



## 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 Zoom Meeting**

**Monday October 12, 2020**

Virtual Meeting conducted on the Zoom Platform  
Facilitated by Michigan Sea Grant – Meaghan Gass and  
Brandon Schroeder  
**10:00 am-1:00 pm**

#### **Pre-Meeting Technology Check and login to test audio connection (Meaghan Gass and Brandon Schroeder, Michigan Sea Grant).**

There appeared to be very few problems with the participants entering the Zoom meeting. Persons entered with computers and some opted to participate by phone only.

#### **Welcome, Introductions and Announcements (Frank Krist, and Randy Claramunt, DNR Lake Huron Basin Coordinator).**

*Frank Krist* welcomed everyone and introduced, Mike Veine who is a new member, representing the Arenac County Walleye Club. Mike is a lifelong angler and a prolific outdoor writer. The Club raised large numbers of Walleye for stocking in Saginaw Bay until the walleye population recovered with the food web changes. Currently, the Club still raises Walleyes in cooperation with the DNR and the fish are stocked across the state.

#### **Meeting Process and Feedback from the last LHCFAC Meeting (Brandon Schroeder and Meaghan Gass, Michigan Sea Grant).**

*Meaghan Gass* provided an overview of Zoom technology and the process of the Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee meeting. The meeting evaluation from the previous August 11, 2020 Zoom meeting showed that the majority (91%) of people thought that participation and engagement was easy. Many people thought that Zoom meetings should continue into the future to cut down on drive time or at least have the option for people to connect virtually. New to this meeting, is an optional one-hour fish talk discussion after the Advisory Meeting with MDNR partners and anyone that was interested in sharing ideas or wanted to ask questions. The fish talks session after this meeting was a success and continued for a full hour.

*Randy Claramunt* welcomed everyone and acknowledged that Meaghan and Brandon have been rock stars throughout the process of moving everything virtually. To clarify, the Fish Talk discussions after the formal meeting is not where any decisions will be made, this is an optional time just to chat like we would normally do at Jay's after the official meeting was over.

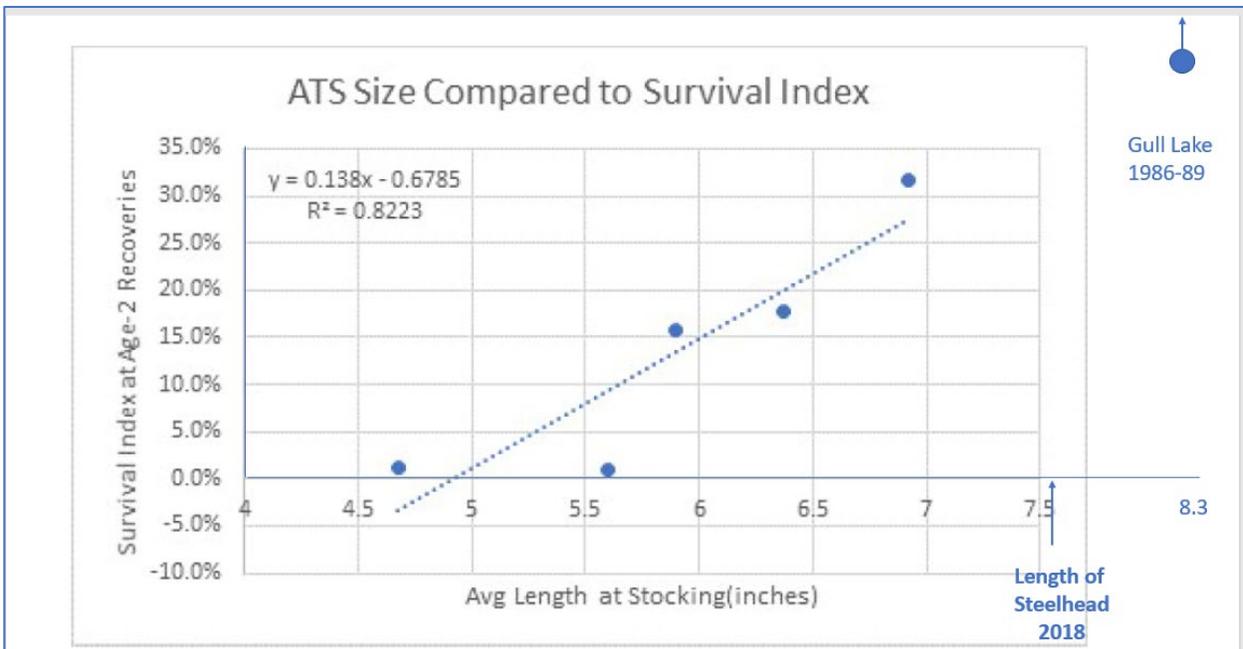
**Review of data and observations that indicate directions that might be pursued to increase survival of Atlantic Salmon and Steelhead immediately after stocking, (Randy Terrian, Jim Johnson, and the MDNR Fish Production Staff.).**

*Frank* introduced this topic and made note that Randy Terrian has spent hundreds of hours talking to anglers, monitoring the stocking sites, visiting with hatchery staff, and going through fish stomachs with the goal of increasing survival of newly stocked fish. Jim Johnson will follow with an overview of stocking obstacles and potential options for improving survival of especially Atlantic Salmon immediately after being planted. Finally, Randy Claramunt will finish the discussion. Overall, Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee is doing this effort to respectfully provide input that might help increase the survival of stocked fish.

