



Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee

Established by the Department of Natural Resources to improve and maintain fishery resources of Lake Huron through better communication and partnership.

Approved Minutes

Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee Meeting Wednesday May 8, 2019 Jay's Sporting Goods, Inc. in Clare 10:00 am – 3:00 pm

Attendees:

Simone Valle de Souza, Ralph Zimmermann, Jerry Brown, Bob Reider, Tim Wieczorkowski, Dave Fielder, Frank Krist, Randy Claramunt, Rick Kretzschmar, Dennis Gulau, Ed Retherford, Tom Hamilton, Judy Ogden, Julie Shaffo, Tom Frontjes, Lindsey Henski, Todd Grischke, Brad MacNeill, Tess Nelkie, Alan Seiferlein, Ken Merckel, Capt. Terry Walsh, Gary Decker, Tod Williams, Randy Terrian, Fred Sterns, Lee Martin, Todd Wills, Ed Eisch, Dave Borgeson, Glen Buehner, Scott Lutz, Jan Hamilton, Brandon Schroeder, Nick Atkin, Lt Michael Feagan, Bob Kettner, Leo Mrozinski, Jerry Serafin, Bonnie McMurry, Cameron McMurry, Dana Serafin, Mike Feagan.

Welcome and Introductions:

Frank Krist called the meeting to order. Introductions were made. Frank thanked Scott Lutz, Manager of Jay's Sporting Goods, for setting up the room and accommodating us. Frank read a card of thanks from Jim Baker, retired Southern Lake Huron Unit Manager, to the committee. Jim is currently busy enjoying the outdoor natural resources, but he greatly enjoyed working with the Advisory Committee and the public.

Discussion of the benefits of stocking private or State raised brown trout in Thunder Bay:

The Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee's Subcommittee is working on the Trout and Salmon Management Plan. When the Subcommittee discussed brown trout, it was decided that since we have a direction already in place, brown trout didn't need to be discussed further. Randy has reviewed the plan. The lake has changed, so Randy asked the question, 'do we need to have a discussion on brown trout management?'

Brown Trout History in Lake Huron:

- Substantial variation and decrease in post-stocking survival
- Many factors attributing to poor and variable survival
- Extensive experiments and stocking evaluations have been conducted
- The contribution of stocked fish to the fishery was concluded as not worth the investment (this is widely accepted)
- However, local fishery issues led to approval of a private fish stocking permit for 1,000-2,000 brown trout per year in Alpena
- There are issues and concerns related to private stocking of the Great Lakes

Fisheries approves many private stocking permits per year, however, private stocking of the Great Lakes is not promoted.

Brown trout stocking surveys were conducted in 2009, 2010 and 2011. The percent return by year class

averaged over the six ports stocked were: 2009 1.440%, 2010 1.690% and 2011 0.559%, see table below.

Private brown trout stockings have taken place in Alpena since 2016. Tim Wieczorkowski applied for the private permits and obtained the fish from Jerry Kahn at Cedar Brook Trout Farm near Harrisville. Before requesting the stocking permit, Tim spoke with the LaFarge plant manager about employees fishing in the warmwater discharge at the facility. In the past, the brown trout concentrated near the discharge when the lake water temperature was cold. Company policy has been updated and employees can no longer fish on company time. With that information, Tim applied and stocked Lake Huron. He transfers the fish from the delivery truck to a flat barge equipped with oxygen and stocks the brown trout offshore of Partridge Point in 15-25 feet of water. Tim releases 2-3 fish at a time over a mile in distance while the boat remains in motion. The stocked brown trout have been mostly three-year-old fish averaging 12 to 14 inches in length but also 230 four-year-old brown trout 14 to 18 inches were stocked in 2018.

Tim and Ed Retherford both indicated that they have been documenting good catches of brown trout in Thunder Bay and the River. Randy Claramunt received several photos that would indicate a possible 5% return. They are healthy looking fish, indicating the stocking seems to be working. So where are we going with this?

Randy shared some data from a Great Lakes fish stocking database. Ontario issues private stocking permits also. Private stockings and coordination with Ontario create challenges for management.

