sampling approaches to try and help look at this.
- Walleye – 2017 trap net catch per net lift almost 2 times long-term average. Charter harvest one of best since 1991. Sport harvest 42% 2015 year-class and 30% 2014 year-class.
- Smallmouth Bass- trap net age-class distribution nice and even. Mortality stable since 2012. Charter effort increasing, CPUE showing an asymptote (charter only US waters). 2017 numbers and size suggests potential for really good year class - 1<sup>st</sup> year since 2006 both benchmarks above average
- Muskie- Will use a turbidity meter this year in addition to secchi, to measure water clarity. Decline in charter CPE since 2012. Effort decrease last 2 years. No asymptote yet.
- Muskie telemetry- lack of movement info hampers developing a population estimate. Help us know where we can re-capture to get valid numbers. Preliminary results indicate a seasonal pattern to movement. Returning to where tagged about a year later in Thames River.
- VHS monitoring has begun for this year.
  
- Terry wondering if biological reason why can't harvest bass in winter.

### **10:45-11:15 Fisheries Division Update (Jim Francis, MDNR-Fisheries)**

- Dead shad first reported this year in the Anchor Bay area on February 20. There were clinical signs of VHSV and testing is underway to confirm this suspicion. So far, we have only seen shad affected. We will continue to monitor the situation to see how it progresses this year.
- Water levels on Lake Erie have trended up the past several years – the projection for 2018 looks similar, or slightly higher than last year.  
<https://www.glerl.noaa.gov/data/dashboard/GLWLD.html>
- The Fisheries Division Strategic Plan (2018-2022) is now available:  
[http://www.michigan.gov/documents/dnr/2018-2022-FisheriesDivision-StrategicPlan-FINAL-WEB\\_613209\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/dnr/2018-2022-FisheriesDivision-StrategicPlan-FINAL-WEB_613209_7.pdf)
- Recovering America's Wildlife Life Act – H.R. 4647. Potential to generate an additional \$30M for resource management in MI.
- Roadmap to Fishing Lake Erie – Marketing tool that will be on the DNR webpage early April.  
[http://www.michigan.gov/documents/dnr/2018LakeErie-FishingRoadmap-FINAL-web\\_618817\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/dnr/2018LakeErie-FishingRoadmap-FINAL-web_618817_7.pdf)
- Cormorants
  - Public Resources Depredation Order 2003
  - Order rescinded by federal court in May 2016
  - Since discontinuation – cormorant numbers have increase 85% from control targets at some index sites

- Representative Bergman introduced H.R. 4429, Cormorant Control Act, in November 2017.
- Governor Snyder announced BlockCarp.org
- Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs)
  - Michigan  
[http://www.michigan.gov/deq/0,4561,7-135-3313\\_3677-422064--,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/deq/0,4561,7-135-3313_3677-422064--,00.html)
  - Ohio  
<http://lakeerie.ohio.gov/LakeEriePlanning/OhioDomesticActionPlan2018.aspx>
  - Ontario <https://www.letstalklakeerie.ca>

**11:15-11:45 Law Enforcement Division Update (Lt. Molnar, MDNR-Fisheries)**

Update on Law Enforcement activities

- Recruit class 22 officers. 3<sup>rd</sup> officer to St. Clair Co. 2 new Monroe, 1 Wayne, 1 Oakland.
- CO Pat Hartsig (St Clair). Ice fishing – good numbers perch (some over limit violations). Eyes on cuts for panfish. Walleye are starting near Port Huron. Some limits, nice size. Stress boating safety. Some coho and Atlantic through ice. Now random salmon and trout, as well as a few Atlantic salmon
- Increased funding from the Governor - increase number of commercial enforcement and investigators.
- Brest Bay – some big walleye being taken already.