*Randy Terrian*-Since we began stocking Atlantic Salmon, much focus has been directed, at recording fish characteristics and environmental conditions when the fish are stocked. A large part of his focus has been on both steelhead and Atlantic Salmon. Since 2013, our effort to understand more has increased. The last ½ mile of the Au Sable has the largest rate of mortality. A comprehensive effort was put into this project by organizing volunteer anglers to provide catch data, stomach samples and coded wire tagged heads. In addition, hazing of cormorants was done along with recording their numbers and the time the birds spent in the area. It appears that reduction of predation has the potential of increasing survival of stocked fish so minimizing the impacts of Lake Trout predation, the Saginaw Bay Walleye migration, and Cormorant consumption should be considered.

*Frank* summarized Randy's recommendation: In order to potentially increase survival of Steelhead in the Au Sable River, it is recommended that a test stocking during the end of May or beginning of June be conducted. This period has the best chance of minimizing predation from Walleye, Lake Trout and Cormorants. Also, at this time, the stocked fish are more active and much more food is available for the newly released fish.

*Jim Johnson*-I am addressing more on the Atlantic Salmon versus Steelhead portion of this presentation. Predation on stocked fish is always a concern. The disappearance of alewives likely contributes to this issue and is indicative of an unbalanced system. The newly stocked fish often linger and don't leave the predation arena. We want to minimize predation effects to allow a larger percentage of fish to escape to open water. Stocking of Pacific Salmonids and Atlantic Salmon when smolted appear to have much better survival. The critical element is that these smolted fish are ready to migrate quickly offshore at stocking time. DNR surveys of river mouths back in the early 2000s, indicated that there were large concentrations of Walleye in the area when Brown Trout stockings were failing. Yearling Atlantic Salmon have been much smaller than Steelhead when stocked. Bigger is better for Atlantic Salmon since larger fish are farther along in the smolting process. The graph below shows that the Atlantic Salmon stocked in the 7 inch or larger size range survived significantly better than smaller fish.



***Atlantic Salmon stocked at larger sizes survived better***

Another item to consider is that the fitness of the Atlantic Salmon in the hatchery might not be the same as fitness in the lake after stocking. The goal in the hatchery is not to have any signs of disease but a study completed in Gull Lake showed that Atlantic Salmon stocked at the larger sizes of 7 or 8 inches in length but exhibited some fungal and bacterial disease earlier in the hatchery cycle before being released survived much better than smaller stocked fish that experienced no health issues.

***Recommendations:*** Compared with steelhead, Atlantic salmon have been relatively small and perhaps not as advanced in their smoltification process when stocked. We recommend the hatcheries do all they can to stimulate smoltification by exposure to rising daylength and temperatures along with holding Atlantic salmon until late May or even the first of June to achieve the largest size possible. Stocking larger Atlantic Salmon is probably the single most promising opportunity for improving Atlantic salmon survival. This larger size will allow most fish to be smolted resulting in them moving offshore quickly which would reduce vulnerability to nearshore predators.

***Randy Claramunt-***I discussed this issue at the Lake Huron Basin Team meeting last week. The Basin Team is composed of DNR staff from all Fishery Division Sections. We considered all of the topics and information that were provided by Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee. Randy shared a story about a fellow researcher that had marked turtles and studied how predation on offspring was associated with clutch size and egg size. When a lake had very few predators, the turtles laid more but smaller eggs. In contrast, when there was an abundance of predators then the turtles adapted quickly and laid fewer eggs that were also much larger. So, we are trying to mimic the exact paradigm in nature with the survival of our stocked fish and responding to the changing predation rates. There are a number of different variables to factor in when trying to strategize a stocking plan in response to those variables. For example, often the

larger fish in the hatcheries are stocked first to allow the smaller fish to grow, which may not align with the optimal timing for stocking. Another challenge is the Walleye, Lake Trout, Cormorants, and other predators are present at the various ports at different times. So, what is right for one port might be wrong for another port. This issue is complicated but there are some opportunities to consider for possibly revising strategies. Randy was interested in learning from the participants their observations at other ports.

**Judy Ogden**-Do you feel that this discussion also ties into the higher survival of plants out of Lexington due to warmer water temperatures?

