

Lake Michigan Citizen's Fishery Advisory Committee Meeting
DRAFT Minutes
April 23rd, 2020
Microsoft Teams

Attendees: Denny Grinold, Jay Wesley, Chuck Pistis, Paul Jensen, Scott Carey, Kevin Hughes, Jim Fenner, Martha VanAmburg, Bart Bale, Seth Herbst, Frank Pearson, Dan O'Keefe, Frank Krist, John Stegmeier, Jason Phelps, Bill Winowiecki, Dennis Eade, Brian Gunderman, Dave Clapp, Gary Smith, Mark Tonello, Sean Kehoe, Troy VanGelderren, Dave Peterson, Wes Newberry, Bob Reider, Eric Braden, Craig Milkowski, Larry Atkin, Donna Wesander, Ben Turschak, Scott Heintzeman, Rick Clark, Troy Zorn, Randy Claramunt, Alexa Curtis, Randy Espinoza, Ed Baker, Dave Caroffino, Ed Barr, Dave Shaw, Jeff Dehn, Jim Bos, and Mike Verhamme.

Roll Call

- Attendees joined the Teams meeting via video or conference call.

Advisor Reports

- With the virtual meeting and no boating at the time, advisor updates and fishing reports were not given.

Review of COVID-19 Impacts

- Egg takes – no walleye, muskellunge, or steelhead
 - Consider use of Chinook salmon equivalents for 2021 to mitigate steelhead stocking
- No Arctic Grayling eggs from Alaska
- Fish Stocking
 - Steelhead, Coho salmon, and brown trout done – CONSOLIDATED
 - Chinooks direct stocked in late April and early May
 - Lake trout stocked nearshore
- Assessments
 - Creel and lake netting assessments are on hold (all states, tribal and federal)
 - Many Lake Michigan staff on layoff through May 9th
 - No Charter Boat data
- Mass Marking – Chinook salmon were not clipped (index and lake movement)
- Sea Lamprey Control – TFM treatments and trapping delayed

Discussion followed for the need to allow boating and that the Michigan Charter Boat Association sent a letter to the Director expressing interest to allow Charter Boat operations under PPE and social distancing guidance. Some expressed gratitude towards Law Enforcement and Conservation Officers for educating boaters and anglers with these vague Executive Orders.

Regulations

- Changes for 2020

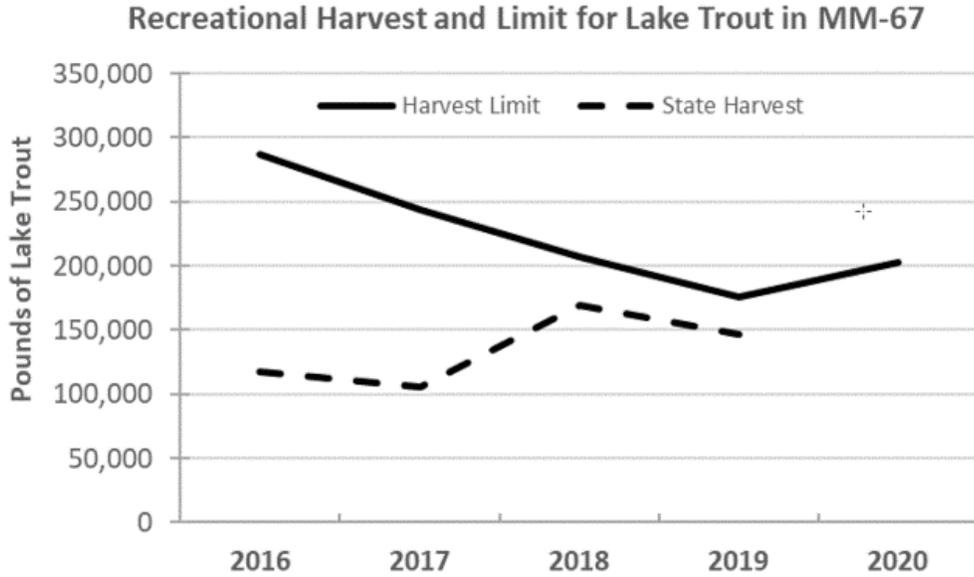
- Cisco, lake whitefish, and round whitefish daily possession limit is 10 for the Great Lakes and drowned river mouth lakes; possession limit is 5 for inland waters.
- MM-4 (Grand Traverse Bay) lake trout daily possession limit is 2
- Proposed changes and seeking public feedback
 - The Betsie River; closed to fishing all year within 100 feet of the lamprey barrier and fish passage facility, ***closed to fishing from August 1 to November 15 within 300 feet of the lamprey barrier and fish passage facility.***
 - Smallmouth and Largemouth Bass Possession Season in MM4 Grand Traverse Bay; July 1- December 31, open to CIR all year. *(Same regulation as the Beaver Island Archipelago).*
 - Party Fishing Limits – Combine the daily possession limit for all in a party or on a boat

