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
Tuesday October 22, 2019
Jay's Sporting Goods, Inc. in Clare
10:00 am – 3:00 pm

Attendees: Simone Valle de Souza, Dave Fielder, Frank Krist, Randy Claramunt, Rick Kretzschmar, Ed Retherford, Judy Ogden, Julie Shafto, Dr. Rodney Hanley, Dr. Lynn Gillette, Tom Frontjes, Lindsey Henski, Tess Nelkie, Terry Walsh, Gary Decker, Randy Terrian, Fred Sterns, Todd Wills, Ed Eisch, Glen Buehner, Scott Lutz, Nick Atkin, Leo Mrozinski, Cameron McMurry, Dana Serafin, Ken McCanham, Kynzie House, Jan VanAmberg, Seth Herbst, Gary Whelan, Mark Lentz, Craig Milkowski, Bryan Darland, Matt Zink, Ken Merckel, Tom Heritier, Ji He, Brandon Schroeder, Jeff Jolley, Ralph Hamilton, John Moore, Blaise Pewinski, Jim Mortimer, Aaron Switzer, Lynn Gillette, Rod Hanley, Nick Torsky, Jim Johnson, Richard Haslett, Eric Andersen, Jim DeClerck, Doreen Campbell, Lance Campbell, Tom Keerl.

Welcome and Introductions:

Frank Krist called the meeting to order. Introductions were made. Frank expressed the Committee's thanks to Brian and Scott from Jays Sporting Goods for setting up the space and allowing our use of the facility.

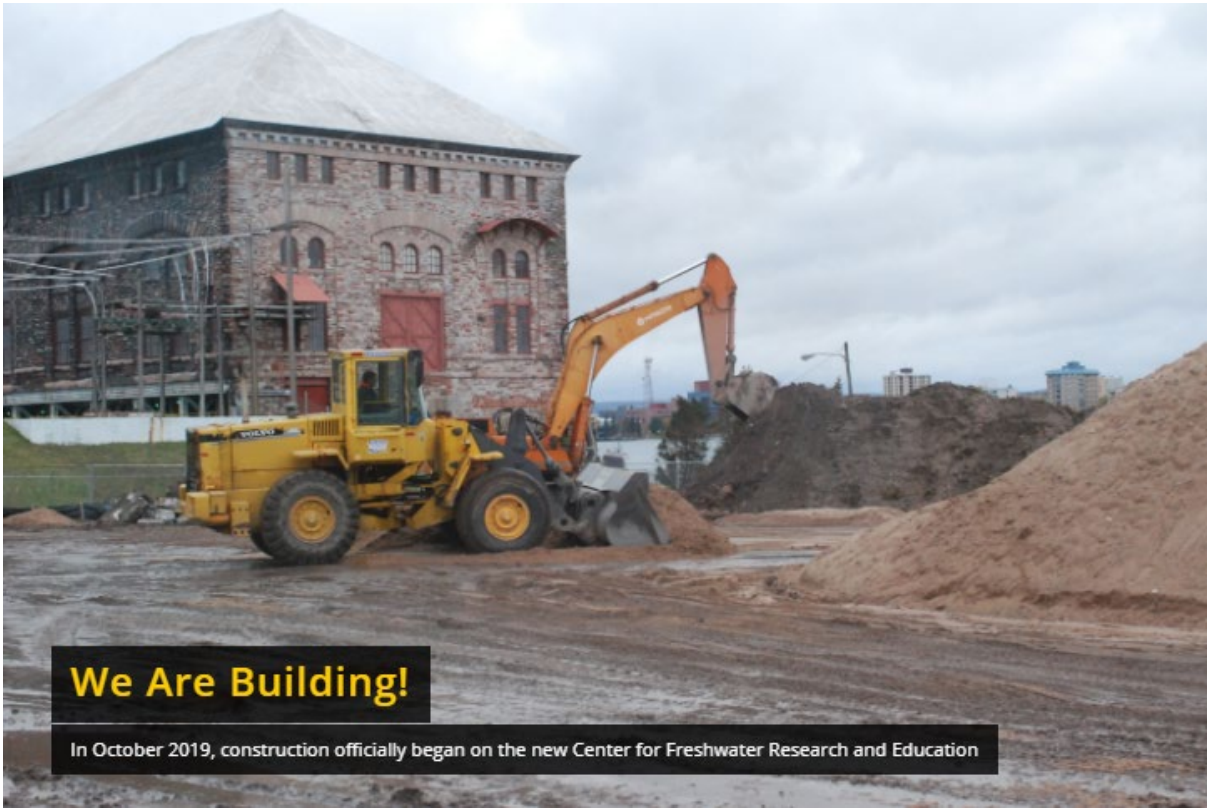
Dr. Rodney Hanley, President of Lake Superior State University and Dr. Lynn Gillette, Provost attended the meeting. Dr. Hanley provided an overview of the expansion of the Aquatics Research Lab at the University. Since 1977, Lake Superior State University's Aquatic Research Lab has been housed in a small, two-story section of the east end of Cloverland Electric's hydro plant along the St Marys River. Cloverland and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources have supported the lab, and students handled the day-to-day operations while receiving hands-on experience in freshwater research and fish culture.

