

# Lake Michigan Citizen's Fishery Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Conference Call and Webinar

**Attendees:** Denny Grinold, Jay Wesley, George Freeman, Gregg Mariuz, Glen Buehner, Jim Bedford, Mike Verhamme, Dan O'Keefe, Frank Krist, John Stegmeier, Donna Wesander, Mark Williams, Jason Phelps, Bill Winowiecki, Scott Heintzelman, Dennis Eade, Jory Jonas, Jim Bos (written comments), Ian Fitzgerald, Frank Pearson, Darren Kramer, Brian Gunderman, Ben Turschak, Dave Clapp, Gary Smith, Bryan Burroughs, Dan O'Keefe, Mike Pajtas, and Mike Estes (written comments).

## Chinook Salmon Stocking Discussion

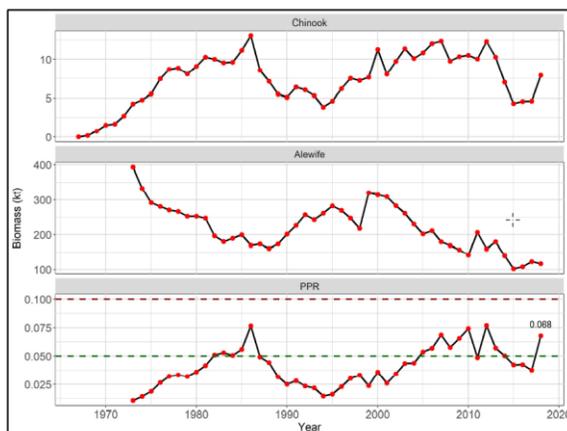
The goal of this discussion was to provide a recommendation to the Basin Coordinator for consideration while working through the issue with the Lake Michigan Committee.

The predator and prey model information was provided prior to the meeting. A link was also provided to Lake Michigan Committee Salmonine Stocking Strategy:

[http://www.glfrc.org/pubs/lake\\_committees/michigan/LMC%20-%20PPR%20Strategy%20November%202018\\_Final.pdf](http://www.glfrc.org/pubs/lake_committees/michigan/LMC%20-%20PPR%20Strategy%20November%202018_Final.pdf).

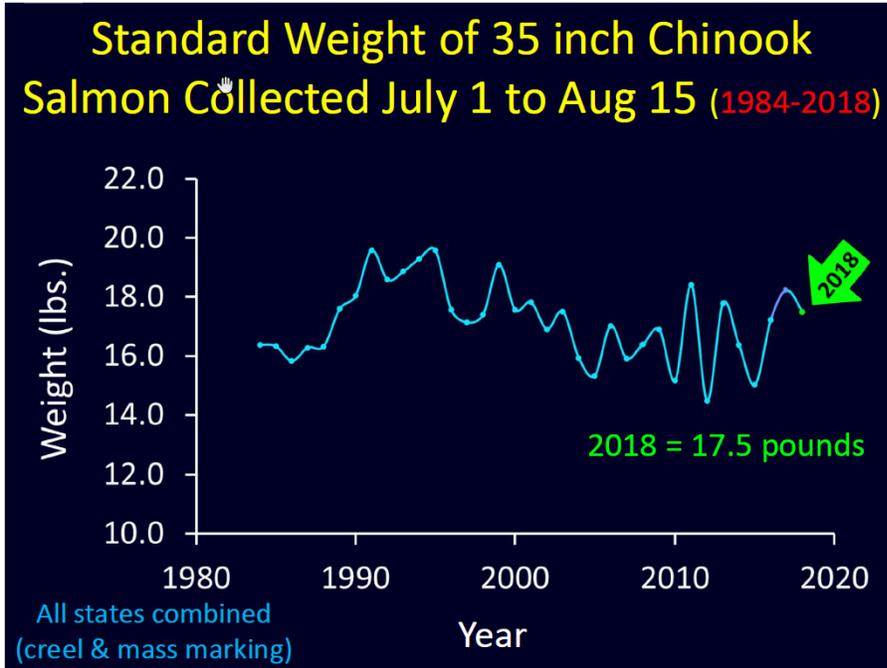
Key information was reviewed, and Ben Turschak and Jory Jonas provided information on how the model has changed with the last run. The main adjustment was putting less emphasis on the bottom trawl survey in recent years as the gear type has diverged from acoustic data in the biomass estimate of alewife.