In the following discussion, advisors mentioned the continued need for educating anglers to not catch and release lake trout in MM-4 (Grand Traverse Bay). Advisors were generally in favor of the proposed regulation changes other than enforcement would be difficult with the party fishing limits for ice, shore, or pier fishing. The Party Fishing Limits does make sense on a Charter Boat and might work for boats in general.

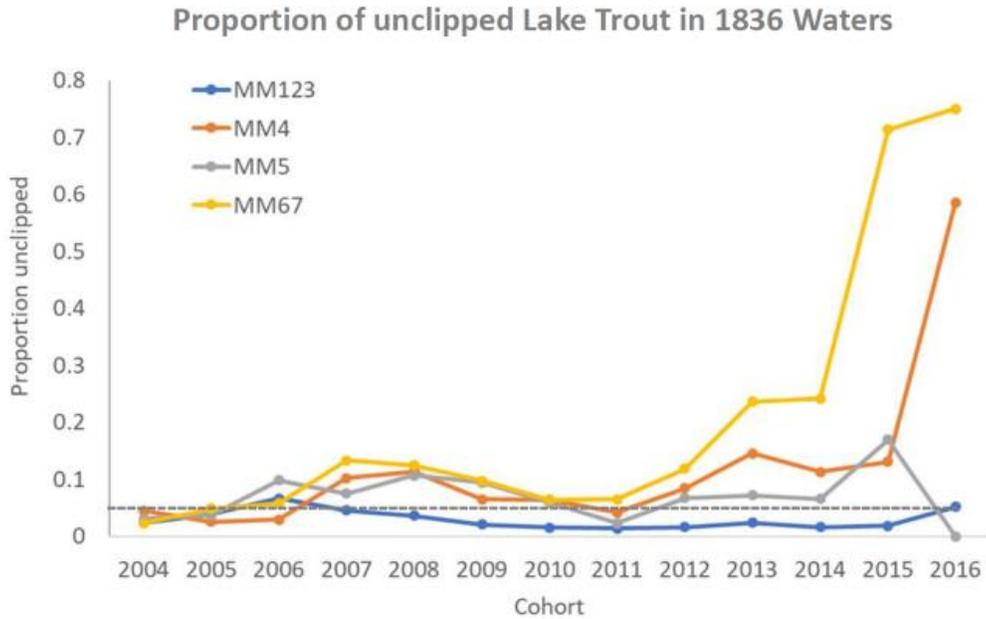
2000 Consent Decree Lake Trout Harvest Limits

- Dave Caroffino gave an overview of harvest limits for Lake Michigan. An annual report describing the lake trout populations and established harvest limits for both the state and tribes is available at: https://www.michigan.gov/documents/dnr/2018CD-ImplementationReport_655329_7.pdf
- Below are the harvest limits and actual harvest for MM 6,7. The concern is that the limit used to be much higher in the early 2000's compared to now. There were some issues with the model that were adjusted, and we went through a period with higher sea lamprey mortality and now that sea lamprey mortality is low. The 2020 harvest limit is expected

to be around 200,000 pounds for the state.



- Estimates of wild lake trout continue to go up in the southern portion of Lake Michigan and in Grand Traverse Bay. Older lake trout models did not handle wild fish very well, so that influenced available harvest. The Technical Fisheries Committee is addressing wild fish with model updates.



Recent Harvest and Harvest Limits

Unit	2019 Limit (lb)	2019 Harvest (lb)*	2020 Limit (lb)**
MM-123	80,000	57,679	80,000
MM-4	61,539	47,574	77,200
MM-5	67,262	55,350	72,955
MM-67	176,115	147,119	202,532

*Harvest includes throwback mortality: number of released fish remains high in MM-4