The Research Laboratory has outgrown its current space and because of its unique location centered near three Great Lakes, it is well positioned to play an important role in increasing scientific understanding and education of Great Lakes. Therefore, Lake Superior State University and the State of Michigan have decided to invest in a new Center for Freshwater Research and Education to increase capacity in freshwater education and science and ensure that the Great Lakes remain great.

The new $13.2 million Center for Freshwater Research and Education building will be positioned along the St. Marys riverfront near Alford Park. The facility, co-named in honor of Richard and Theresa Barch who donated $1 million dollars, will provide space dedicated to public outreach, a K-12 discovery room, office space for researchers, labs for conducting research on fish culture and management, emerging contaminants, and invasive species. In addition, Lake Superior State University is working with the City of Sault Ste. Marie to create an outdoor educational park surrounding the Center for Freshwater Research and Education that will provide waterfront access to the community. Local donors and alumni have also provided funds for the project. For more information on this important undertaking, see the following link, https://www.lssu.edu/cfre/project-updates/.

Several participants expressed their gratitude for the excellent relationship between the MDNR and the University. A special thanks was given to Roger Greil and his dedication over the years to the students, programs and his willingness to share his knowledge and expertise with the MDNR and the stakeholders.

The Committee Members appreciate the opportunity to work with Roger, the other staff and students to improve the fisheries in both the Great Lakes and inland waters.



Frank and Randy Claramunt introduced ***Dr. Jeff Jolley, Southern Lake Huron Unit Manager***. Jeff has been adjusting o his new position and has been busy hiring replacements for retired biologists, Joe Leonardi and Kathrin Schroeder. He is excited for this opportunity and challenge, and is looking forward to working with the Advisory Committee.

The Atlantic Salmon Program:

a) Continue the discussion of where the projected 80,000 Atlantic salmon produced at the Harrietta Hatchery will be stocked.

In 2013, Fisheries Division updated their strategy for stocking Atlantic salmon in Lake Huron. That strategy calls for annually stocking the number of yearlings indicated below:

St. Marys River – DNR and LSSU 50,000
Au Sable River – 15,000 – 30,000
Thunder Bay River – 15,000 – 20,000
Lexington Harbor – 15,000

As a starting point for discussion, Frank suggested the following numbers for stocking at each of the current sites if the target of 180,000 is reached.

St. Marys River	30,000
Au Sable River	40,000
Thunder Bay River	40,000
Lexington Harbor	40,000
Total	150,000

This would leave 30,000 Atlantic salmon for consideration of another stocking site. Currently, Fisheries has one source of brood stock. Randy is experimenting at Lexington Harbor this fall to determine the feasibility of using the site as a backup egg source. The Atlantic salmon are returning in good numbers at Lexington even though there is no river to assist with imprinting. Randy stated that the Atlantic salmon fishery is so important to stakeholders and anglers that the Department should be investigating other options to obtain eggs for the program.

