Lake Michigan Citizen's Fishery Advisory Committee Meeting
Draft Minutes
April 17th, 2018
Cabela's in Grandville

Attendees: Denny Grinold, Jay Wesley, Dave Caroffino, Ben Turschak, George Freeman, Denny Kuenzer, Gregg Mariuz, Gary Smith, Glen Buehner, Rick Kretzschmar, Jim Dexter, Lt. Mike Feagan, Cpl. Sean Kehoe, Cpl. Nick Torsky, Jim Bedford, Mike Verhamme, Dan O'Keefe, Theresa Krist, Frank Krist, John Stegmeier, Wes Newberry, Eric Andersen, Donna Wesander, Blaise Pewinski, Mark Williams, Paul Jenson, Jason Phelps, Chip Klein, Ron Tabiadon, Bill Winowiecki, Christian LeSage, Scott Heintzelman, Brian Gunderman, Elyse Walter, Todd Grischke, Ed Eisch, Dennis Eade, Nick Popoff, Steve Vanderalaan, and Jeff Dehn.

Yellow Perch Possession Limit

Fisheries Division is taking the temperature of anglers, advisors and angler groups regarding the idea of changing the yellow perch statewide possession limit from 50 to 25. Yellow perch continue to be one of the most sought after fish throughout Michigan's inland and Great lakes. Some anglers and groups have had more interest in quality fishing and have requested lower limits in some systems. Saginaw Bay and Gogebic Lake currently have a 25 yellow perch possession limit, and Lake Michigan below the 45th Parallel has a 35 perch limit. MUCC has a draft resolution to change the statewide limit to 25. Rather than continue to add exceptions to the Fishing Guide, Fisheries Division would like to know if there is support to make a statewide change.

Advisors seemed comfortable with the existing bag limits for yellow perch in Lake Michigan and there was not much interest to make a change. There was more interest by advisors to consider changing inland lakes to 25. An angler survey will also be going out through GovDelivery.

Below are Lake Michigan regulations from other states:

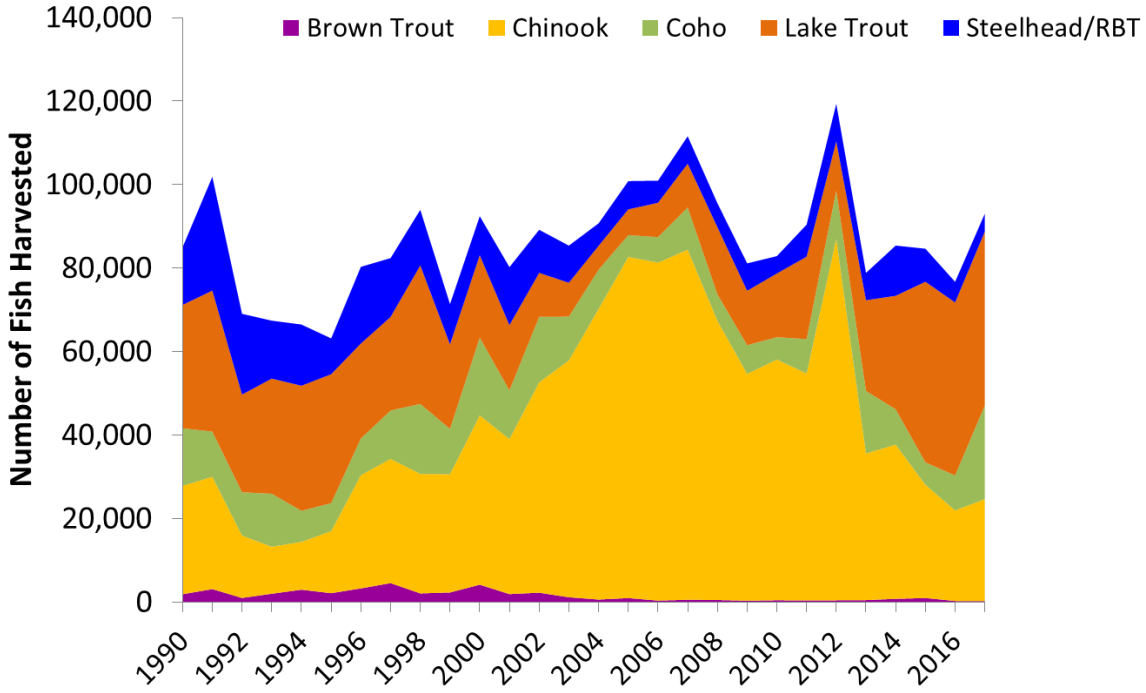
Sportfishing regulations:

- Illinois
  - May 1 through June 15; closed to sportfishing for yellow perch
  - Daily bag limit 15 fish
- Indiana
  - No closed season for yellow perch
  - Daily bag limit 15 fish
- Michigan
  - No closed season for yellow perch
  - Daily bag limit; 35 fish (south of the 45th parallel) / 50 fish (north of 45th parallel and Grand Traverse Bays)
- Wisconsin (Lake Michigan)
  - May 1 through June 15; closed to sportfishing for yellow perch
  - Daily bag limit 5 fish
- Wisconsin (Green Bay)
  - March 16 through May 19; closed to sportfishing for yellow perch
  - Daily bag limit 15 fish

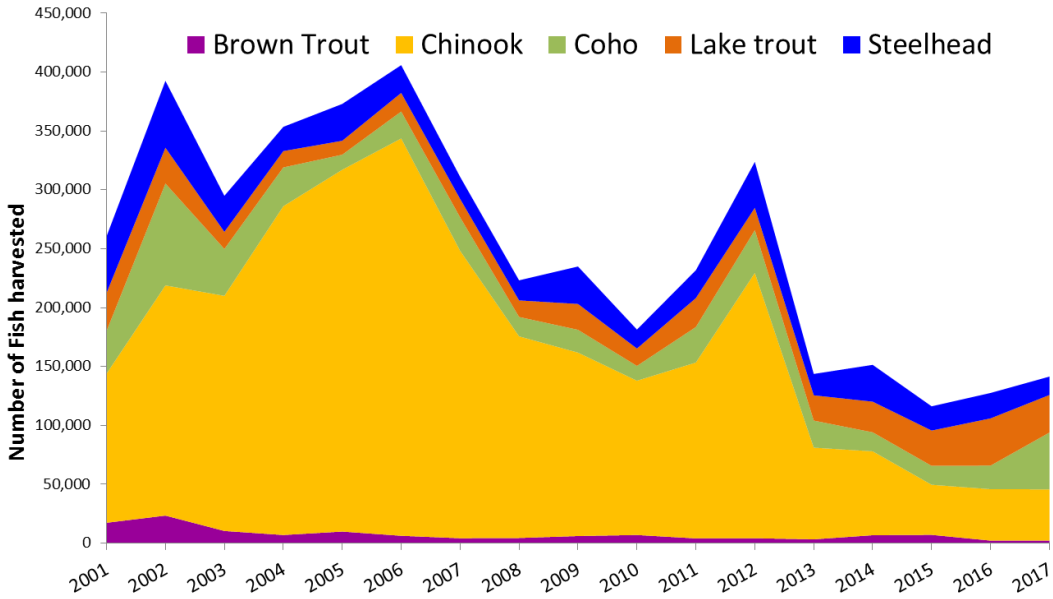
2017 Charter and Creel Harvest and Effort

Donna Wesander gave an update on the 2017 Charter and Creel data.

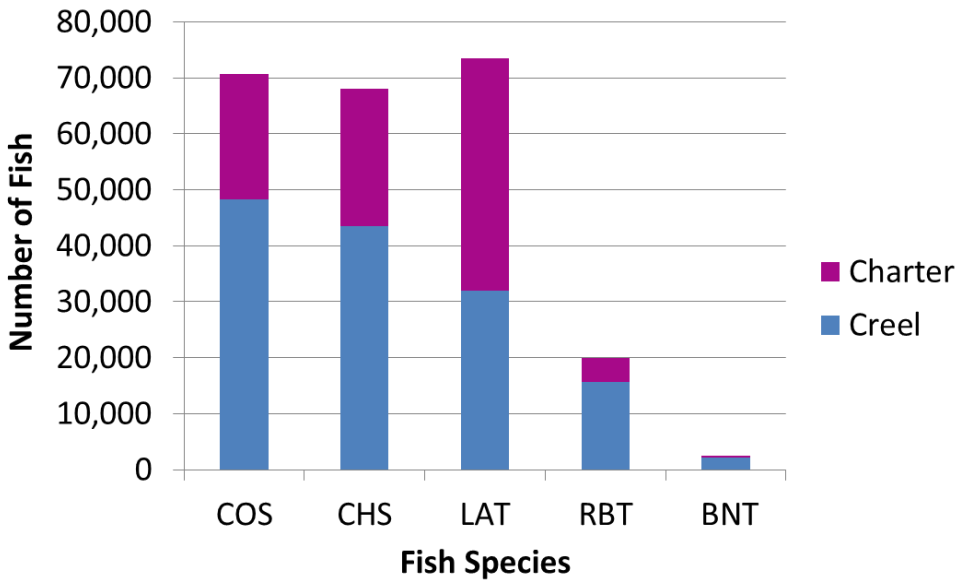
Charter excursions continue to stay robust. There were 12,100 in 2017.
Harvest was dominated by lake trout and Chinook salmon with a nice increase in coho salmon.