**11:45-12:30 Lunch—provided by DNR**

**12:30-1:15 Yellow Perch Bag Limit (All)**

Discussion of reducing the statewide bag limit for yellow perch

Background

- Some anglers are requesting it to be lowered
- The current statewide regulation (50 fish per day) was set in 1979 when Michigan's perch fishery was very robust
- There is a continuing pattern of adding "exceptions" to the statewide regulation to limit yellow perch harvest in certain areas
- Areas with exceptions causing law enforcement issues

What is being considered:

- Changing the daily possession limit from 50 to 25 yellow perch
- Maintaining an exception for Lake Erie because the fishery is co-managed with the other states and Ontario using quotas (currently at 50 fish)

Committee and Guests - Discussion:

- In Lake St Clair, both the numbers of perch and growth are down, but size quality has increased – favor reduction. Charter captains not targeting perch much, some older fish this year.
- There are likely biological reasons for current yellow perch exceptions. Would favor a size limit like the LeCheneaux – 7 inches would be acceptable. In Canada, more people are traveling more to fish – as a result, increased regulations on lakes to preserve the fishery. In favor of reduced bag limit.
- Look at science, take social out of it. If there's a growth problem, probably forage related - too many perch. No big impetus to change.

- Creel numbers showing most people not catching 50 anyway, so reducing has little effect - why change it. Punishing people for good days. Support 7-inch size limit.
- Making things unnecessarily complicated; not a problem now; why look for a problem. Perch in Lake St Clair are not resident. Size limit would lead to release mortality. If reduce bag limit – will lose anglers - people stopped fishing when pike limit went down to 2.
- Fishing mortality doesn't really affect perch populations - more recruitment driven. Understand the current exceptions – they make sense. Anglers willing to accept more complicated regs if benefits the resource. Similar to Quality Deer Management argument – one group should not be dictating how another should behave. Those who want lower limit can stop when they get 25. No need to reduce to protect resource, exceptions okay. Support leaving at 50 statewide.
- Against making rules to make law enforcement easier. Bad message to out of state anglers (may take the reduction as a negative sign). Management needs to be science driven. How will this affect participation – likely lose more anglers. Shouldn't be one size fits all. If it does not make perch fishing better – then don't change.
- How would a regulation change be evaluated?
- Yellow perch is also a key prey species (bass and walleye), reduction could potentially be a proactive move to provide more forage. Not necessarily a bad move. Folks that take 50 all the time are a small subset. Lions share of anglers at tackle shop feel reducing number not a bad thing.
- No lack of forage
- Trend in being proactive rather than reactive in management. Feel social media is a factor in increasing effort. Large number of trailers, no open spaces at Sterling last weekend – likely from word getting out on social media. How long will Lake Erie yellow perch fishery hold if sustained high effort for lots of years.
- Erie more productive than Lake St Clair. Focus on biological carrying capacity.
- People are more mobile and informed by social media. Examples like Lake Simcoe and Rice Lake, where limits in place now because of increased effort. However, down side of lower limit could be reduced participation.
- If Lake Erie was the only 50, would more people go there to fish? (and thus lead to higher harvest)
- Fall perch fishing in the Detroit River is supported by Lake Erie fish – would like to see lower river remain at 50 (as part of the Lake Erie exception).

#### Vote

Leave at 50 (13 votes)

Move to 25 (7 votes)

Consensus on leaving Lake Erie at 50.

1:15-2:00

#### **Lake St. Clair Muskie Spearing (All)**

Input on the Michigan Darkhouse Angling Association's proposal for a 1-week spearing season for muskie on Lake St Clair

#### Proposal

- Open February 1 – February 7 to muskellunge harvest
- Include spearing as method of take
- Trial basis

NRC directed DNR to get input from groups/anglers on this proposal.

### Background

18% of current muskie waters have no spearing (including Huron Erie Corridor).

### Current Lake St Clair muskie regs

- 1 fish per year harvest limit
- 42" Minimum Size Limit
- Harvest registration requirement
- Harvest Season: First Sat. in June to Dec 31 (2018 year-round catch and release)
- Spearing allowed ONLY for yellow perch and northern pike

### Lake St Clair

- Arguably the best muskie fishery in N. America
- Technical Information – no population estimate available
- Heavily fished system - creel survey estimates high catch rates, but very little harvest
- Uncertainties – although there is a good fishery, the population is not unlimited. Data from the fishery pre-1970s showed that the fishery could impact the population (size structure and numbers). Charter catch rates have dropped significantly over the past 5 years and spring electrofishing on the Detroit River mirrors this trend, both metrics raise concerns.