Randy Terrian spent a day at Lake Superior State University with Roger Greil at the Aquatics Research Lab to discuss collecting and processing the Atlantic salmon broodstock. During the first 2 weeks of November, the mature Atlantic salmon are gill netted by the students and the fish are quickly removed from the nets to prevent injuries to them. The fish are then placed in a raceway with only about a foot of water in the bottom to prevent the fish from jumping out of the tank. The goal is to take about 140 pairs of spawning fish. The biggest take away from the conversation, was that Roger is very concerned about developing a backup brood stock. He feels there is a need to aggressively pursue another egg take site.

To be a successful egg take station, Frank commented that logistics are important to consider. The Swan Weir has several characteristics that indicate it has much potential to be a brood stock site for Atlantic salmon. The facility is located inside a private quarry where access is strictly controlled. The Swan River has been proven to be an ideal size to handle thousands of fish with a reliable flow that is supplemented with ground and surface water pumped from the quarry. The river below the weir is approximately 0.25 miles in length, 60 to 100 feet wide and 3 to 5 feet deep. The river is open to Lake Huron the entire year and its size has been able to accommodate even the very large harvests during the earlier years of operation.

There was concern that the Chinook Salmon egg-take operation may interfere with an Atlantic Salmon egg-take but experience with the return of the Atlantic Salmon to the Au Sable and Thunder Bay Rivers demonstrated that the Atlantic Salmon begin to enter those streams toward mid-October, which is the time that the Chinook Salmon harvest is being completed at the weir. The Atlantic Salmon spawn during mid-November, which is about 1 month later than the Chinook Salmon.

Another advantage of the Swan Weir is that there are few predators in the area when the Atlantic salmon are stocked. There is no walleye run in the area and cormorants and seagulls have not been an issue for the last several years.

Committee Feedback:

Ed Eisch commented that the 180,000 Atlantic salmon are actually the target amount and none of them are considered extra fish. The additional Atlantic salmon raised at the Harrietta Hatchery reach the 180,000-target amount. The Swan Weir was designed as a harvest weir so a method of returning the spawned Atlantic salmon back to the river will need to be developed.

Randy Terrian commented that reallocating 30,000 to a potential brood stock location is necessary and a worthy measure. What do we need to know to move forward? How much can we defer to the Subcommittee for them to review and formulate a long-term strategy, so we don't take up too much time here?

Aaron Switzer commented that Platte River Hatchery has 4 raceways; 25,000 Atlantic salmon to be held in each raceway. Two raceways are designated for one site, while the other two raceways are designated for another site. There are two raceways at Harrietta that hold 40,000 each; one site per raceway. Marking would usually be done already; however, marking is not happening this year until spring 2020.

Frank asked if the Committee could recommend a new brood stock location since the fish are not marked yet. ***Randy Claramunt*** answered yes, but the details would have to be worked out.

Tom Kreel asked how the Atlantics are being distributed in the hatchery raceways. The Platte River Hatchery has two raceways (50,000 total) designated for the St. Marys River and two raceways (50,000 total) designated for Lexington Harbor. Harietta Hatchery has one raceway (40,000) designated for the Au Sable River and one raceway (40,000) designated for Thunder Bay River. If we reduce a Platte raceway to stock a fifth site, those 25,000 would come from St. Marys designation. ***Frank*** mentioned that if 25,000 Atlantic salmon were stocked at a broodstock site that possibly the fish could be marked with an AD fin clip but with no coded wire tag since the fish at all the other ports have tags.