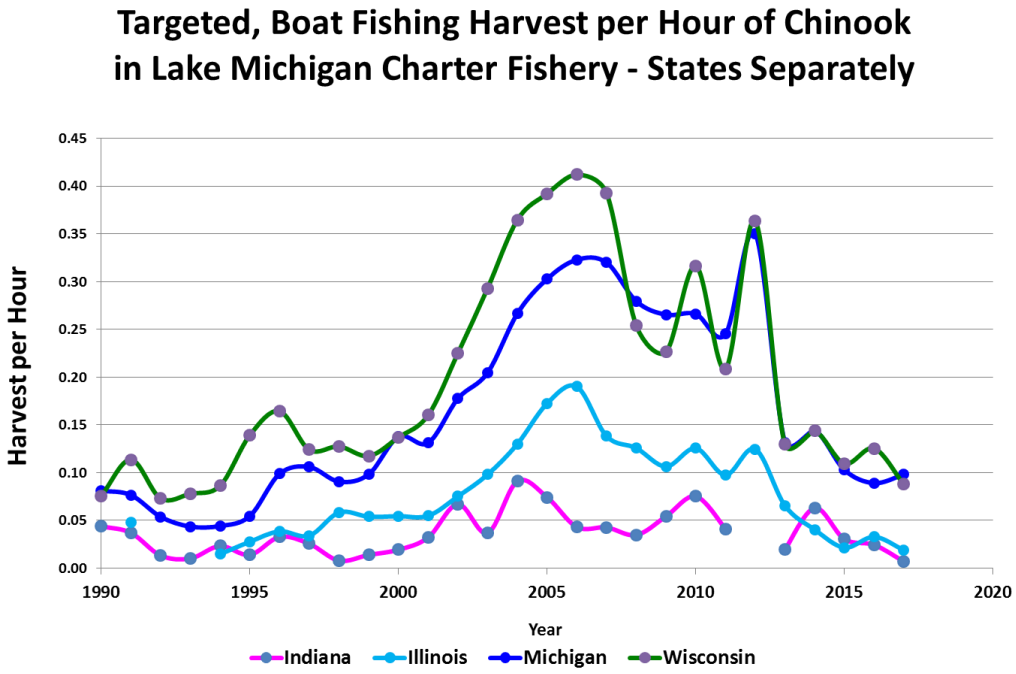
Creel harvest was up slightly with a mix of Chinook salmon, coho salmon, lake trout and steelhead. Creel effort increased from 687,000 in 2016 to 1.3 million in 2017.



Total harvest was made up with mostly lake trout, coho salmon and Chinook salmon with much less steelhead and brown trout.



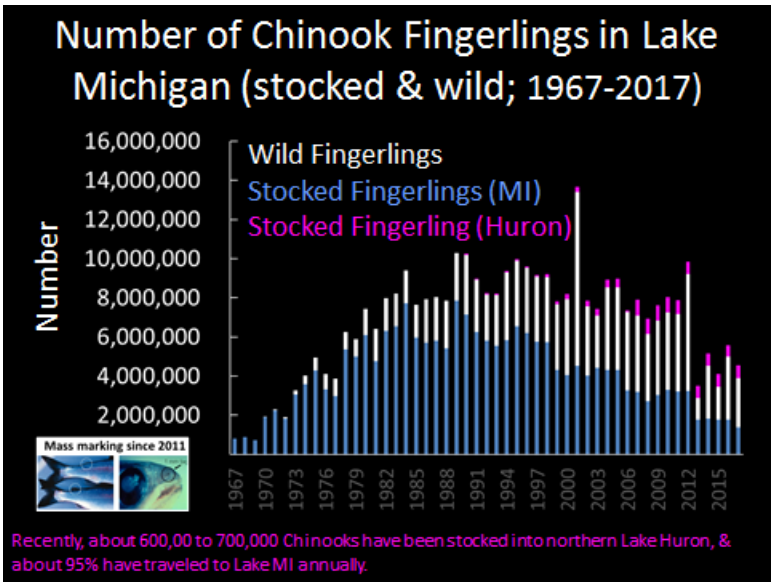
Michigan's targeted Chinook salmon harvest rate was similar to Wisconsin in 2017.