### Process:

- Information was presented at Warmwater Resources Steering Committee,
- An electronic survey went out to anglers who purchased a fishing license in last 12 months
- Citizen Advisory Groups – today
- Coffee and Conversations – April 9

### Committee and Guests - Discussion

- Not a muskie angler, catch for charter and DNR electrofishing is down. Fishery is not as good as it was and we are not sure why – so why change anything right now. Can't put a speared fish back.
- Manage based on biology and recent numbers indicate a declining population; take away the social factors. Sustainability of muskie is low even when protected. If more anglers started taking 1 per year it probably wouldn't be sustainable. LSC has a lot of pressure, borderline sustainable now. The addition of CIR starting this year will only put additional pressure on the resource.
- Just introduced a new year-round catch and release regulation for Lake St Clair – this could negatively impact the population by targeting prime breeding season and targeting prime breeding sized fish. Muskie Inc members have been encouraged to not participate in this new season. More pressure on lake. Spearing would be targeting big fish.
- Need to protect natural resources. Big decline starting with VHS in 2006 - so how did year-round catch and release go through on LSC? Spearing would be trophy size fish, mercury levels in fish that big not edible. Spearing would take the fish before the spawn.
- MI resources belong to everyone and should utilize resource if not damaging. However, DNR shouldn't set a one-week reg for a special interest group – use the current spearing season that begins December 1. Just passed year-round catch and release and don't know impact yet. Want to see if we can monitor that before further changes - timing for spearing is not now. But a limited spearing season would be okay.
- Consumption issue raised again. Taking big females out of the system is a concern. Spearing kills fish versus rod and reel can catch and release.

- Consumption (people eat crap and smoke), shouldn't be an issue. Trophy class fish are taking during summer too. Discriminating against one method of take. Black Lake sturgeon season managed very well. (In response to sustainability - if population is that low then all harvest should be stopped.)
- Could become really popular, lots of out of staters – so even one-week season may kill too many.
- Hard to gauge the size of a fish – this would result in fish under the legal limit getting speared and thrown back – waste of resource
- You can't or shouldn't have a size limit on muskie spearing. Needs to be biologically managed but it is more social - giving muskie to tournaments and guides. "If you fish, you kill fish" – regardless of intent – meaning there is release mortality by hook and line anglers. This one week would be ruled by weather. Allow spearing elsewhere where much fewer fish. Resource doesn't belong to a certain group of people, denying is not biological. Compared to old days, almost no harvest. Thinks CIR is devastating.
- Taking away a form of fishing that has been around a long, long time. Spearing takes place in 3-foot stationary hole, whereas charters run 9 lines and can cover the whole lake.
- If allowed to take and keep one per year, what difference does the method of take matter.
- Uncertainty used as reason for denying. We don't know how many would be taken and we don't know how many we need to sustain population. Adaptive management options. Black Lake – can we do something similar on LSC. Slippery slope to deny harvesting a fish.
- We haven't talked about VHS. Fish floating down river last year. Graphs reflect what the captains are seeing, especially last few years. We don't know what VHS will do and now we have added catch and release.
- Fishery owned by state, need to share the resource. Method of take should not matter.

Vote (on the proposal, as written: 7 days in late Jan./Feb on LSC, with current bag limit and size limit)

Yes: 8

No: 9

\*Concern that there's no cap/quota in current version of proposal (made by several people).

2:00-2:45

### **Committee Member Round Table (All)**

Fishing reports, organization updates or announcements, and issues

- Stan - Fairhaven access, look into possible expansion.
- Tim- Harley Ensign BAS work?? They are working to minimize closures during the habitat project, recognizing busiest launch. Jim says parks will be replacing the ramps this summer. Counterparts in Lake MI and Huron have a Facebook page – should we consider.
- Joel – “legacies” in the room - need to engage more of our younger population in this group and using resources.
- Mary – reef team will be starting Fort Wayne reef construction probably in June. Sea Grant Fishery Workshops, LSC April 12 at Sportsman's Direct.
- Dan – Conservation Summit at Bassmaster Classic, MDNR presentation on tournament reporting and other states were interested.
- The number of walleyes in the system is millions. Would 6 fish limit ever go up? Jim – the walleye bag limit is based on a sliding scale relative to the annual quota allocation. Under the current system, the maximum bag limit is capped at 6 walleye.
- Jim – April 21 baby sturgeon at Outdoor Adventure Center; Belle Isle clean-up same morning.