Vote: Tom Keerl made a **motion** to take one raceway of 25,000 Atlantic salmon from Platte Hatchery that would go to the St. Marys River, and move that stocking to the Swan River for an egg take experiment. Jim DeClerk seconded the motion. **Vote on the motion;** all ayes. The committee is unanimous but the Basin Team, Fisheries Division and the Tribes will have to approve the recommendation.

b) Is it possible to expand production of Atlantic salmon up to a total of 240,000 yearlings annually as mentioned in the original 2012 Atlantic Salmon Plan?

The original Atlantic Salmon Plan mentioned that an attempt would be made to raise up to 240,000 yearlings annually. Currently, it appears that raising 180,000 yearling Atlantic salmon is doable with the Platte Hatchery at a maximum of 100,000 yearlings and the Harietta Hatchery is still experimenting with 80,000 yearlings. More time will be needed to determine the extent of the success at the Harietta Hatchery, but the Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee is encouraging the Fish Production Section consider if it is feasible to raise up to 240,000 Atlantic salmon yearlings annually.

Much is still to be learned about the Atlantic salmon program and currently 3 rivers are being stocked and one harbor. The river stocking sites all have walleye runs, which can prey heavily on the newly stocked fish. Raising up to 240,000 Atlantic salmon yearlings annually would allow up to 2 additional harbors without walleye runs to be stocked. These harbor sites with less predation, would assist in learning more about the impacts walleyes and other predators have on newly stocked Atlantic salmon and other species.

c) What was learned stocking the Atlantic salmon in 2019?

Since time was short, this topic was referred to the Subcommittee for further discussion.

Lake Huron Atlantic Salmon Population Assessment and Economic Valuation. (Matt Zink, Master Student, Michigan State University and Dr. Simone Valle de Souza, Professor, Michigan State University):

Atlantic salmon are native to Lake Ontario and were initially stocked in the Great Lakes in early 1970s when searching for a predator to control invasive the alewife populations. Since 2013, 860,000 Atlantic salmon have been stocked. A potential problem of determining the open water boat angler harvest is that the current creel surveys appear to be missing a significant portion of the harvest. Species misidentification may also be an issue. Recording fish harvest amounts misses the value of just having the opportunity to fish for Atlantic salmon. An economic valuation will be used to determine the value in the opportunity to fish for, release, or harvest Atlantic salmon. An attempt will be made to determine the Willingness To Pay (WTP) per fish caught/per fishing trip. Survey goals include determining the value

associated with the opportunity to fish for and harvest Atlantic salmon. In addition an attempt will be made to quantify the number of harvested fish missed when just using the open water creel.

Both Mark and Simone encouraged anyone that has suggestions for the survey or would like to participate in the study to contact them. The following are their email addresses: Simone Valle de Souza (valledes@anr.msu.edu) and Matt Zink (zinkmat1@msu.edu)

Progress update on investigating the reestablishment of stocking a limited number of lake trout in Southern Lake Huron. (Randy Claramunt, Lake Huron Basin Coordinator, and Ji He, DNR Fishery Researcher and Modeler):

There have been internal discussions since the Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee recommended at the previous meeting to reestablish lake trout stocking in central and southern Lake Huron. The recommendation was taken to the Lake Huron Committee. The Tribal representatives, were in full support but the Ontario representatives have issues they want to address, including interactions of lake trout with whitefish and concerns implementing international quotas. Both USGS and DNR data show that declining lake trout numbers are due to poor recruitment, not overharvest. The hatchery stocked lake trout south of Alcona have not been surviving well and wild reproduction is much lower than first anticipated. Lake trout are still living to older ages, but they are being harvested faster than younger fish can replace them. A recommendation will be made to the Lake Huron Committee again to undertake an evaluation to determine if hatchery fish can survive well in the southern two thirds of the lake if the fish are stocked on selected sites. It is proposed that lake trout would be stocked at 2 sites with 220,000 fish at each location.