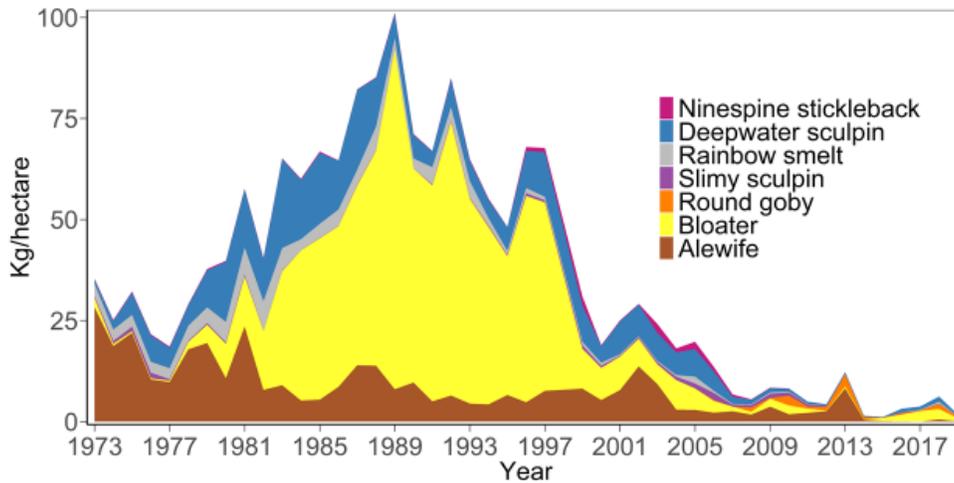
**2020 limits have not yet been finalized; TFC meeting scheduled for April 27th

Dave also discussed recent movement matrix data for lake trout and some consideration to combine units. There was more discussion from advisors that they were concerned about the drastic reduction in harvest limits from 2001 until now. This presentation along with improvements to the model addresses some of those concerns. There was also a comment that lake trout harvest is in correlation with harvest of other silver fish like Chinook salmon. When Chinooks are not available, anglers target lake trout.

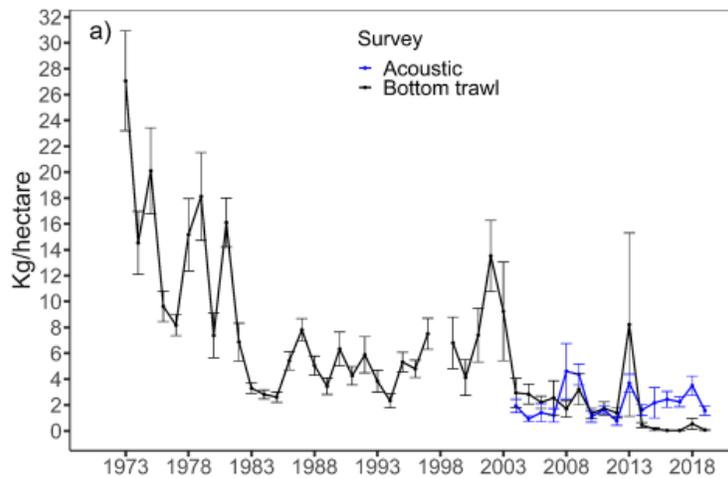
2019 Fisheries Data Updates

The 2019 bottom trawl survey sampled nearly record low numbers of prey. USGS pulled the R/V Arcticus for repairs and addressed some noise concerns. There continues to be a divergence between the bottom trawl and acoustic survey since 2015.