Characterization of the Alpena Private Stocking:

- Composed of mostly 3-year-old fish stocked in the fall.
- The Alpena brown trout are a larger size in the 13+ inch range while the DNR stocks mostly spring yearlings in the 7 to 8 inch range.
- Stocking method in Alpena is offshore with vessels while most DNR stocked fish are stocked from land.
- Returns have been measured by local anglers, fishing tournaments and the creel survey with 50 estimated harvested in 2017 and 92 in 2018.
- Stocked fish are marked without coordination from the DNR
- This is the only measure of brown trout performance in Lake Huron

Questions for the Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee:

- Is there interest from the Thunder Bay area in having the DNR providing a small scale barometer stocking of browns in Alpena?
- If so, is the community representatives willing to continue coordinate with the DNR and have community representatives stock the fish offshore?
- If the community is supportive, then:
 - Is the Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee willing to support a barometer stocking of brown trout?
 - If so, at what level?
- Why are we bringing this proposal to the Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee now?
 - Changing factors in Lake Huron, for example, changes in the food web, cormorant numbers, stocking methods, etc. may have an impact on survival.

Lake Huron Basin Coordinator's Proposal:

- The Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee is being asked if it supports discussion of the brown trout proposal at the Subcommittee including the following items:
 - Consider two sites that can serve as a barometer for brown trout in Lake Huron
 - The brown trout strain to be used is the Sturgeon River/Michigan
 - Alpena/Thunder Bay could be one potential site if agreed to by the community in lieu of the private stocking

- Stocking level of 10,000 per site per year. Looking at the return rate from the last study, see table directly below, harbor sites with less predation have the best return including Lexington, Port Sanilac and Rogers City

Table 1. Estimated harvest, number stocked, and percent return by cohort, brown trout stocked as fall fingerlings, 2009-2011, and harvested during 2009-2012. Harvest estimates for all but Lexington and Port Sanilac (where creel surveys included winter) have been expanded by a factor of .26 to account for winter harvest.

| | Alpena/Rock- port/Presque Isle/Harrisville | Tawas/ Au Ggres/ Oscoda | Harbor Beach/ Pt.Austin | Rogers City | Lexington | Port Sanilac | Total |
|--|--|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Total numbers returned by cohort (yr stocked) | | | | | | | |
| 2009 | 316 | 69 | 115 | 226 | 312 | 197 | 1,236 |
| 2010 | 90 | 150 | 407 | 151 | 356 | 286 | 1,440 |
| 2011 | 37 | 56 | 217 | 27 | 113 | 62 | 513 |
| Number stocked by cohort | | | | | | | |
| 2009 | 19,815 | 21,066 | 20,040 | 5,233 | 9,864 | 9,824 | 85,842 |
| 2010 | 19,826 | 19,883 | 20,157 | 5,300 | 10,000 | 10,084 | 85,250 |
| 2011 | 19,160 | 29,027 | 19,160 | 5,197 | 9,580 | 9,580 | 91,704 |
| Percent return by cohort | | | | | | | <u>Average:</u> |
| 2009 | 1.595 | 0.329 | 0.576 | 4.323 | 3.168 | 2.005 | 1.440 |
| 2010 | 0.456 | 0.755 | 2.017 | 2.858 | 3.565 | 2.832 | 1.690 |
| 2011 | 0.195 | 0.193 | 1.134 | 0.512 | 1.183 | 0.649 | 0.559 |

- If agreement is reached by the Subcommittee, then it would have to be approved by the full Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee

It was mentioned at the meeting that brown trout were still being stocked in the Black River adjacent to the St. Clair River a short distance from Lake Huron. Ed Eisch clarified that brown trout stocking at this site has been terminated because of poor survival. Despite there being more forage fish in the St Clair River area for a predation buffer in comparison to Lake Huron, survival was still poor from this plant.

Frank Krist asked the advisors, 'Do we want to discuss this brown trout proposal with the Subcommittee?' The the members supported sending the brown trout proposal to the Subcommittee. The next step will be for the Subcommittee to provide a recommendation that will be shared with the full Committee at a future meeting and a recommendation to the DNR will be made at that meeting.

Update on the Cormorant/Free Swimming Fish Conflict, Randy Claramunt and Dave Fielder, DNR Great Lakes Research Biologist:

Need: An objective, robust tool(s) that reasonably predicts local cormorant abundance and population size.