Jim Johnson indicated that Ontario harvests about 70% of the lake trout and Michigan only takes about 30% in these central and southern waters. The commercial fishery in Ontario has a strong voice but something needs to be done to change the steady decline of this fishery. ***Ken Merkel*** asked if we can still go ahead with the stocking? Randy replied not at this time because these are Federal fish that would have to be reallocated and we cannot do that without Lake Huron Committee approval. The possibility of stocking lake trout in 2020 is not likely.

Can losses by predation of newly stocked steelhead and Atlantic salmon be reduced? (Jan VanAmberg, DNR Upper Peninsula Hatchery Manager and Randy Claramunt):

The Fish Production Section's goal is to get the fish out in the best condition possible using the most efficient means possible. Many factors influence the scheduling of fish stocking including staff availability, vehicle availability, condition of the fish, stocking site water temperature, weather, predator avoidance, coordinating staff, road conditions, overnight trip scheduling (drivers are limited to 11 hours of driving each day, etc. There are about 1,000 stocking sites, requiring driving 130,000 miles which takes 3,500 person-hours. This process takes place within an eight-week period in the spring.

Biological constraints in the hatchery that require the fish to be stocked during certain periods include water temperatures, disease, density in the raceways, fish size, and smolting status. Steelhead and walleye egg collection occur during stocking season which takes technicians away from stocking the fish.

The mass marking study of steelhead with the US Fish and Wildlife Service will continue through 2023. Interest was expressed in the possibility of marking lots of steelhead in the Au Sable River where over 150,000 are stocked each year. This would allow for testing different stocking scenarios. There are limitations to marking and separating the tagged fish in raceways. There is a possibility of marking a 45,000 to 60,000 lot or two in the Au Sable River with a unique mark, but that idea would have to be discussed further.

Discussion: Can we push the temperature window to higher temperatures to avoid predators? It is easier on the hatchery if fish can be stocked earlier because it reduces densities. Fish have been

stocked through ice before. ***Randy Terrian*** mentioned he witnessed stocking steelhead through the ice around 2014. It avoided cormorants, but the fish were less active and slower to leave the river system. At 40 degrees and above the steelhead are more energetic and move out of the river faster.

Randy Claramunt noted the table provided by Frank on 8x14 inch paper, is very useful. This table shows each steelhead stocking site and the number released on the Michigan side of Lake Huron. Frank also provided a smaller table that showed the stocking sites on the Ontario side of the lake. Even though over 500,000 steelhead are stocked by Michigan and over 100,000 are stocked by Ontario, only 1,440 steelhead were estimated harvested by anglers in Lake Huron by the creel survey during 2018. Jim Johnson mentioned that his work on steelhead reproduction at the DNR Alpena Station indicated that a significant number of those harvested steelhead could be wild fish. On the other hand, less than 1/3 as many Atlantic Salmon have been stocked during the same period yet 1,936 of these fish were harvested in Lake Huron during 2018. This shows the poor survival and return to the fishery of steelhead.

The discussion continued around the idea that a significant reason for the poor survival of steelhead is heavy predation directly after stocking. It was decided that this topic would require much more discussion, so it was decided to refer the discussion to a Subcommittee meeting.

Update on the progress of opening the Saginaw River to walleye fishing the entire year. (Randy Claramunt):

During the last meeting, the Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee voted to support opening the Saginaw River the entire year. There are many steps to do that, including Fisheries Division review, public comment and Natural Resource Commission review. Dave Fielder provided an analysis for the Basin Team. The Basin Team recommended opening the Saginaw River along with revisiting the overall management directions for the entire Saginaw Bay.

Fisheries Division needs time to work on preparing a proposal to take to the public for their input. Time is limited since Jeff Jolley who just replaced Jim Baker as the new Southern Lake Huron Supervisor is just beginning to settle into his new position. In addition, Jeff is now hiring two Southern Lake Huron fishery biologists to take the place of newly retired fish biologists Kathrin Schrouder and Joe Leonardi. This is a huge loss of knowledge and expertise of the Saginaw Bay fishery, but efforts will be made to be ready to share ideas on this concept at the spring workshops.