Bottom Trawl for 2019

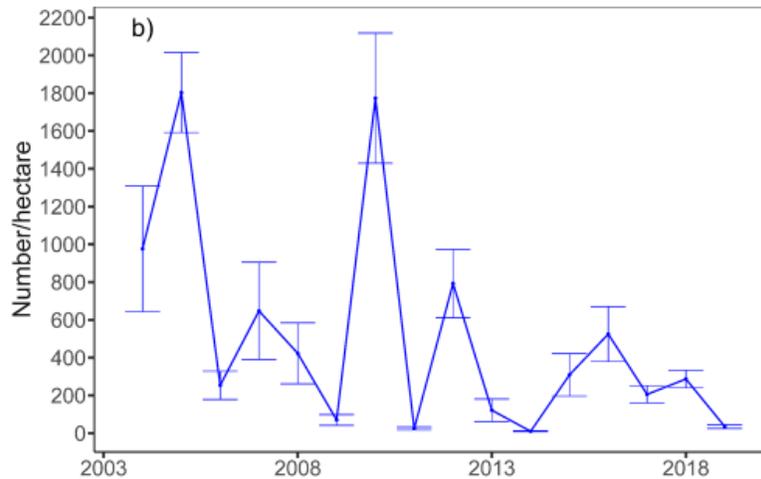


Acoustic and Bottom Trawl Alewife Density



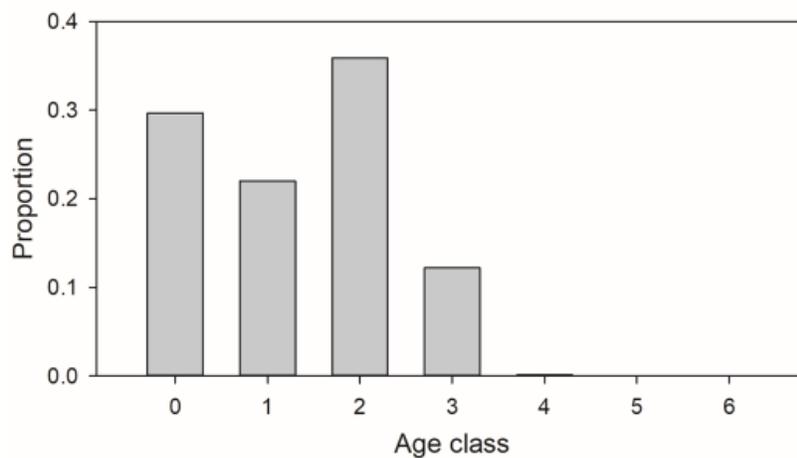
The 2019-year class of alewife was low in the acoustic survey marking a couple years in a row without an average or strong year class.

Age-0 Alewife

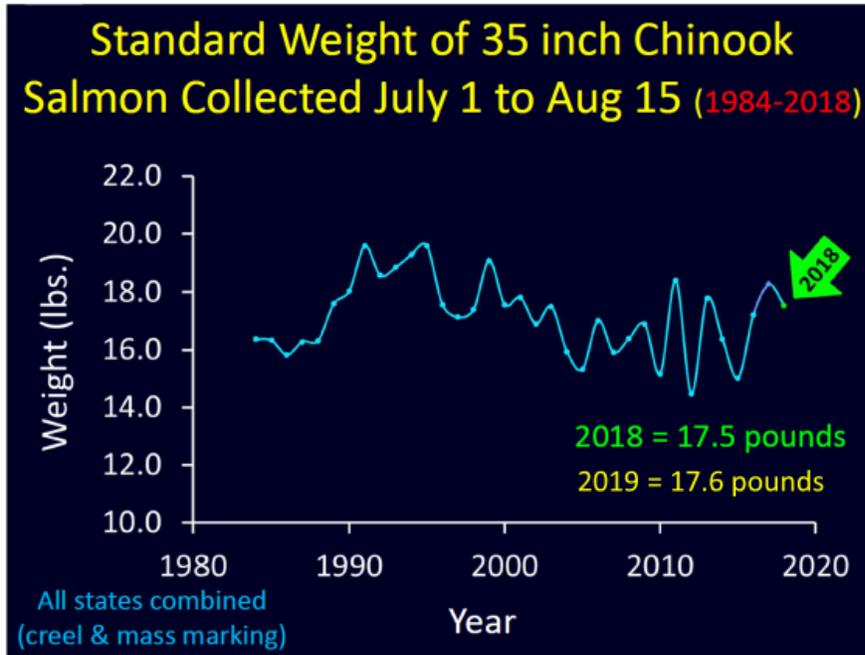


The alewife that have been aged from the bottom trawl and mid-water trawl (acoustics) shows a young population that truncates after age 3.

Alewife

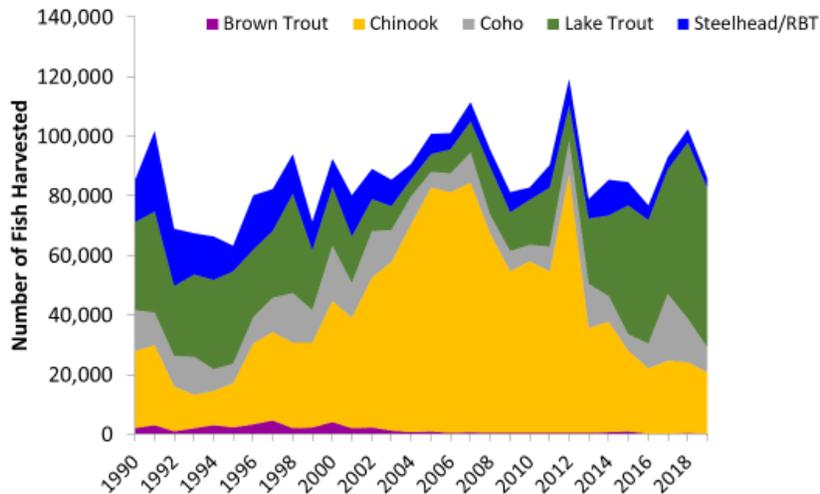


On the other hand, Chinook salmon weight continues to be good indicating a good balance between predators and prey. The lower numbers of Chinook are in balance with the current alewife abundance. Chinook weight was similar in 2019 compared to 2018 at 17.6 pounds for a 35-inch Chinook salmon.