**Jim Johnson**-In a 2009 gill net survey, there was a low Walleye population in the Lexington area compared to the river mouths that are stocked with silver fish. The lack of Walleye could be the major driver for increased survival.

**Judy**-She would agree with this because they don't start catching Walleye until midsummer well after the fish are stocked.

**Dennis Eade**-Would like to know why it might be wrong or right about stocking Atlantic Salmon the end of June.

**Randy Claramunt**-The idea of stocking Atlantic Salmon in Lexington in June might be worse for survival. Earlier in the season the water is more turbid and there are few Walleye so possibly stocking earlier could be better. The idea to stock Atlantic Salmon later might vary at each port depending on the variables. Varying stocking practices at the various ports depending on the conditions at each stocking site would likely also apply to steelhead.

**Ken Pletcher**-Along those lines, from his perspective being far north in Cheboygan, Walleye arrive the first or second week of June. If you waited until then in Cheboygan, you might be feeding the Walleye.

**Randy Claramunt**-Don't forget you have to pick your poison. Early, you have Lake Trout and then later you have Walleye and Cormorants.

**Tess Nelkie**- Chat: "I remember when Roger Greil from Lake Superior State University was asked about fish size at stocking, he said that at LSSU, they tried to grow their Atlantic Salmon to a size of 7 inches because they had a much better survival rate at that size"

**Randy Claramunt**-The chart we saw earlier definitely suggests that 7-inch fish have a better survival rate.

**Ed Retherford**-Chat: The DNR creel clerks ask anglers about what they are targeting. Do they ask the anglers questions about seeing newly stocked steelhead or Atlantic Salmon? For example, are you asking if you think the stocked fish are surviving, or do you see planted fish in stomachs even if anglers can't identify planters?

**Randy Claramunt**-Yes, Randy Terrian has a decent amount of data about this topic. They do show up in diets and we do get reports from anglers.

**Randy Terrian**-Most times the earlier larger stocked fish will show up less in Walleye stomachs, but more in Lake Trout stomachs. Lake Trout and Cormorants do not discriminate on size of stocked fish. Must consider overall predation, not just one species of predation.

**Frank**-The DNR was stocking the Chinook Salmon at Swan Weir in early to mid-May and it was not unusual to find 20-30 stocked Chinook in Lake Trout stomachs. Since 2012 the fish are stocked at the end of the first week of June and by then the near shore waters have warmed above the ideal temperature for lake trout and this has reduced significantly the time the newly stocked Chinook are in the same waters with lake trout.

**Tom Keerl**-It seems that a lot of this is specific to the Au Sable River, and it may be very difficult for fish production to meet the goals that we are trying to set. Without hearing from them, I'm not sure we can come to a decision on this.

**Frank**-Tom is exactly right and that is our goal to share these ideas with the hatchery staff to determine if some of these suggestions are doable.

**Ed Retherford**-Many good points are being made. This year was the best open water Steelhead season from Alpena to Rogers City in many years.

**Jim Johnson**-One limitation of stocking Atlantic Salmon in April before the walleye migration, is the fish are small and not smolted so they will stay in the river until they smolt and the water temperature is 50 to 55F degrees. Because of this, these pre-smolts would be present when the walleye migration hits the Thunder Bay and Au Sable Rivers resulting in a disastrous outcome. Jim has a question for Randy Terrian. Do the Steelhead move out of the river when the temperature is in the low 40s F?

**Randy T.**-When stocked in the lower 40s, the Steelhead will string throughout the system and then they will typically out-migrate around 47-50F. They also are more evasive to predation in the warmer water. In the lower 40s they are more lethargic.

**Dan Manyen**-Dan thanked Randy Terrian for discussing that many anglers understand what they see above the water but not what is occurring under the water. We've been experiencing higher water in all the Great Lakes. Dan lives a mile from the mouth of the Saginaw River and the Bay gained over 40 inches of water and that has to make a difference. I have been chartering for over 55 years and the habits of the fish have changed greatly in the last 5-6 years. The fish are being caught at different times and locations. Does the DNR have plans to explore the impacts of the high water?

**Dave Fielder**-We completed some surveys on high water and it does impact natural reproduction and nursery habitat of yellow perch, pike and other species. That would be a worthwhile investigation to study the impacts of high water further. Other remarks: From the telemetry work,

the evidence shows that Walleye and Cormorant migrations do not really depend on water temperature but rather it's more related to calendar date. He doesn't think that Lexington Harbor is something magical for survival of stocked fish other than it's not a river mouth with a large Walleye population. If the goal is to improve survival of stocked fish, one option might be to test stock a harbor where there are few walleye and other predators to determine if the pattern of better survival of Atlantic Salmon stocked at Lexington can be replicated.

**Jason Gostiaux**-provided more information regarding Walleye movement with tagging data. There did not seem to be a correlation between tagging data and large numbers of Walleye moving from Saginaw Bay into the southern portion of the lake. Only a few hundred tags have been returned from Southern Lake Huron. In the south, Lake Trout rather than the Walleye might be the more common predator. This probably is a significant factor in the success of the Lexington Atlantic Salmon plant.