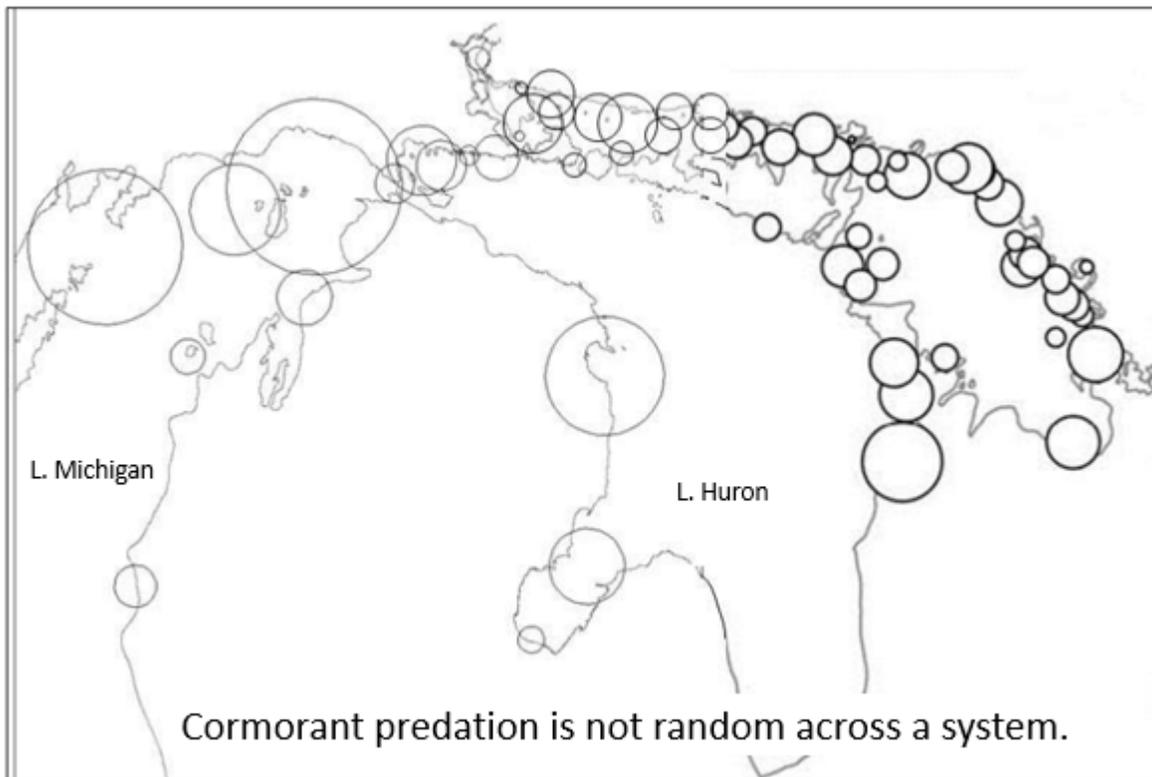
Desirable factors incorporated into a cormorant management protocol:

- Balances cormorant presence with reasonable fish management goals
- Incorporates more recent work

- Informs the policy discussion and process
- Includes risk assessment to both fish and cormorant populations at local and widespread levels

Cormorant facts:

- Cormorant diets are diverse
- There are a few dominant prey species the cormorants feed on
- The cormorant diets vary with prey availability and often changes by season
- The diets are dominated by small fish, age 1 in the spring and age 0 in the fall
- Distribution of fish is not random within a system. Certain locations and habitats produce more fish.
- Cormorant consumption is also concentrated in localized areas, see map of feeding areas below.



Modeling considerations for managing cormorants:

- Diets vary within and among years, reflective of fish community changes
- With changes in prey species composition, cormorant feeding habits also change switching to the more available food sources
- Cormorant impacts are not uniformly or randomly distributed but mostly impact several local areas as shown on the map above.

Three Models are being Considered:

1. **Cormorant Yield Model –**

Fish yield uses components of Ryder's 1965 MEI Index. The fish yield is calculated from the habitat characteristics including nutrients, temperature, depth, volume and area. This model is simple and intuitive, can be used in small and large systems, it is broadly applicable, all models have uncertainty, some systems will lack the necessary data for evaluation.

This model then balances the fishery yield per area against cormorant consumption over the

same area.