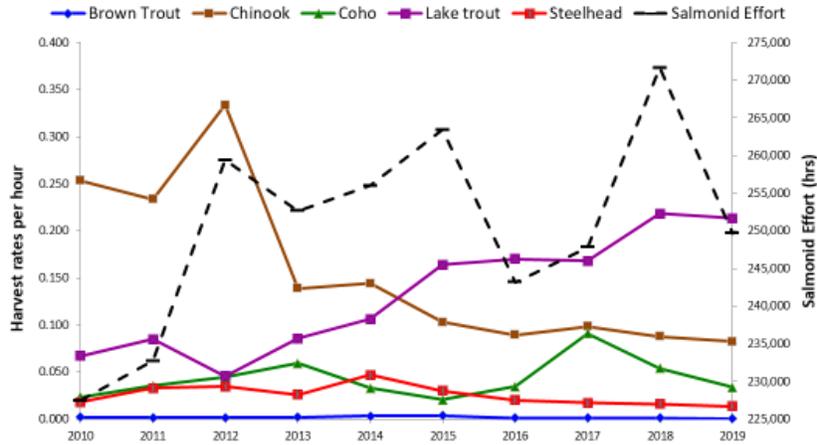


The Michigan charter boat harvest was dominated by lake trout and Chinook salmon, and the effort continued to be consistent through 2019. It is estimated that effort will be substantially lower for 2020.