**Ed Eisch**-Starting with Atlantic Salmon the Harrietta Hatchery has the advantage over Platte River Hatchery because it can hold onto fish longer because the fish are raised on well water. Because of this, Harrietta will be stocking the Au Sable and Thunder Bay Rivers. So, if the Atlantic Salmon are stocked a little later in the Au Sable River to get close to the preferred temperature range, that should not be an issue with the Harrietta fish. The Platte River Hatchery has the Lexington plant, so they are okay to stock those fish as planned. The St Marys plant should be good as is. Overall, we should be good with Atlantic Salmon. I understand the desire to hold Steelhead as long as possible, but everyone must understand that we have two-year classes of Salmonids at the same time and we must take into consideration timing to move the older fish to the outside raceways. In terms of larger Atlantic Salmon and not thinking about fish health, that is not true. The DNR has a responsibility to only stock healthy fish so we cannot stock out fish that are clinically sick. That is the same standard that the aquaculture industry is held to.

**Aaron Switzer**-I really like the discussion we are having and the input from the stakeholders. Aaron has concerns about holding sick fish at Platte River because the water is re-used and the Atlantic Salmon are at the top of the chain. If Atlantic Salmon get sick, then we are sending water with sickness through the whole hatchery.

**Randy Espinoza**-Thompson Hatchery is happy to assist where we can. It takes about 1½ months to stock the Steelhead. We can't target all of the Steelhead to be stocked out later because we have so many fish to stock out but we could accommodate some sites later in the spring, but others would have to be stocked early. We don't want to stock fish when temperatures get higher than preferred. At the Thompson Hatchery, there isn't a specific marked group for the Au Sable River in the mass marking program so a special batch of Steelhead would have to be a fin clipped, which we would have to be discuss internally.

**Matt Hughes**-We have marked steelhead yearlings prior to stocking on the Au Sable. It can be done, but it requires hand clipping. They can hold fish a bit longer but once water temps reach around 60F they need to go.

**Frank**-Is there a possibility to isolate a group of Code Wire Tagged Steelhead and stock them in the Au Sable?

**Matt Hughes**-Potentially it depends on raceway capacity. At Wolf Lake Hatchery it is possible to specifically mark batches in the 55,000 to 70,000 fish range. It may then be possible to stock one batch early and another batch later.

**Martha VanAmberg**-Possibly stocking fish in batches as just mentioned could happen. Because of groupings that are required for the mass marking program and the constraints of the batches and sizes of the raceways at Wolf Lake and Thompson Hatcheries, it would have to be researched to determine if the logistics would work.

Going back to fish health, the Atlantic Salmon were not sick when they were stocked out at Gull Lake, but they had been sick during the rearing process. They required treatment and were healthy when stocked. Atlantic Salmon are very susceptible to getting diseases. I want to clarify that stocking larger fish is not a budget issue, but it is actually helpful to have various size fish in the hatcheries. The fish are stocked over a 6-week period and this allows stocking the larger and smolted fish first and as the smaller fish grow and smolt they are stocked later.

**Frank**-Is the limitation on getting fish out because of hatchery constraints or limitations of staffing and trucks?

**Martha VanAmberg**-The limitation is typically about the number of trucks that can be used for stocking fish. There are 6 hatcheries and only 18 trucks. Some of the bigger stocking trucks are shared and coordinated between hatcheries. We try to maximize logistics for fish going across the state from different hatcheries. We are reluctant to hold fish into late May because they will be past smolting.

**Frank**-If we marked some fish then we could evaluate different stocking strategies, but if we keep doing the same thing then nothing will change. If we don't try a little different approach, then we won't learn much. If the public is informed, they will respect trying new approaches to improve the fishery. This was proven when the Salmon plants were put on hold in two thirds of Lake Huron and when the Brown Trout Stocking was terminated in the entire lake.

**Gary Whelan**-To add to Ed's comment on fish health, stocking diseased fish unnecessarily adds pathogens to the Great Lakes and this will show up in the system. This is just a bad practice that created conditions in the past in Lake Michigan for large epizootics for Salmon with BKD that took 20 years to get fully under control.

**Jim Johnson**-I should have been clearer. I do not advocate stocking "sick" fish and I did point out the Gull Lake example was an extreme case. I used Gull Lake as an example, though an extreme one, of the advantage of stocking larger, more advanced Atlantics.

**Randy Terrian**-Directed question to Matt Hughes, currently there is a Coded Wire Tagged (CWT) index batch of Steelhead for the Au Sable system which is one raceway of mass-marked

fish to be stocked each year (confirmed by Matt). If a late May Steelhead stocking experiment was attempted, it seems logical to use this CWT index batch which is already marked with a unique tag and this would allow us to learn more information about this later plant since all the other stocked fish will be marked with different CWTs. These tags will show other stocking dates and locations. In the 1990s, the DNR was able to stock out Steelhead in late May and possibly that can be done now. I understand that staffing and other logistics have changed over the years but unless we learn more it will be difficult to improve the survival of the stocked fish.