There is concern from tournament and trophy anglers that opening the river during spawning season could harvest too many of the larger spawning fish. It is important that all management options be reviewed so they can be shared with the public. The Natural Resource Commission approves regulation changes base on science, so it is important that the potential impacts of opening the walleye season the entire year be documented. It was mentioned that only the lower river would be considered for opening, not the actual spawning grounds upstream in the Tittabawassee, Cass, etc. Several scenarios will be considered including a reduced daily bag limit and a slot size limit.

Brief update on new cormorant discussions with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and natural resource managers from around the country. (Randy Claramunt and Dave Fielder, Lake Huron Research Biologist and Modeler):

A National Professional Meeting of Fisheries and Wildlife professionals met jointly with over 4,500 attendees. Day 2 discussions centered around the problem of managing cormorants. Representatives from US Fish and Wildlife Service were there, and they stated they had submitted recommendations to the Secretary of the Interior for review. Dave Fielder indicated that it appears that some sort of cormorant control is being discussed at higher levels and he is optimistic that more will be learned soon.

Frank mentioned that is important to regularly encourage your US Senators and Representative to pressure the US Fish and Wildlife Service to do their job and implement a program to protect free

swimming fish from cormorants.

Update on the lake trout daily bag limit during 2020 in Management Unit MH-1 from Rogers City to Drummond Island. (Randy Claramunt):

We are dealing with two issues. 1) harvest went above quota and, 2) the model was changing. We were in a cycle of an over-harvest penalty. We now have a court order that set the state limit for 2019 and 2020 at 66,800 pounds. The harvest data for 2019 is still being analyzed to determine if the bag limit for 2020 will be changed back to a 3 fish per day. We should know the results by the end of the year or early next year.

2020 Negotiations for a new Consent Decree for the Great Lakes Waters covered under the 1836 Tribal Treaty:

Negotiations have started! All parties involved, signed a confidentiality agreement. The good news that Randy can share, is that there is a strong interest by the Parties to try to complete negotiations by August 2020. There are 30 meetings scheduled from now through August 2020.

Glen Buchner, from the Great Lakes Salmon Initiative, is requesting that the organization have a member on the Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee:

The Great Lakes Salmon Initiative was founded in 2016 in response to reduction in salmon stocking in Lake Michigan. The group does not just look at Lake Michigan, there are anglers on both sides of the state that are members of the organization. It is their belief that the management directions were negatively impacting angling effort and the economy. Working with the DNR, they proposed zone management and other changes, and during 2018 fishing effort increased in Lake Michigan. The Great Lakes Salmon Initiative is communicating and building relationships with the DNR, Tribes and commercial groups. They currently have a voting member on the Lake Michigan Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee.

Judy Ogden asked what the criteria are to become a voting member of the Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee? Frank and Randy replied that the goal of the Committee is to have members from various ports and and organizations across the state. If someone is interested in being a member, they are asked to attend the meetings for a year to determine if they are interested in exchanging ideas between the Committee and their constituents. Very few persons that asked to be a member were still active after one year. It was agreed that Glen would provide the contact information from one of his members that fishes in Lake Huron that is interested in becoming an Advisor. Frank said if the person attends the meetings for a year, then he and Randy will confer with the person to determine if he will become a member.

The Lake Michigan Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee has just revised their ***Terms of Reference*** and Randy would like to share those changes with our Committee to determine if we would like to consider changes also.

Manager, Law Enforcement and other updates:

Nick Torsky, Law Enforcement Division – There will be a recruit school in the summer of 2020. In Northern Lake Huron, they pulled a trap net, the 5th one this year. There is still one in Hammond Bay that needs to be removed. Rockport Harbor is closed due to filling in with lose gravel caused by the high lake levels and strong winds.

Todd Wills, *Lake Huron, Lake Erie and Lake St. Clair Supervisor* – The Office at Alpena is fully staffed. They are wrapping up the field season.