SOM Lake Michigan (GL only) Charter Angler Salmonid Harvest, 1990-2019

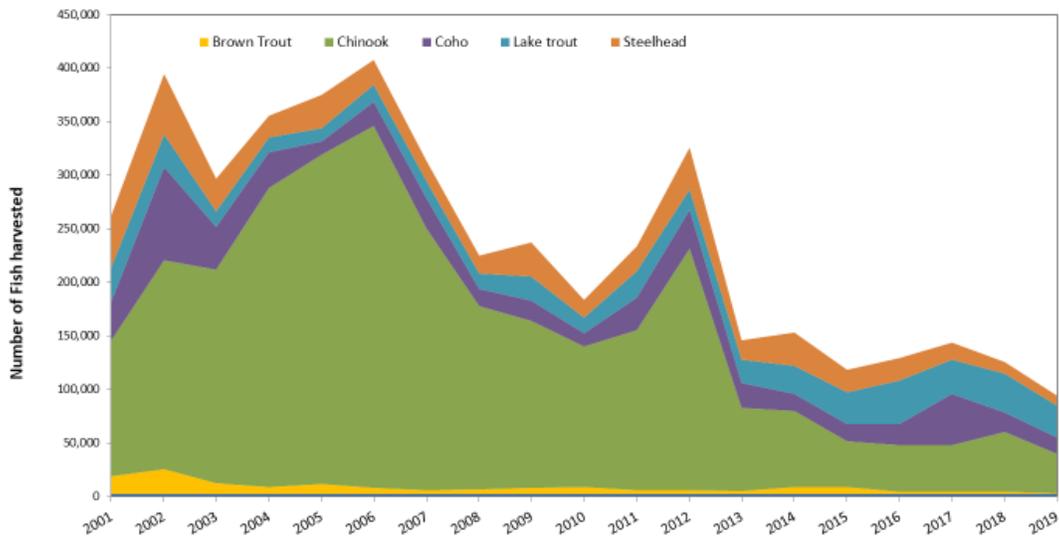


SOM Lake Michigan (GL only) Charter Harvest Rate and Effort

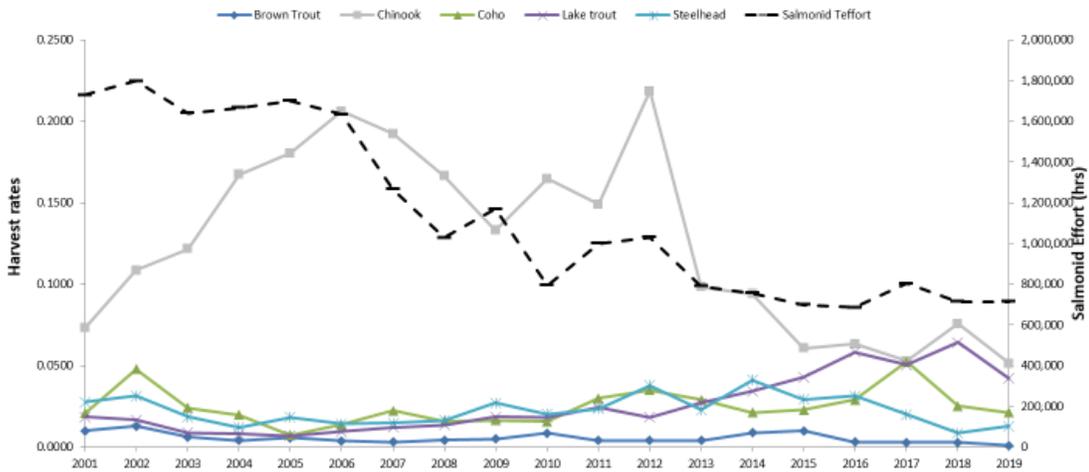


Creel harvest continues to decline and is dominated by Chinook salmon and lake trout. Effort stabilized around 800,000 angler hours, which is below the goal of 1.2 million angler hours. Although big fish seem to create some excitement, it has not provided an increase in effort compared to years when harvest was higher for Chinook salmon.

Lake Michigan Creel Harvest

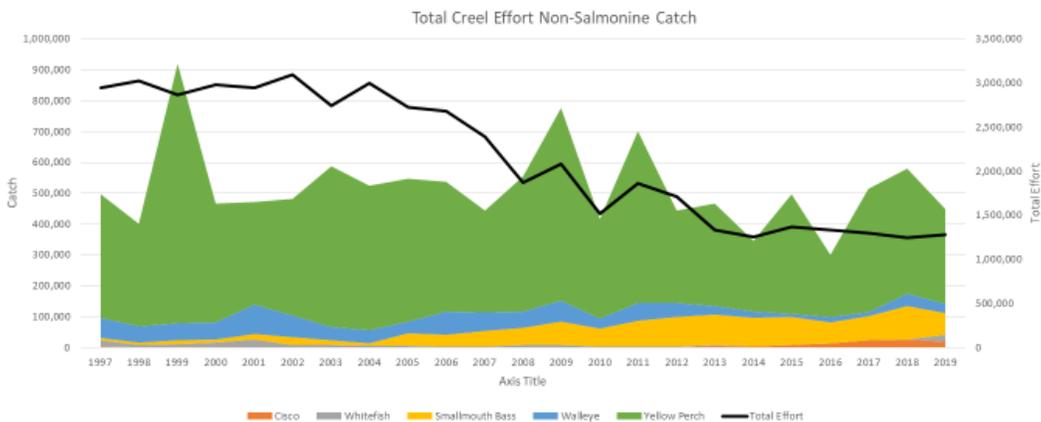


Lake Michigan Creel Harvest Rate and Effort



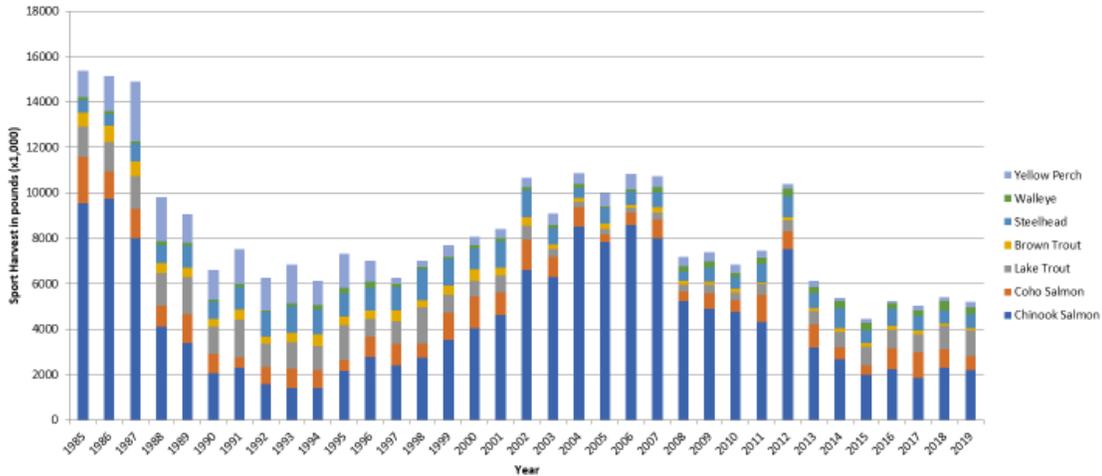
Total effort continues to be over a million anglers and considers yellow perch, smallmouth bass, walleye and cisco effort.