*Frank*-confirmed that the earliest that Steelhead will be stocked is in 2022. It will take much discussion between the staff to decide what is feasible so he proposed that we continue the discussions over the next year to determine if changes can be made. It would be good to have updates at each meeting as we move forward. I am asking the hatchery staff if that approach is feasible or should something else be done?

*Matt Hughes*-I am comfortable delaying Steelhead stocking until mid-May, but after that it will be difficult with Muskellunge egg take on the Detroit River requiring staff. We need to know what the managers want before we can plan for it.

*Tim Cwalinski*-I am trying to absorb all of this. The managers and hatchery staff are discussing this internally to try to determine what could be a good strategy. This is complicated and there are a lot of iterations that can be affected by this. For example, the Au Sable River will not get 150,000 Steelhead stocked in late May because it is physically not possible to do that. After much work internally, the goal is to come back to this Committee to share the results.

*Frank Krist*-We are leaving the topic and we will move forward with additional discussions in the future. We appreciate the hatchery staff and managers listening to us and being blunt discussing the challenges. That is a positive approach and if there was a simple solution it would have been implemented years ago.

*Randy Claramunt*-The unit managers and biologists are tasked with working with fish production and research staff to consider these variables to determine a more explicit layout for Atlantic Salmon and Steelhead stocking. We will come back to the advisors with a potential layout for input.

**Discussion of an updated version of the Great Lakes Citizens Advisory Committees Terms of Reference that incorporates the best of all the individual Committee's versions. Should this version be adopted by all of the Great Lakes Citizens Advisory Committees? (Randy Claramunt and Frank Krist).**

*Randy Claramunt*-This project started out as a way to have uniform Terms of Reference with all the Great Lakes Citizen Advisory Committees. All of these Committees function similarly, but there are some differences across the Committees. The idea is to have uniform Terms of Reference for all Committees.

**Frank Krist**-Below are the potential changes from our existing Terms of Reference and my suggestions for modifying the newly proposed Terms of Reference that is recommended to be used by all of the DNR Great Lakes Citizen Fishery Advisory Committees.

1. The **Chair** would be elected by the majority of the Members every three years and would serve at the pleasure of the membership.
2. A **Vice-Chair** would also be elected every 3 years.
3. It is important that if the Chair or Vice-Chair are not doing their job then the Committee should have the flexibility to remove them. I would recommend that a sentence be added that clarifies that the Committee may remove the Chair or Vice-Chair at anytime with a majority vote of its Members.
4. The Advisors job is to provide **Recommendations** to the DNR and on the bottom of the first page of the proposed uniform Terms of Reference, **Decision Making** was changed to **Recommendation Making**. I agree that **Recommendation Making** better reflects the role of the Members but on the bottom of page 2 the **Decision Making Process** paragraph should have been updated to reflect that it is a **Recommendation Making Process**.
5. A new paragraph on **Meeting Attendance** has been added and because it is redundant and is already covered under **Member Responsibilities** in the paragraph below and in the **Members** paragraph directly above, I recommend that the new **Meeting Attendance** paragraph be removed. Also, in the **Meeting Attendance** paragraph having **Guests** and **Alternate Members** email the Chair or Basin Coordinator before attending a meeting is not practical since many attendees will not comply. If the goal is to obtain a head count for lunch, then have the meeting notice indicate if persons attending the meeting want a served lunch then they must notify the Chair or Basin Coordinator or they must provide their own lunch.
6. A new paragraph encouraging Observers to attend has been added. I suggest that this is a good addition since it encourages anyone that is interested to attend and participate at the meetings.

**Jay Wesley, Lake Michigan Basin Coordinator**-Logistically we like to know how many people to expect at the meetings. Some committees are still providing lunch, so we need to have an idea of numbers.

**Frank**-Having **Guests** and **Alternate Members** email the Chair or Basin Coordinator before attending a meeting is not practical since many attendees will not comply. If the goal is to obtain a head count for lunch, then have the meeting notice indicate if persons attending the meeting want a served lunch then they must notify the Chair or Basin Coordinator or they must provide their own lunch.

**Dave Fielder**-from another committee that I serve on, a vice-chair provides some continuity and transfer leadership after chair is voted off or can't serve anymore. The vice-chair may assist with tasks.

**Dennis Eade**-I think it is a great idea to have a vice-Chair. I am the Vice-Chair of the Michigan Sportsmen's Advisory Council and I work well with the Chair to coordinate the meetings and logistics.

**Ed Retherford**-Vice-Chair and secretary are also good ideas. The waterfowl committee he is on, must have a certain percent of members to pass a vote. Does all of the Great Lakes Advisory Committees use the same method of voting?