According to the predator prey ratio, the Lake Michigan Committee could consider status quo or a stocking increase because the ratio for 2015, 2016, and 2017 was below 0.05. The 2018 ratio was higher, and this last data point often has the most uncertainty and has often been high with previous model runs.

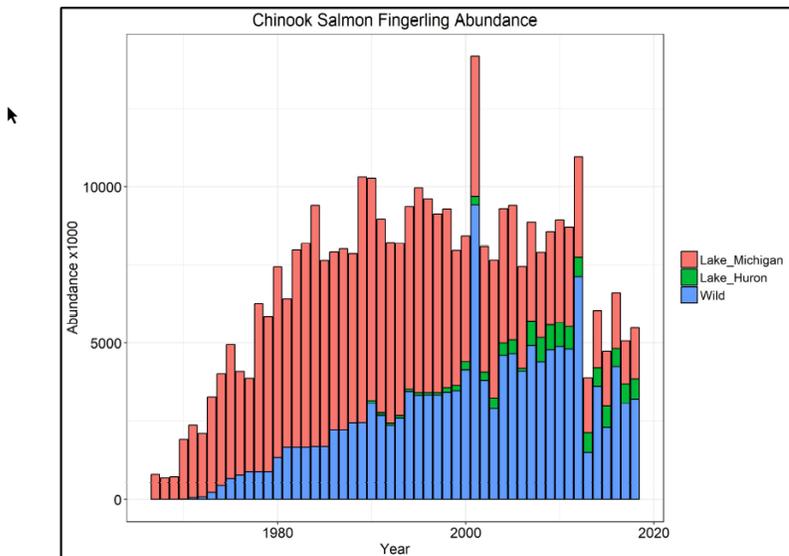


Age 1+ Chinook Biomass, age 1+ Alewife Biomass, and the predator Prey Ratio. Subsequent slides explain how we got here.

The weight of Chinook salmon was also reviewed as an indicator of a good balance of bait fish. It was also pointed out that Chinook weight has varied up and down in recent years indicating some instability in the ecosystem.



Chinook fingerling abundance dropped significantly in 2013 due to reduced stocking and wild recruitment. Wild recruitment is slowly increasing and has been variable adding uncertainty whether it will stay at a low number or increase significantly.

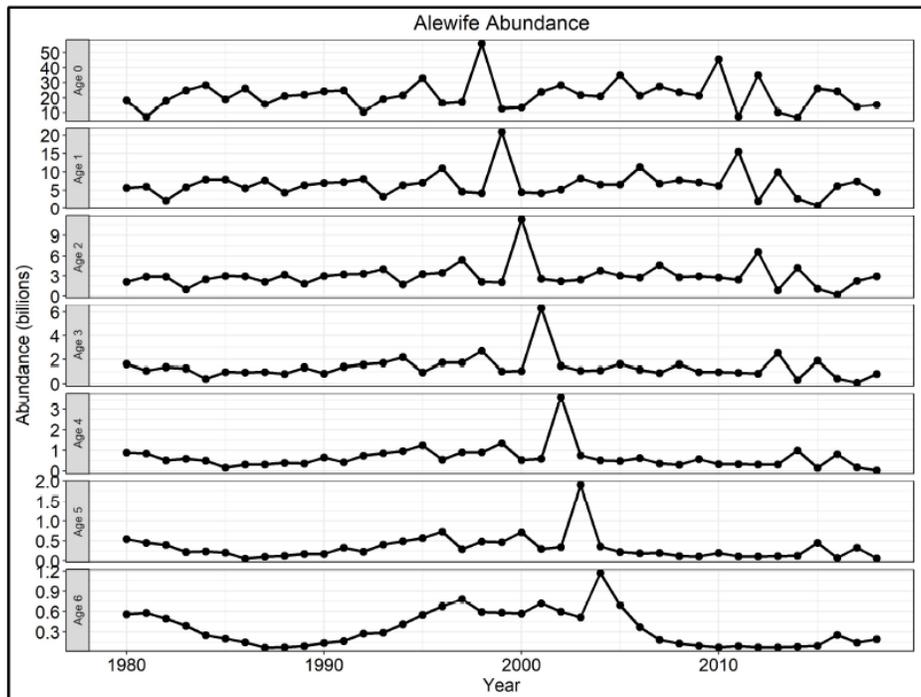


Chinook salmon fingerling abundance. We appear to be in a new regime of Chinook abundance since the 2013 stocking reduction although wild recruitment is variable.