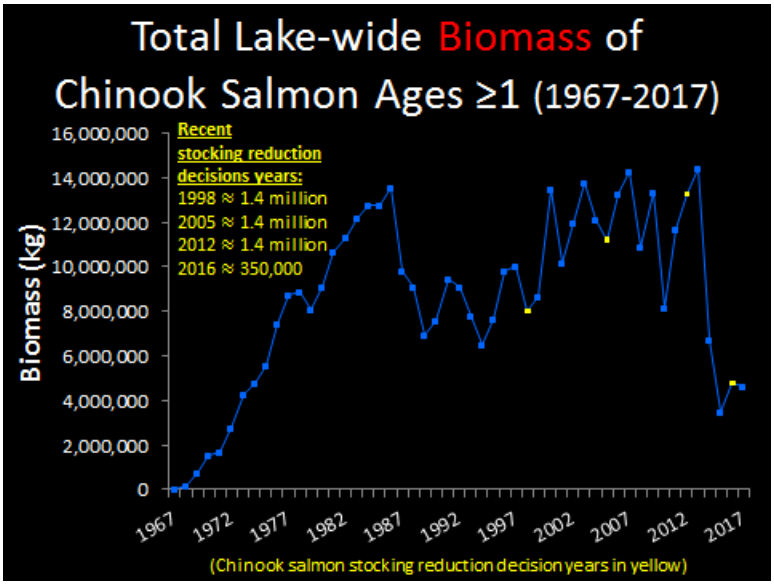
Ludington excursions were similar to last year at 1,108 with 8,901salmon and trout caught. Grand Haven reported 1,402 trips with 10,983 caught. Holland trips continue to increase since 2013 with 610 in 2017 and 6,479 salmon and trout caught. Saugatuck caught 4,720 fish with 370 trips. South Haven had 698 trips with 6,547 caught. St. Joe had 858 trips with 10,519 fish caught.

Predator and Prey Ratio Results for 2017

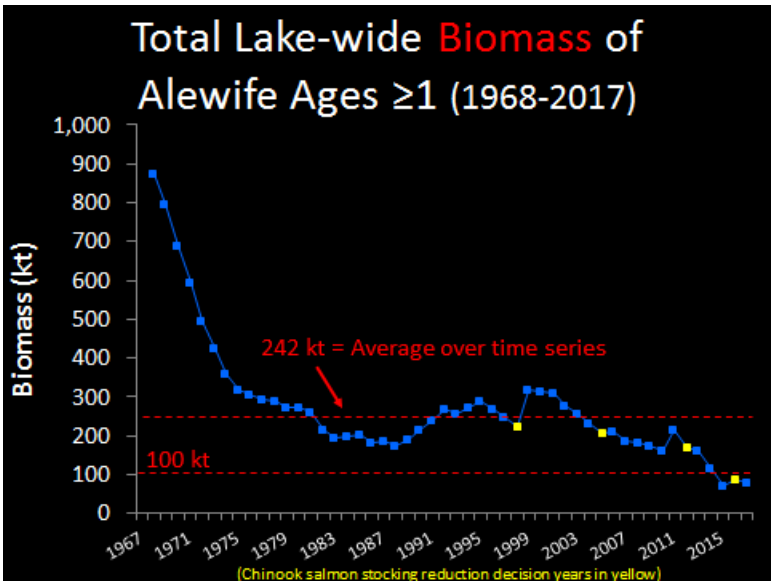
Ben Turschak (the new Research Biologist at Charlevoix) gave a brief review of the predator and prey ratio modeling process. Chinook salmon fingerlings in Lake Michigan bottomed out in 2013 due to stocking reductions and poor survival of wild fish. Even with the most recent stocking reduction the number of Chinook fingerlings has increased in recent years mainly due to better wild fish survival.