**Randy Claramunt**-All of the Committees use the same decision process which is similar to what is used internally in the Fisheries Division. If people cannot live with parts of the decision (recommendation), then those reasons are noted but a majority vote is not needed. We want to know the results of the Committee's vote.

**Jay Wesley**-The Lake Michigan Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee strives for consensus, only sometimes do we have to go for an actual vote.

**Tess Nelkie**-Having a vice-Chair is a really good idea. People get sick and there are poor weather conditions. The group that is very against this, what are they against? What are we possibly missing?

**Frank**-The Lake Erie Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee has quite a few items that they don't like in the proposal. The Chair thinks that everyone should be able to have their own Terms of Reference and flexibility. They will be discussing the proposed version at a meeting soon.

**Jim Johnson**-Could the vice-Chair run some meetings so the Chair could advocate for something that they have possibly a conflict of interest? Example: stocking at the Chair's home port.

**Frank**-Good point and he agrees with Jim Johnson. I will send out the various Terms of References and comments by email and hopefully we can vote on this issue during the winter meeting.

**BREAK**

**How extensive was the return this season of adult Coho Salmon to their stocking sites at the Thunder Bay River and Port Sanilac? (MDNR and participants).**

**Lee Martin, DNR Creel Clerk**-Started working in June. There was a definite increase in Coho being caught in Oscoda and Alpena compared to past five years, but the increase was not a lot. More Coho than Atlantic Salmon were caught this year. More Coho were caught out of Oscoda compared to Alpena, probably because the deep water is closer to shore in Oscoda. Fish came into Thunder Bay River earlier than most anglers were expecting. Coho began showing up in the first to second week of September compared to October when most people expected. The average size of fish was 5-7 pounds, but some were upper 8 pounds. I expected to see more fish

be caught while staging at the river mouths, but that hasn't happened. A few anglers have caught some Coho in the Au Sable.

**Julie Shafto, DNR Creel Clerk**-More Coho were caught at Presque Isle compared to Rogers City, but there was not a major increase from the past at Presque Isle. We can say that we have Coho, but we don't know if they are stocked or wild fish because they were not marked. Julie is in Alpena for the month of October and fishing has been slow. There are many salmon and possibly Atlantics jumping toward the Dam in the Thunder Bay River, but it is hard to identify the jumping fish. It has been a challenge for the anglers to catch these spawning fish. An angler from southern Lake Huron mentioned to Julie that he was very happy with the Coho fishing in the southern end of the lake this year and appreciated the fish being stocked.

**Ed Retherford, Charter Captain**-During August, we moved the charter boat to Presque Isle. There was a huge influx of pink Salmon this year and it is possible that anglers were catching Coho and thinking they were pink salmon. The Coho did show up in bigger numbers than the past few years. We did catch some Coho "planters" as we called them even though they were not clipped. Many of the Coho were 3-4 pounders but we caught one that was nearly 10 pounds.

**Judy Ogden**-During the week of Sept. 21<sup>st</sup> at Port Sanilac, fish were jumping all around the boat including lots of Coho. One angler from Virginia caught three Coho off the wall on a flicker shad and they ranged from about 3.5 to 5 pounds. Anglers are continuing to catch fish in the harbor, but it has been more challenging as the fish became more mature. Some anglers are catching Coho around the shore at Port Sanilac and some of the Coho are turning up at Lexington harbor as well. The Coho were returning toward the end of September, which was later than we thought they would.

**Jason Gostiaux, DNR Fishery Biologist**-We have a crew that will be sampling Port Sanilac and Lexington next Monday to look for Coho and Atlantic Salmon. Since there are no streams nearby for the fish to move into we should be able to determine the intensity of the returns.

**Ken Merckel**-From Harbor Beach to Lexington, a fair number of Coho were caught over the summer. The Lake Trout are gone near shore, and people are going out to Yankee Reef to catch them currently.

**Ken Pletcher**-A few people have said they have caught Coho in the Cheboygan area, but he doubts it because of the large number of Pinks this year.

**Randy Claramunt**-Even though we missed the spring creel survey, based on the distribution of Pacific Salmon in the Great Lakes, the photos, and reports he got prior to the boating closure during the spring, the fishing was phenomenal. Lots of Coho captured, and hopefully the fall data will continue to show fish returning. All in all, it was pretty successful. With 50,000 Coho stocked at each site and with typical survival rates, we are in the ballpark with the current return rates.

**Cormorant Update. Are meeting participants encountering heavy problems with cormorants? (Randy Claramunt and participants)**

**Randy Claramunt**-Provided an update on the development of a new Cormorant rule. The US Fish and Wildlife Service is working to change the Cormorant rule and is currently reviewing the comments that the states, tribes and stakeholders provided on the proposed rule. The Service is rather conservative toward the cormorants, but it appears that the new rule will be a more positive approach that protects both the fish and birds. The Service is committed to completing the rule making by next year. I am very interested in hearing about how people felt about Cormorant abundance across the lake.