Aaron Switzer, Manager Platte River, Oden and Harrietta State Fish Hatcheries – Most persons know Aaron as the Fish Production Manager, but he is also the statewide weir coordinator. They collected all the Chinook eggs needed (Illinois and Indiana went to Wisconsin for eggs), however, at the last-minute Wisconsin called and needed eggs. We were able to meet those needs. Oden is looking into solar energy facilities at that hatchery as part of the Governor's initiative to change to renewable energy sources at state facilities.

Jeff Jolley, New Southern Lake Huron Unit Manager – Jeff has been busy settling into his new position for the last few months and hiring two biologists. Kathrin Schrouder and Joe Leonardi just retired at nearly the same time so that loss of knowledge will be greatly missed. The unit completed year two of lake sturgeon reintroduction plan which was capped off with a release of hatchery raised sturgeon at an event in Flint.

Brandon Schroeder, Michigan Sea Grant – Brandon is looking forward to working with the Committee to organize the Spring Lake Huron Regional Workshops. Frank mentioned that at our winter Committee meeting Brandon will lead a discussion about the highlights of the 2019 workshops and our goals for the 2020 workshops.

Kynzie House, DNR Creel Clerk – The Wilderness State Park smallmouth bass fishing was excellent this year. Both the size and number of fish were excellent. It was a tough year for salmon fishing at Cheboygan.

Julie Shafto, DNR Creel Clerk – Fishing was good at Rogers City and Presque Isle, but the horrible windy and stormy weather these past two months had a major impact on reducing the number of trips on the lake. The strong winds and currents caused major shifts in water temperatures from very warm water down very deep and then quickly upwellings occurred bringing low 40 F degree water temperatures to the surface.

Jan VanAmberg, Upper Peninsula Hatchery Manager – The renovation project at Thompson Hatchery is ongoing. The very wet weather delayed the work by months. The estimated completion is toward the end of 2020, perhaps August.

Ed Eisch, Fish Production Manager – Construction at the Little Manistee Weir is complete. It was wrapped up just as the salmon were showing up. The project had a tight timeline, but everything came off without a hitch. The Governor's renewable energy initiate goal is to have renewable energy at all 103 state parks and 6 hatcheries. The DNR is looking into a power purchase agreement.

Seth Herbst, Aquatic Species & Regulatory Affairs Unit Manager – Seth is the new manager of this Unit. His Unit has four biologists and an office administrator. Their primary duties are listed below. In addition to overseeing the tasks listed below he represents the Division and Department on various regional committees that are relevant to the Unit's responsibilities (e.g., Asian Carp Regional Coordinating Committee) and he is also responsible for bill analysis for the Fisheries Division.

The following biologists work in the Unit:

Tom Goniea: Implements the state licensed commercial fish and wholesale program (including bait harvest), implements the Fishing Tournament Information System, and implements the Scientific Collectors Permit Program.

Christian LeSage: Implements the statewide fishing regulations program, oversees the production of the annual fishing guide, reviews stocking prescriptions, oversees the statewide allocation process for fish that are stocked, works with staff for NPDES permit reporting

Lucas Nathan: Implements the statewide aquatic invasive species program. Primary lead for prevention,

detection, and response work for Fisheries Division, also he partners with staff and other state agencies and universities to implement this work. (This was Seth's old job)

Christina Baugher: Works closely with the Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas (CISMAs) throughout the state to ensure that they are working to address the state's invasive species priorities. She also works very closely with the Michigan Invasive Species Grant Program (MISGP) to review proposals and acts as the grant manager for many of the funded projects.

The office administrator helps to assist each of the biologists with the various tasks and is also in charge of the statewide inventory management.

Adjourn: 3:10 p.m.

Meeting Dates for 2020:

Monday March 2, 2020
Monday May 11, 2020
Tuesday August 11, 2020
Monday October 12, 2020.

All meetings will be held at Jay's Sporting Goods in Clare from 10 am until 3 pm.