There were several questions about mortality of smolts. It was suggested that mortality varies from 25 to 50%.

Chinook movement from Lake Huron was discussed. Traditionally, it was estimated at 90% based on mass marking data. More recent data suggests that this has changed and that it is lower and mostly younger (1-year-old) Chinook. Anglers have noticed this in their catches in the northern part of Lake Michigan, the U.P. and Door Peninsula. Right now, the model still uses a high number to be conservative until we have a better understanding of movement from Lake Huron.

Alewife abundance is low compared to historic estimates. We are not seeing the really high year classes like was observed in 1998, 2010, and 2012. We also only have five-year classes present and used to have nine. This indicates a relatively young and small spawning stock biomass.



Alewife abundance at age. We can track cohorts of alewives through time in this figure. Note the strong 1998, 2010, and 2012 year classes moving through each of the age class panels. However, keep in mind that the y scales vary and there are actually very few fish in the older age classes. Moderate recruitment in 2015 and 2016 appear to be providing most of the current alewife biomass in the lake.

There was concern about what the other states would do. Illinois and Indiana are most comfortable with status quo stocking. Wisconsin is under severe political pressure to increase their Chinook stocking from 830,000 to 1.3 million in 2020. The Lake Michigan Committee is working with Wisconsin to produce some Chinook equivalents through lake trout stocking reductions on the mid-lake reef.

Advisors and non-DNR participants on the conference call were asked what their recommendation would be:

Status Quo Stocking = 3

Either status quo or 450,000 increase = 2

450,000 lake-wide increase of Chinook equivalents = 9

900,000 lake-wide increase of Chinook equivalents = 1

900,000 or larger lake-wide increase of Chinook equivalents = 1

Abstain/no recommendation = 4

There was support for a small increase of Chinook stocking. There was also comments regarding Michigan taking a high percentage since Michigan has reduced the most in the past.

### Legality of Releasing Lake Trout

There was a lot of discussion about the need for education and outreach about the potential for lake trout mortality once released. Temperature and depth of capture are key factors. Is this a Great Lakes issue? There are examples around Standard Rock, Big Reef and Isle Royal of catch and release fisheries for lake trout. Enforceability is a big concern and how this would impact the average recreational angler.

Advisors and non-DNR participants on the conference call were asked what their recommendation would be. Should it be illegal to target and CIR lake trout once a limit is obtained?

Abstain = 3

Yes = 1

No = 14

There appears to be no support to seek a law to limit CIR of lake trout. There is support to educate anglers about limiting releases of lake trout and possibly to explore fishing and release methods to reduce mortality.

**Issue Statement for the Lake Michigan Citizen's Fishery Advisory Committee**  
**June 2019**  
**Prepared by: Jay Wesley**

**Type of Action:** Action

**Suggested Time Frame:** 20 minutes

**Suggested Labeled Decision Style:** Advisor Committee Recommendation

**Sideboards Needed:** NA

**Issue:** Should it be illegal to release lake trout once a limit is obtained?

**Background:** Prior to 2011, it was illegal to continue fishing for a species once you had a daily possession limit for that species. This regulation was unenforceable, so a change was made with Fish Order 248 (Appendix 1). Now anglers may engage in Catch-and-Immediate-Release (CIR) fishing after reaching the maximum allowed daily possession limit for a given species.