**Ken Pletcher**-Looks standard compared to other years around Cheboygan.

**Randy Terrian**-did some counting of the birds this spring. The birds are mainly greater in most areas where the fish are stocked. The migrators that show in river systems appear to be increasing. **Question**-is the month of October when the USFWS is supposed to come out with an updated cormorant management plan?

**Randy Claramunt**-Would not doubt if there may be a delay in the plan coming out because all of the state's comments were very extensive.

**Judy Ogden**-I have been seeing slightly more cormorants than usual in both the spring and fall. **Question:** Did Ontario establish an open season on Cormorants?

**Randy Claramunt**-That is correct. Cormorants are protected under the Migratory Treaty Act signed by the United States, Canada, and Mexico but Canada never signed to protect cormorants so the provinces can manage the birds outside of the Treaty Act. The province of Ontario did open a hunting season on Cormorants, and we are hoping to see their harvest data. This is not a great thing for us because USFWS will probably add the number killed in Canada to the model and that could reduce the number of birds taken in Michigan.

**Jay Wesley**-I had more angler complaints about Cormorants this year from Lake Michigan. Seems to be an increase in birds from Ludington and to the south.

**Steve Dey**-From the Brevort Lake/St. Ignace area we saw a marked increase this past spring. Each of the last 3-4 years we have seen the numbers increase. Without the removal of some birds chasing them around the lake is just a waste of time since they keep coming back.

**Fred Sterns**-From the Alpena area, I think more Cormorants were around this year.

**Frank**-Jerry Brown from Saginaw Bay says that numbers on Little Charity are really increasing and is discouraged that nothing is being done to control the numbers.

**Randy Claramunt**-USFWS will not consider a season on Cormorants. Also, we will not be able to implement the permitted 6,000 bird reduction that the DNR has this year because there are lots

of restrictions about where you can lethally control Cormorants. For example, Cormorants cannot be killed on federal lands and you must show that lethal control is not effective before lethal control can be used. We will not know for sure how many birds were killed until the data from US Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services, which remove many of the birds, reports the data.

**Tess Nelkie**-An online site called *eBird* <https://ebird.org/home>, that is maintained by Cornell University, allows birders to record where they are seeing birds which would be a tool to help learn the number of Cormorants observed along the Great Lakes across time.

**Randy Claramunt**-Part of the reason that he is asking for input on the number of birds observed is because the USFWS is predicting a decrease in population across the flyway. Modelers are trying to gauge on the ground observations to the modelling approach.

**Dan Manyen**-Has not been out as much this year as other years, but he has seen fewer Cormorants at the mouth of Saginaw River and fewer flocks in the Bay. Curious about the correlation of clear water and Cormorant abundance?

**Randy Terrian**-Clear water will lend to easier predation from flying Cormorants. Cloudier water can impair them, but not eliminate predation.

**Dave Fielder**-We do have a long-term dataset from nesting abundance. He has a request in for the 2020 data from the USFWS.

**Tom Heritier**-Seeing a lot more Cormorants in non-typical areas such as farm ponds and rivers. Not a lot observed on the lower Saginaw system.

**Tod Williams**-Stable numbers of Cormorants, but we are seeing more Pelicans especially out near Charity and Gravely Island.

**Tom Keerl**-Haven't seen as many Cormorants, but they have been in odd places like inland lakes and the city lagoon which he hasn't seen them at before.

### **Agency updates:**

**Nick Torsky, Law Enforcement Division**-A lot of uncertainty early on with budget and uncertainty in the commercial fishing industry. By mid-summer, we were mostly back to normal with patrol efforts. St. Martin's Bay's Tribal Salmon fishery has pretty much wound down. There were net entanglements in the Bay and in the Detour area because of improperly marked or abandon nets. Removal of the nets is mostly complete but we are still trying to remove an old net off Detour. Lt. Shaw mentioned that we are implementing a new net tracking system with a GIS mapping program. The digital system shows the locations of all known nets whether being used or abandoned. There are no more handwritten logs, and this new digital system will allow the officers to immediately know where all nets are across the Great Lakes.

**Jay Wesley, Lake Michigan Basin Coordinator**-At the last Lake Michigan Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee meeting, the proposed Terms of Reference was discussed, a decision was made to stock additional Chinook to replace the Steelhead that were not stocked this spring and discussed the poor survival of Brown Trout at most ports in Lake Michigan.

**Neal Godby, DNR Northern Lake Huron Unit Fisheries Biologist**-Mentioned a rough start to the field season, now conducting lots of field surveys, and work is being done on the Little Manistee River Chinook Salmon egg take.