- Bob – Friends of Detroit River is working on habitat projects at Lake Okonoka, Stony Island, and Celeron Island. Lower Detroit River boat clean-up Trenton Rotary park clean-up islands.

### Walleye on Detroit River

- Ralph – Why is St Clair River and Lake St Clair a 6-fish bag and 13” minimum size limit, whereas Detroit River is a 5-fish bag limit and 15” minimum?
  - History lesson: There was a meeting when there was a walleye crisis in Lake Erie in the early 2000s. Wanted to make the entire St Clair System 15 in and 5 fish. Morning long argument. Compromise, keep LSC/St. Clair and Detroit River went to Lake Erie regs. Current issue with anglers getting their 6 fish in Canada and being challenged by LED. No walleye crisis right now. Detroit as connecting waterway, should be managed same as LSC/St. Clair River.
  - Bob –why is Detroit 5 and Lake Erie 6? Connection between the two. For consistency why not have the same.
  - Jim Francis – Another way to achieve consistency of regulations on the connecting waters is to reduce the bag limit to 5 and increase the minimum size limit to 15 inches – for both the St Clair River and Lake St Clair – bringing in line with the statewide walleye regulations. And a biological argument can be made based on the collapse of the Thames River walleye stock
  - Terry – Lake Erie walleye fell below 20 million, reduce limits. The 2003 year-class big, so raised Lake Erie back up, Detroit river kept at 5 because most fishing in spring/spawners.
  - Jim Felgenauer – bag used to be combined (multiple species)
  - Bruce – recommended no fish (consumption) from LSC in the 1970s due to mercury concerns, perhaps where the 13” came from.
  - Stan – if go back to 6 as in Canada, won’t have issues with LED.
- **Action Item:** DNR staff will do additional research on this topic and bring it back to the fall meeting for discussion.

### 2:45-3:00      **Summary of meeting, future meeting topics and locations (Bob Neely)**

- Fall meeting – preferred timing was the first two weeks of September; before mid-September
- Spring meeting – March is much better. Keep!
- Bob is stepping down as Chair and Frank Corl is the new chair.

Lake Erie / Lake St. Clair Citizens  
Fishery Advisory Committee

Belle Isle Nature Zoo  
March 21, 2018

Attendees:

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Name	Affiliation
John Bacarella	Sportsmen's Direct Inc
Mary Bohling	Michigan Sea Grant
Dan Boileau	Downriver Walleye Federation
Bob Burns	Friends of the Detroit River/Detroit Riverkeeper
Stan Bydlos	Perch Point Conservation Club
Jerry Comfort	Lake St Clair Walleye Association
Frank Corl	Downriver Bass Association
Eric Diesing	Clinton River Watershed Council
Mike Eichbrecht	Charter Captain/Michigan Sportsman.com
Jim Felgenauer	St. Clair-Detroit River Sturgeon for Tomorrow
Jim Francis	MDNR-Fisheries
Eric Grajewski	Michigan Muskie Alliance
Ralph Kandt	Wholesale Bait Dealers
Dan Kimmel	Michigan BASS Nation
Charles Legarski	Lake St Clair Muskies Inc, Chapter 58
Jim Litke	Michigan Darkhouse Angling Association
Tim Muir	Lake St. Clair Walleye Association
Bon Neely	Chair
Joe Piatek	Lake St Clair Guide/Tournament Angler
Terry Picard	Lake St Clair Walleye Association
Dave Reault	The Bass Federation of Michigan
Matt Shackelford	DTE Energy
Gerald Sickon	Michigan Steelhead and Salmon Fishermen's Association
Henry Walters	Michigan Charter Boat Association
Bruce Yinger	Downriver Bass Association
Staff:	
Andrew Briggs	MDNR-Fisheries
Melanie Foose	MDNR-Office of the Great Lakes
CO Pat Hartsig	MDNR-Law Enforcement
Jan Hessenhauer	MDNR-Fisheries
Lt. Joe Molnar	MDNR-Law Enforcement
Jen Tewkesbury	MDNR-Office of the Great Lakes
Sara Thomas	MDNR-Fisheries
Guests:	
Spencer Berman	Michigan Ontario Muskie Club/Charter
Jason Quintano	Michigan Ontario Muskie Club/Charter
Justin Selden	Michigan State University Extension
Chuck Smith	Michigan Ontario Muskie Club

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