2. **Predator-Prey Biomass Ratio Index Model** – Estimate prey demand of existing cormorant colonies. Apply Cormorant Yield Model for each colony. The amount of free-swimming fish saved can be calculated if a certain amount of cormorant management is applied. Determine where management implementation can be most impactful, either at the local level or more broadly.
3. **Existing cormorant flyway population model – PTL**

Conclusion:

- Cormorant Yield Models warrant investigation
 - Biomass is a common factor
 - Can be used over smaller or larger areas
 - Responds to system changes
- May fit together with existing frameworks for fish and birds
- Standardized tool to better inform policy on several systems

Study Proposal: The State applied for a grant to study the Yield Model. The questions to be answered include, what does this model really look like and what are the risks if we apply it? David Fielder proposed getting a graduate student at MSU to assemble this information.

Some cormorant control permits are being issued by the US Fish and Wildlife Service to reduce cormorants, but unfortunately this does not include protecting free swimming fish. Cormorant permits can be sought to protect endangered species and aquaculture production. The Fisheries Division has applied for permits under this rule at 4 locations. Those applications are still pending so there was no assistance this spring when attempting to harass cormorants at stocking sites where the birds were numerous.

A discussion followed the presentation. It appears that it could take possibly 3 years to develop and complete the work to protect free swimming fish. Before any changes could be implemented, the new protocol would have to be approved by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Much frustration was expressed by the participants that progress was much too slow, and more emphasis needs to be directed at congressional representatives stressing that this pace of progress is unacceptable.

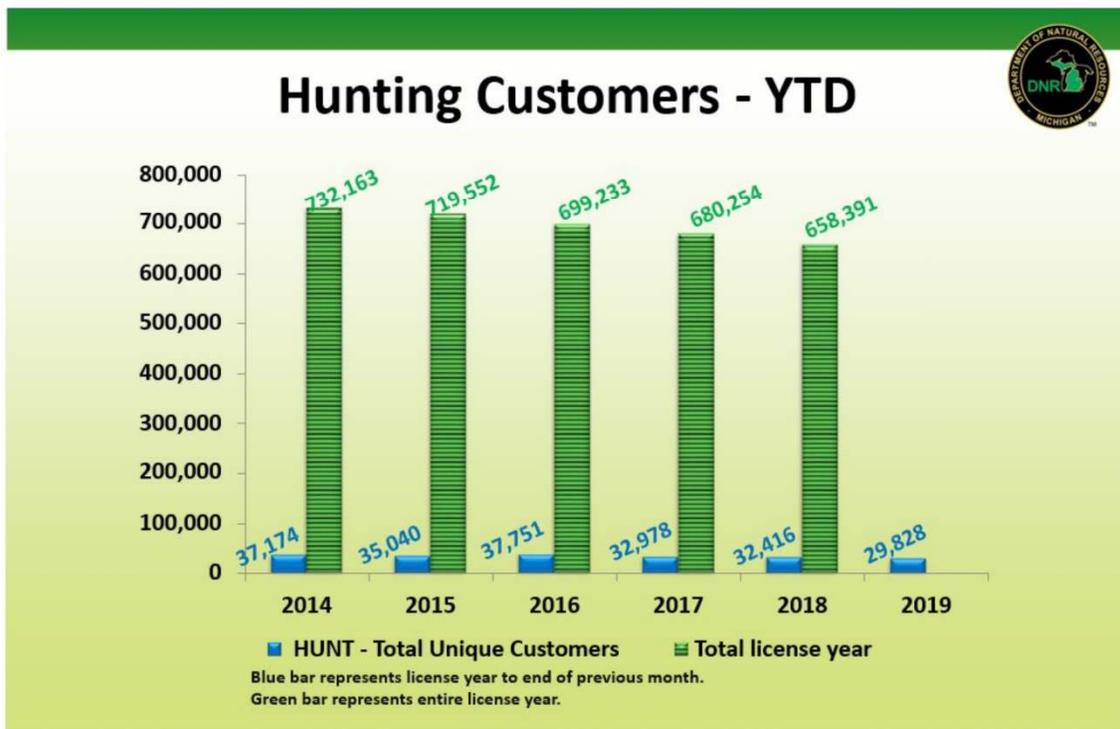
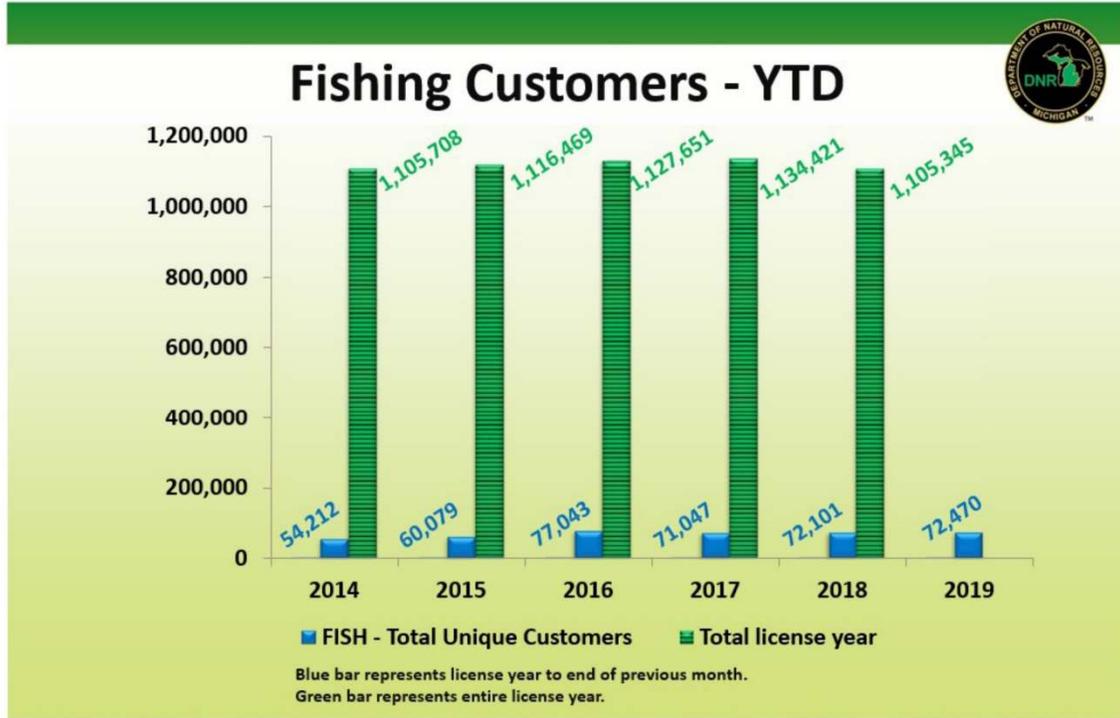
Brainstorming session on the funding status in the Fisheries Division, all Participants:

Frank started the discussion by reviewing the current user fee structure that is used to fund the Fisheries and Wildlife Divisions. There have been no changes in the Fisheries fee structure since 2014. Because the number of hunters has been declining each year and the number of anglers is nearly stable, the amount of funds available is actually declining each year because of less income and increased costs, see charts below. Each year after a fee increase, instead of addressing new fishery issues that need attention, often the focus is on what in the current budget must be eliminated to deal with the declining value of the funds. As employees are retiring, some positions are not being replaced and this is impacting field work and other services. The lack of funds has resulted in needed infrastructure improvements being delayed so the existing funds can be used to maintain critical staff positions.

Each year without regular fee increases to keep up with rising costs and declines in license sales, reduction in services must be a constant consideration in the budget. For example, this spring an experiment has begun stocking Coho Salmon stocking in Lake Huron to determine how the food web changes impact survival with the hope of producing a quality fishery. Over the last several years, some Coho Salmon have been caught each year in Lake Huron but because funds are not available these newly stocked fish were not marked so these planted fish could not be distinguish from the other Coho Salmon. In addition, marking the fish would show which stocking sites are contributing most to the lakewide fishery.

Fishing and Hunting Customers 2014-2019

Presented March 2019



It is apparent that the current system of periodic hunting and fishing fee increases is not adequate, and a discussion should begin on a new sustainable funding approach. Several states have implemented innovative methods of conservation funding and the following were briefly mentioned as a starting point

of the discussion:

Conservation funding methods used by other states

- A portion of state sales tax dedicated to conservation funding
- The sales tax on sporting goods and outdoor equipment dedicated to conservation funding
- A portion of lottery funds
- User fees linked to consumer price indexes
- Developing a Trust Fund dedicated to conservation funding

These options and other pertinent information can be found at the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation website, <http://congressionalsportsmen.org/policies/state>. Frank stressed that for such a change in funding to be implemented this effort must be driven by stakeholders.