**Jeff Jolley, Southern Lake Huron Unit Manager**-Walleye management work group is off the ground, two meetings so far. The goal is to have four meetings total and hoping to have them all completed by the end of the year, but that is dependent on everyone's schedule. Fishing Order 226.21 passed the Natural Resource Commission meeting in October which allows for additional fishing opportunity on the river systems during March and April while protecting spawning Walleye. The Grass Carp sampling for the year has been completed and no Grass Carp have been found but lots of Walleye were recovered in the river systems year-round.

**Todd Wills, DNR Lake St. Clair/Lake Erie and Alpena Fisheries Research Stations Manager**-Lake Huron/Lake St Clair 2020 field season is winding down. The Lake Huron gillnet and trawling surveys were completed. The commercial fishing sampling and Les Cheneaux Islands work is complete. Lake trout surveys are upcoming. The staff completed transfer of a new-to-us vessel from DNR Law Enforcement Division. The 25' 1998 SeaArk Commander known as the P/B Skoglund will be renamed the R/V Sander and refitted for nearshore gill netting, hydroacoustics, logger and acoustic receiver deployment/retrieval, and diving. The vessel last served DNR Law Enforcement Division in southwest Michigan during 2019. The station is assembling cost estimates to convert the R/V Smolt, the station's large jon boat, to a Great Lakes electrofisher.

**Dave Fielder, DNR Research Biologist and Modeler**-In Saginaw Bay the adult and juvenile walleye results had little change but there was a reduction in the Yellow Perch catch by about a third. The flood may have impacted Walleye reproduction a small amount, but it appears there was decent success. More details will be learned in the months to come when the data analysis is complete. The results of the Les Cheneaux Islands survey showed that the Yellow Perch catch was down significantly from the 2019 survey but the results from 2019 were higher than normal. There is some concern about predation on Yellow Perch from cormorants and Northern Pike but that will have to be sorted out. There was about a 20% decline in the Northern Pike catch but there is not much concern since it is one of the best Pike populations in the state.

**Dan Manyen-Question:** Wanted information about trawling data near Coreyon Reef. Dave said he could send some data to everyone when it is available.

**Jim Johnson Question**-Anglers are seeing Gizzard Shad in stomachs along with smelt, gobies and other prey. In addition, lots of reports of large clouds on fish finders. Are the fish surveys showing an increase in prey fish in Saginaw Bay and the Main Basin?

**Dave Fielder**-Lots of young Gizzard Shad and some alewives in the stomachs, but soon we can answer the question when the survey data are analyzed.

**Jim Johnson**-Any Lake Herring showing up yet?

**Dave Fielder**-Not yet, but we would expect them to show up this fall as adults. The US Fish and Wildlife Service will be setting nets this fall to see if any spawners are returning.

**Lee Martin Chat Box**-Hi Jim, I can second that Shad explosion here in Oscoda. huge schools of young shad and shiners off the pier heads

**Steve Lenart, DNR Tribal Coordination Unit**-Negotiations are ongoing, but not much can be provided. Because of a confidentiality agreement no specific information can be discussed. However, the current 2000 Consent Decree that was due to expire in August was extended to the end of the year. Negotiations are continuing through online Zoom meetings.

**Ed Eisch, Fish Production Manager**-The Salmon egg take is ongoing at the Little Manistee Weir. All Chinook eggs have been taken, 3.9 million for us and the allotted amount for Illinois. The staff did an excellent job working through all of the Covid challenges. Currently, there is no need to take eggs at the Swan Weir. The capital outlay project at Thompson is on time and should be mostly completed by Nov. 15<sup>th</sup>. The first year quarantine of the Arctic Grayling broodstock was completed at the Oden Fish Hatchery and the fish were moved to Marquette to serve the rest of their term.

**Aaron Switzer, DNR Fish Production Manager**-The Atlantic Salmon remaining at the Platte River Hatchery are healthy and there are no issues for Atlantic Salmon at the Harrietta Hatchery.

**Jon Jackoviak, DNR Harrietta Hatchery Manager**-The Atlantic Salmon to be stocked in the spring are scheduled to be marked in January

**Matt Hughes, DNR Wolf Lake Hatchery**-not much to add from Wolf Lake

**Christian Lesage, DNR**-Regulations are winding down at the Natural Resources Commission, just one left to go (a director's order in November). Starting to work on the fishing digest for 2021.

**Randy Espinoza, DNR Thompson Fish Hatchery**-not much to add, Ed covered it.

**Randy Claramunt**-Party fishing proposal was not adopted. The Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee Advisory committee did not support Chinook Salmon stocking to replace Steelhead because of no Steelhead egg take this past spring. Supplemental budget bill has been approved to send \$8 million to support Asian Carp from entering the Great Lakes. Illinois will need to match that funding. Ballast water bill is now open for comment on the federal level.

*Frank Krist*-Next meeting will probably be in early March but hoping that we will be meeting normally again by the end of next year.

1:00 Adjourn.