Total Creel Effort with other Species Catch



Lake-wide effort combining all states and modes (charter and creel) of recreational harvest continues to be dominated by Chinook salmon and lake trout. Overall harvest continues to be low and may be an indication of the new normal. Perhaps recent nearshore productivity may increase this some in future years.

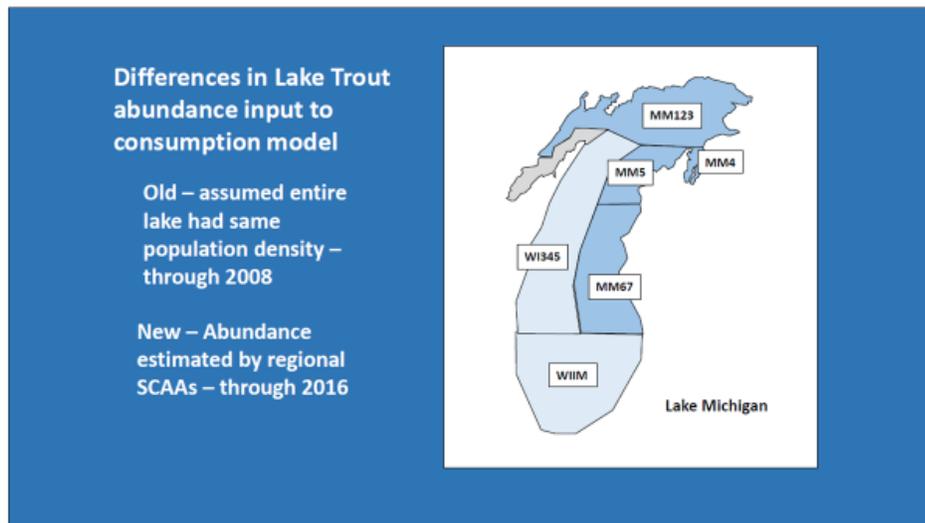
Lake Michigan Lake-Wide Sport Harvest



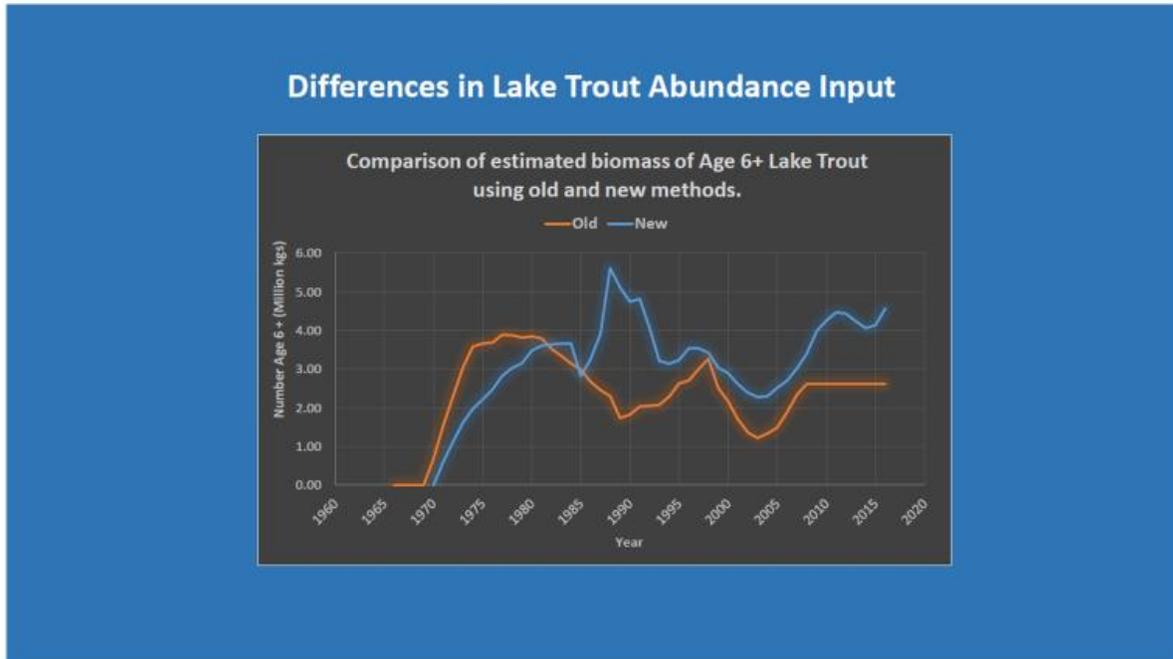
New Lake Trout Model Update

Rick Clark with the MSU Quantitative Fisheries Center is collaborating on a new lake trout model to better predict lake trout abundance in Lake Michigan. Existing models are robust for the 1836 Treaty area, but the southern and western portions of the lake are lacking a model. Basically, the rest of the lake is assumed to be like the 1836 Treaty area. This new model will help inform what total predation is and will improve the predator and prey ratio.