The participants joined the discussion.

Did combining the fishing license and trout stamp make any difference in revenue? Todd Grischke responded, there has been no noticeable change in revenue after the first year. Because the current system is based on user pay, declining users in the current fee categories and increasing cost trajectories, puts the Division way past the point to meet users demands.

Bill Moritz, previous Deputy Director, has been working with a consortium of people, to try to redefine how we fund natural resources. This has to be constituent supported. Sportspeople support Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson Acts which provide federal funding to the states collected on sales taxes of hunting and fishing equipment. Possibly, the Department could create another dedicated fund possibly based on an outdoor equipment tax.

Todd Grischke provided an overview of the ***Recovering America's Wildlife Act***. The act, if passed, could provide Michigan with approximately 30 million dollars annually for the conservation of vulnerable fish and wildlife. The following link to The National Wildlife Federation provides many details about the Act and how to support it, <https://www.nwf.org/Our-Work/Wildlife-Conservation/Policy/Recovering-Americas-Wildlife-Act>.

It was mentioned that other users that currently do not contribute directly to natural resource management like kayakers, birders and hikers should also chip in. It was asked what amount of dollars does the Division need. Todd Grischke replied that is what Fisheries Division is trying to identify. In the past two years, Fisheries has reviewed the staffing plan and the trajectory of costs. Currently, Fisheries Division will exceed its budget in one year. Fisheries Division has reduced staffing numbers to the bare minimum to get the job done. There has been a decrease from 190+ positions to 165.

Frank mentioned that when the public is approach with funding issues the first question asked is what is not getting done under the current budget and specifically what could be accomplished if funding was increased. Todd agreed to provide at another Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee meeting this year an overview of the current budget, what is getting done, what is not getting done and what could be accomplished if the budget is increased. It was stressed that with limited funds being available, many of the needed updates to the Division's infrastructure has not been undertaken and this is beginning to impact work in the field.

Southern Lake Huron Whitefish experimental fishery follow-up to determine if a license or permit will be issued for 2019:

At the previous meeting the majority of the Committee members recommended extending the research permit for one more year. At the Port Sanilac meeting on April 9th, between community representatives, Randy Claramunt and Dana Serafin, it was asked if the research permit should be moved to an actual permit? Randy Claramunt stated that there's more work ahead with the research permit, but we shouldn't

wait the full year to begin the process of getting the license moving forward.

The status of the long-delayed Sea Lamprey treatment in the Mississagi and Garden Rivers, is progress being made: Three advisors from the Great Lakes Fishery Commission are on the Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee including Ken Merckel, Judy Ogden and Tod Williams. Ken Merckel brought this subject up at a Great Lakes Fishery Commission luncheon. He kept hearing, 'we are working on it, we are working on it, we are working on it'. He called John Dettmers, Director of Fisheries Management, last week and Judy Ogden spoke with Dale Burkett, Sea Lamprey Program Manager, both from the Great Lakes Fishery Commission. They provided good news and bad news. The Mississagi River will be treated this year. The Garden River will not be treated but if the First Nations representatives from the Garden River area see that the Mississagi River sea lamprey treatment goes well then possibly they may approve treating the Garden River during 2020. The Garden River sea lamprey treatment has been overdue since 2016 so this is major concern because there could be an explosion soon of adult lamprey in Lake Huron.

Law Enforcement and Manager Updates:

Conservation Officer Nick Akin, LED, DNR – There are 24 new Probationary Conservation Officers. We have a new commercial patrol vessel this year, it probably will be assigned to the Upper Peninsula Great Lakes Enforcement Unit. There will be sonar training in June. One more Goose Island known abandoned trap net has been removed. That makes 3 of 4 nets removed to date. Three officers will be attending training with the FBI on boarding procedures.

Brandon Schroeder, Michigan Sea Grant – Four successful Sea Grant workshops have been concluded this spring. There were great topics and great conversations. Nice to take many of the conversations discussed at this Committee to the communities along Lake Huron.