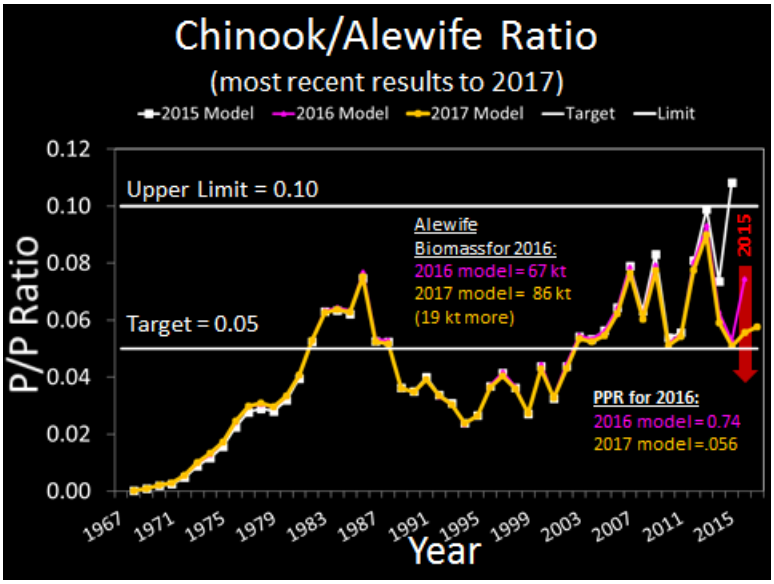
Biomass of Chinook salmon bottomed out in 2015 and has increased slightly the last two years.



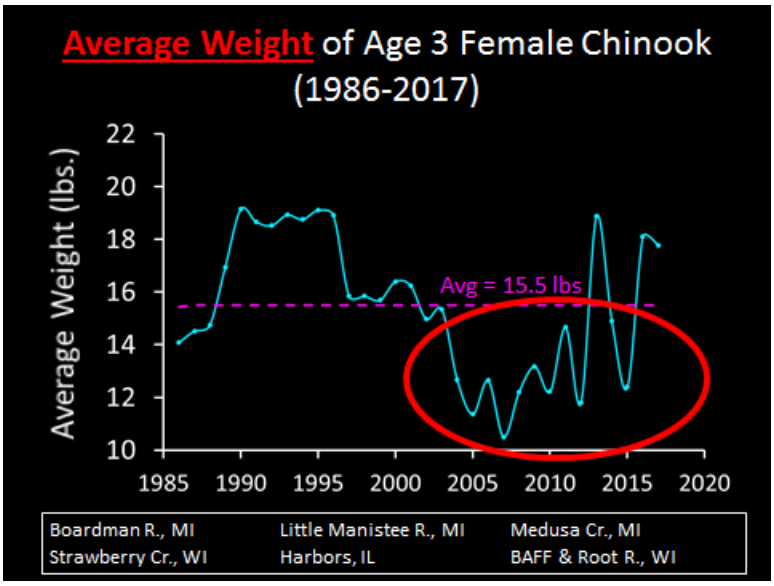
Alewife abundance is determined through a statistical catch at age model that incorporates trawl and hydro-acoustic data, alewife size at age, and total consumption by predators. Total lake-wide biomass of alewife was 81 kt in 2017, which is below the long-term average of 242 kt.



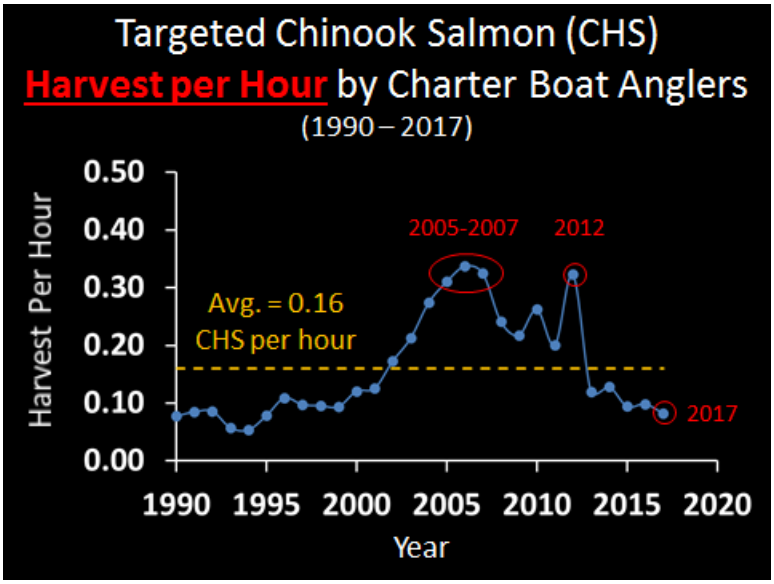
SCAA models build on previous years of data and so the most recent years estimate fluctuates more than previous years because the least amount of data is available for that estimate. The alewife age structure is also highly truncated so that we used to see alewife that were form 1-8 or 9 years old, now we typically only see alewife up to about 5-6 years old. This is especially problematic in these models because young alewife (age 0) dominates the population on any given year and we only have one year of data. With each subsequent year, we have more information (age 0 become age 1 and so on) so the model becomes more accurate. Below are the model runs for the last three years with the 2017 ratio being 0.056 which is just above our target:



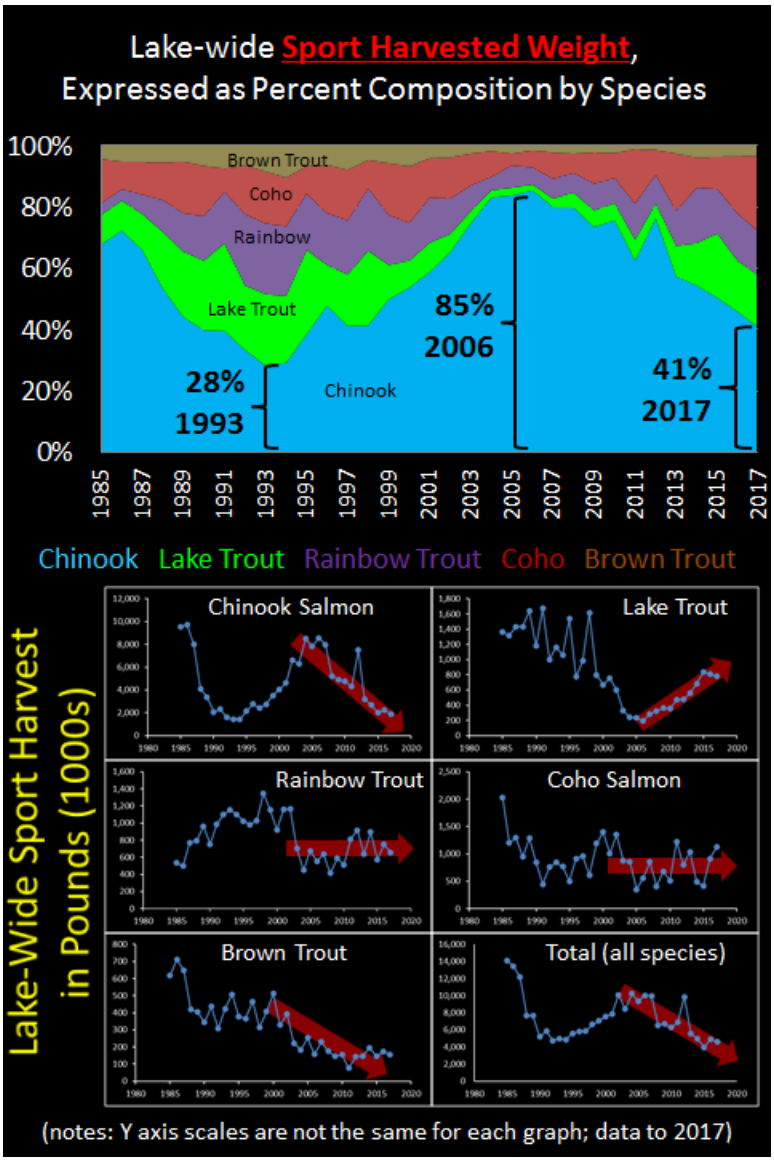
Other indicators are also used with the ratio to determine the status of Chinook salmon and to inform future management actions. Average weight of age 3 females has been variable in recent years and was above average in 2017.



Lake-wide targeted Chinook salmon charter boat harvest can be an indicator of Chinook abundance and can indicate an out of balance situation when catch rates are really high like in 2012.



Overall we are seeing fewer Chinook salmon and brown trout in the sport catch lake-wide with relatively stable catches of coho salmon and steelhead. Lake trout catches are increasing lake-wide.



Based on the predator and prey ratio and other indicators, the Lake Michigan Committee will stay the course and are not planning any major changes to our stocking strategy. Each state can continue to work with their constituent groups to adjust their species mix as long as they stay within their predator cap.

Lake Michigan Committee Meeting Review

Highlights of the March 2018 Lake Michigan Committee were given. These meetings are open to the public and are a great opportunity to see the most recent survey results and reports for the lake.