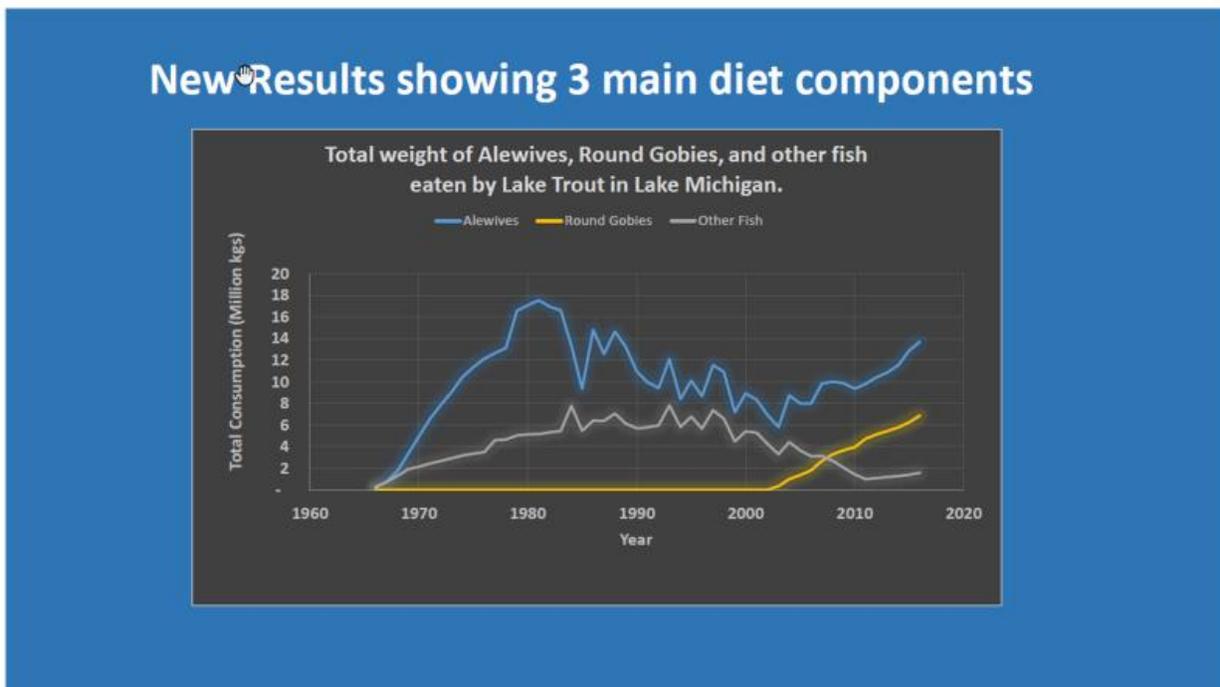
Rick Clark et al. New Lake Trout Model



The new model does show a higher and increasing lake trout biomass, which better relates to angler harvest and observations.



Based on the new population estimates and past and present diet data, consumption estimates can be made showing an increase in consumption of alewife and round gobies as the lake trout biomass increases.



Other Fisheries Updates

As reports become finalized, they will be posted at the Lake Michigan Fisheries Management web page at:

- <https://mdnr1mfmp.wordpress.com/documents/>

Michigan Sea Grant also hosted a Lake Michigan Fishery Workshop and will post videos of Lake Michigan and Lake Huron Diet Studies and Mass Marking. Please check their website.

Discussions

- Committee members want to get boats out and want the Charter Boat Industry to start back up.
- Lots of frustration with executive orders and excessive quarantine.
- Some concern with Consent Decree negotiations on hold. DNR responded that hopefully all parties will agree to an extension of the 2020 Consent Decree if negotiations are not completed.
- The committee would like to see a table of where fish were stocked with the consolidation of stocking sites. Once stocking is completed, a table will be made available.
- The USFWS is completing an Environmental Assessment on cormorants. Michigan has a depredation order to kill up to 3,000 birds if there is a public safety or endangered species issue. We still cannot kill birds to save free swimming fish. The allocation is supposed to increase to 6,000 birds. There will be an effort to determine where it is necessary to protect habitat, public safety and endangered species.

Next Meeting

TBD