Scott Lutz, Manager, Jay's Sporting Goods – Hunting sales are down; however, ice fishing season was great. Due to the spring weather arriving, Jay's is very busy as usual. Weather is always a major factor in getting people outdoors.

Ed Eisch, Fish Production Manager, DNR – It's the time of year we stock fish. Everything is going well. All hatcheries are fully engaged in stocking with no inventory issues. Spring egg takes are complete except for musky. We collected 32 million walleye eggs. Thompson Hatchery has Little Bay de Noc walleye eggs. Steelhead egg take went well with 4.47 million eggs at Wolf Lake are starting to hatch. Atlantic salmon reared in Harrietta have hatched, they are up and feeding, and showing good growth so far.

Todd Wills, Research Manager, DNR – Grant funding renewal paperwork has been completed. The research vessel Tanner is launched and conducting surveys. We are running a little behind due to weather. We have received approval to fill a vacant Fisheries Technician position. Captains have been in touch with harbor masters and Coast Guard regarding netting schedules.

Dr. Simone Valle de Souza, MSU Department of Agriculture – Randy and I are working on a project that Randy was successful in obtaining funds. We are looking to get a grad student to evaluate the value of Atlantic salmon, estimate how far Atlantic salmon anglers will travel, determine how much Atlantic Salmon anglers spend during a trip, and convert all of this to an economic value.

Dave Fielder, Research Biologist, DNR – Looking ahead to August meeting. The walleye, yellow perch and forage status will be discussed along with determining if there is a need to change the walleye regulations in Saginaw Bay for 2020.

Todd Grischke, Assistant Chief, DNR – We have a new Director and new regime. There are changes across the board. Jim Bakers position will be filled. The Artic Grayling initiative has taken off. Staff are

in Alaska right now collecting eggs. Those eggs will be the start of our brood stock. Seven hundred thousand dollars in outside funds have been raised in the past 1.5 years and there are 45 partners in the State. Ultraviolet lights are getting installed at Oden. Four streams are being considered for habitat analysis; Manistee, Boardman, Maple, and Jordan.

Dave Borgeson, Northern Lake Huron Management Unit Supervisor, DNR –We had a technician retire. That position will not be filled. We are dealing firsthand with the reality of what the numbers of our staff can actually accomplish. We will not be operating our walleye ponds in 2019 largely because Southern Lake Huron ponds can cover demands. Regarding surveys, we will be doing less since we are down a technician and have no summer staff. Cloverland Electric Cooperative made repairs to the Lake Superior State University Hatchery turbine basin and now we are set to move ahead with putting Atlantic salmon in it. We will be conducting a discretionary survey on Grand Lake.

Lee Martin, Creel Clerk, DNR – Anglers are harvesting lake trout limits. Pier fishing in Oscoda was better this year than the past 3 years. There has been an up-tick in brown trout harvest at Alpena, and I am seeing quite a few Atlantic salmon. River fisheries are pretty slow currently. Suckers came in thick, but they are starting to move out. Walleye opener was good at both ports. In Alpena, anglers are fishing at the mouth. Along the Au Sable River pier, fishermen are shoulder to shoulder.

Julie Shafto, Creel Clerk, DNR – Fishing this spring has been slow due to the windy cold weather. A couple lake trout have been harvested. Ocqueoc River has seen some steelhead caught.

Randy Claramunt, Lake Huron Basin Coordinator, DNR – The Southern Lake Huron Unit Manager position was approved to fill. Joe Leonardi, Southern Lake Huron Management Unit Biologist will be retiring. We will be entering crisis mode and doing less with less. We are looking at the end of June to potentially conduct interviews for Jim's vacant position and hoping to fill the position by July. Walleye rearing in Southern Lake Huron Management Unit is moving ahead as planned. In northern Lake Huron management unit MH-1, from Drummond Island to Rogers City, the 3 lake trout daily bag limit will be reduced to a 2 fish daily bag limit for 2020 because of the quota being exceeded. The 2020 Great Lakes Consent Decree negotiations will probably begin this year.

Adjourn: 2:55 p.m.

Next meetings

Tuesday August 6, 2019

Tuesday October 22, 2019

All meetings will be held at Jay's Sporting Goods in Clare