Mass marking continues for all lake trout. Age 2 to 5 Chinook salmon are also coded-wire tagged. All steelhead are tagged and/or have an adipose fin clip starting with the 2018 stocking year. Wild lake trout range from 25 to 30% in the southern portion of the lake and is about 13%

in northern Lake Michigan based on angler caught fish. Wild Chinook salmon in the angler catch ranges from 66 to 93% on the east side of Lake Michigan to 57 to 78% on the west side of the lake. Lake Huron ranged from 15 to 71%. Wild Chinook year class strength is increasing after hitting a low in 2013. Approximately, 4 million wild smolts were present in 2016 indicating that the number of 2 year old Chinook salmon should be better this year.

The trawl and acoustic data was reviewed. Lake-wide biomass of prey continues to be low with slight increases in alewife, bloater, and smelt. Age truncation of alewife is still a concern. Only six year classes of alewife are detected, which is better than the all-time low of four year classes seen in 2012. Historically, there were eight to nine year classes of alewife.

Sea lamprey targets have been met for the third year in a row due to more use of TFM and after control efforts on the Manistique River.

Yellow perch numbers continue to be low although there was a strong 2015 year class. Commercial fishing for yellow perch remains closed in Illinois and Indiana. There is a limited tribal commercial fishery in 1836 Treaty Waters of Lake Michigan, and Wisconsin only allows a limited harvest in Green Bay.

The salmon and trout Fish Community Objectives continue to be met with lake trout representing 20-25% of the lake-wide harvest. Mortality of lake trout is close to target for the first time in 25 years due to lower sea lamprey mortality and lower commercial harvest. Mortality rates in the southern portion of the lake remain under target due to low commercial harvest and sea lamprey abundance. Egg deposition continues to improve, and fall assessments are meeting targets throughout the lake. Spring assessments are below target throughout the lake and may require a review of methods and/or the established target level because all other metrics are improving for lake trout.

Reports from the Lake Michigan Committee meeting can be found on the Lake Michigan Management Plan website at: https://mdnrlmfmp.wordpress.com/

2018/2019 Salmon and Trout Stocking Plan

The final review of the stocking proposals that we worked on last fall for brown trout, coho salmon, Chinook salmon and lake trout was with the Technical Fisheries Committee (TFC) per the 2000 Consent Decree. Pre-proposals for each species were provided to the five Tribal Nations and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 45 days prior to their meeting. The TFC met on March 26th and approved the brown trout, coho salmon, and Chinook salmon proposals and unanimously rejected the lake trout proposal. Under the Consent Decree, we cannot proceed with a stocking change in 1836 Treaty waters without consensus by the TFC. Therefore, we are looking at further stocking adjustments in 2019 to stay within the Lake Michigan Committee predator cap.

Per the Lake Michigan Committee predator cap for Michigan, 104,000 equivalents are required to be reduced for the 2019 stocking year. These equivalents or stocking reductions could be obtained by reducing Chinook salmon, brown trout, coho salmon or a combination of those

species. Steelhead are not on the table due to the mass marking study that was initiated this year. Below are examples of the reductions by species if we took just a single species approach:

- Chinook salmon = 104,000
- Brown trout = 228,800
- Coho salmon = 332,800
- Steelhead (not being considered) = 249,600

Discussion provided a list of seven options that included:

- Reduce brown trout
- Reduce Lake Huron given 95% movement
- Reduce coho salmon
- Reduce brown trout and coho salmon
- Keep the numbers the same as now
- Reduce Chinook salmon
- Reduce equal equivalents of brown trout, coho salmon, and Chinook salmon

Advisors were able to pick their top option and keep numbers the same was highest followed by reduce Lake Huron, reduce coho salmon, reduce equal equivalents of all three, and reduce Chinook salmon.

Since the two highest options were options that require approval by other groups, Fisheries Division provided an anonymous survey to advisors to consider options that were within the Lake Michigan decision space and that recognized an agreed upon predator cap.

The SoGo survey resulted in 19 responses. The options in order of top votes were:

1. Reduce equal equivalents of Chinook salmon, brown trout, and coho salmon (7 votes).
2. Reduce Chinook salmon by 104,000 (6 votes).
3. Reduce brown trout by 228,000 (5 votes).
4. Reduce brown trout by 114,400 and coho by 166,400 (1 vote).
5. Reduce coho salmon by 332,800 (0 votes).

Based on a weighted score of ranks below is the ranking order based on 20 responses:

1. Reduce equal equivalents of Chinook salmon, brown trout, and coho salmon (79).
2. Reduce brown trout by 114,400 and coho by 166,400 (68).
3. Reduce Chinook salmon by 104,000 (57).
4. Reduce brown trout by 228,000 (56).
5. Reduce coho salmon by 332,800 (40).

The Lake Michigan Basin Team will review these options and make some recommendations prior to fall egg take.

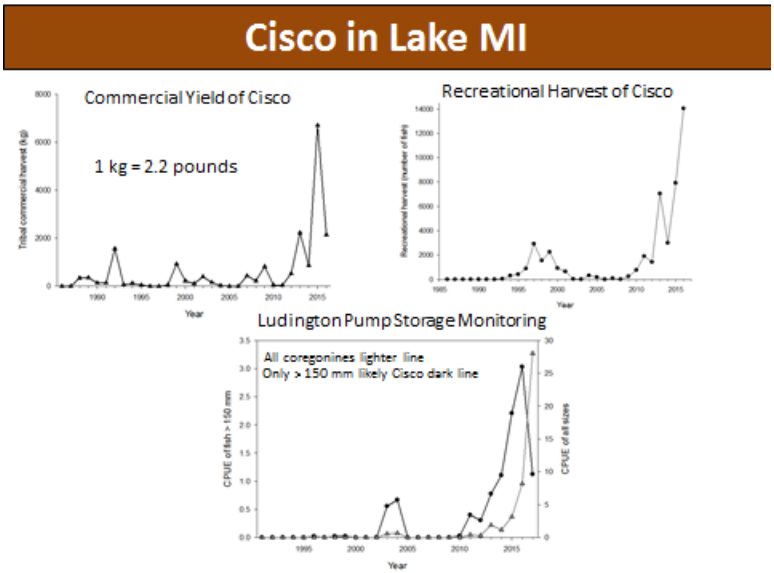
Fishery Marketing Activities for 2018

Elyse Walter highlighted marketing efforts for the Lake Michigan fishery. The Road Map to Fishing Lake Michigan is on the web and 250 color printed copies are available. This content

helps people know what fish are available and when and where to fish for them. A promotional video will be done this spring/summer. Boosted content with a blog will go on Facebook and we will continue to use our GovDelivery email system. This content will also go to our legislators and to local convention and visitors bureaus. We hope to create positive responses and better stories for the Lake Michigan fishery.

Cisco Update and Discussion

Lake Michigan cisco population crashed in the late 1950s due to over fishing and ecosystem changes from an influx of invasive species. With alewife and other prey biomass at historic lows and given the more oligotrophic characteristics to Lake Michigan, there has been an interest to restore cisco in Lake Michigan. More recently, harvest of cisco has been increasing in northern Lake Michigan and is expanding throughout the lake. Understanding this population will be important prior to initiating a rehabilitation plan for cisco. There are also concerns about genetics, what forms to stock, whether there is an empty niche to fill, and regarding current cisco diets that consist mostly of spiny water fleas, alewife and gobies.



The Lake Michigan Committee is currently reviewing a white paper on native prey restoration. Michigan's position is to wait and see how the existing form expands throughout the lake and to gain a better understanding of genetics and diet. We are supportive of habitat protection and enhancement.

Law Enforcement Updates

Law Enforcement has had three retirements (Steve Huff, Shannon Van Patten, and Larry Desloover) and has added six new officers.

Lt. Dave Shaw (Wildlife Resource Protection Section Supervisor) oversees special operations units like GLEU and SIU).

2nd/Lt. Terry Short is the Great Lakes Enforcement Supervisor

Cpl. Marvin Gerlach and Cpl. Mike Hammill will handle northern Lake Michigan and central/western Lake Superior.

Cpl. Jon Busken is the U.P. investigator working with wholesale records, state and Tribal commercial fisheries, and AIS investigations.

Cpl. Nick Torsky is the L.P. investigator and lead on AIS investigations and will also handle state and Tribal commercial fisheries.

2nd/Lt. Mike Feagan is a Great Lakes Enforcement Unit Supervisor and oversees the following positions:

Cpl. Craig Milkowski is handling northern Lake Huron and Northern Lake Michigan.

Cpl. Sean Kehoe is handling northern and southern Lake Michigan.

Fisheries Division Updates

- Continue to prepare for 2020 Consent Decree.
- Cost of living and inflationary adjustments continue to reduce the overall budget power of Sport Fish Restoration and Game and Fish Funds. It has made it difficult to fill vacancies.
- Berrien Springs Fish Ladder might have a new web cam in the near future.
- Stocking of fish has been challenging this spring with the late snow storms.
- Progress has been made with Thompson Fish Hatchery's new deep well and coolwater ponds improvements.

Next Meeting:

October 2nd, 2018 at MUCC (2101 Wood Street) Lansing.