CIR fishing continues to grow in popularity with anglers, but lake trout CIR recently came under scrutiny after harvest limits were exceeded in MM-4 (Grand Traverse Bay). Harvest is determined by the number of lake trout caught that are kept along with 41% of lake trout that are released due to hooking mortality (Appendix 2). In 2018, the recreational harvest exceeded the harvest limit putting the State of Michigan in a penalty situation. As a result, a one fish bag limit was implemented in 2019. Because of the hooking mortality concern, there has been a large education and outreach campaign to alert anglers to stop fishing for trout once a limit is obtained. There have been several news articles, social media blasts, creel clerk and conservation office conversations with anglers, signs at access sites, and any other opportunity to communicate to anglers to limit the number of lake trout that are released.

Along with this educational effort, there is still interest by anglers and the Natural Resource Commission to discuss regulation options to help reduce CIR fishing for lake trout. One option is to make it illegal to fish for lake trout once a daily possession limit is obtained.

**Recommendation Options:**

1. Should an exception be made to FO-248 or FO-200 making it illegal to CIR lake trout after reaching the daily possession limit?
  - a. Yes (go to question 2)
  - b. No
2. Where should this new rule be adopted?
  - a. MM-4 (Grand Traverse Bay) only
  - b. A select number of statistical districts in the 1836 Treaty waters
    - i. Identify the districts.
  - c. Throughout all the Great Lakes.

## Appendix 1

### **Fisheries Order 248.16**

#### **Possession Limits for Fish**

By authority conferred on the Natural Resources Commission and the Department of Natural Resources by Part 487 of 1994 PA 451, MCL 324.48701 to 324.48740, it is ordered on November 5, 2015, the following section(s) of the Fisheries Order shall read as follows:

Department Fisheries Orders regulate various statewide and area-specific daily possession limits for fish. In addition to one (1) day's possession limit of fish, a person may possess an additional two (2) days' possession limit of fish that are processed by any of the following methods:

1. Canning in a sealed container.
2. Curing by smoking or drying.
3. Freezing in a solid state.

A person's processed fish aboard a vessel, on the water or at dockside shall be considered to be in the person's possession for the purposes of this Order.

Anglers may engage in Catch-and-Immediate-Release (CIR) fishing after reaching the maximum allowed daily possession limit for a given species.

The additional two days' possession limit provision does not apply to Lake Sturgeon or Muskellunge. The harvest of Lake Sturgeon shall be limited to the provisions as set forth in FO-240. The harvest of Muskellunge shall be limited to the provisions as set forth in FO-215.

This Order shall be assigned number FO-248.16, and is entitled "Possession Limits for Fish."

This Order supersedes the Order entitled "Possession Limits for Fish," effective April 1, 2011, and assigned number FO-248.11.

This Order shall take effect on April 1, 2016 and shall remain in effect until amended/rescinded.

## Appendix 2

### **Lake Trout Management in MM-4**

The Lake Trout fishery in MM-4 (Grand Traverse Bay) is managed under the terms of the 2000 Consent Decree (Decree), which outlines the allocation and management of fishery resources in 1836 Treaty Waters. For more information visit: [www.michigan.gov/greatlakesconsentdecree](http://www.michigan.gov/greatlakesconsentdecree)

The Lake Trout population in Grand Traverse Bay is maintained by stocking, and adult mortality is high. It has consistently exceeded 55%, even though the Decree prescribes 45% as an upper limit. More than a decade ago, in response to higher than anticipated levels of Sea Lamprey mortality, the State, Tribes, and U.S. Federal government abandoned the mortality targets within the Decree and established higher harvest limits so as not to overly restrict the fisheries within MM-4. Presently, lamprey mortality is low in MM-4, but harvest limits have not been adjusted downward to achieve the mortality targets prescribed by the Decree.

The Decree requires the State and the Tribes to maintain harvest within their respective annual limit. If the State or Tribal fishers harvest 15% more than their limit, a penalty is applied in the following year, which reduces the harvest limit by the amount of the previous overage. The State exceeded the 2018 harvest limit by 20%, causing a lower 2019 limit and requiring an adjustment to the bag limit (1 fish per day) in order to keep total State harvest within the 2019 limit.

Table 1. State and tribal harvest and limits in Grand Traverse Bay since 2010.

Year	Tribal Harvest Limit (lb)	State Harvest Limit (lb)	Tribal Harvest (lb)	State Harvest (lb)
2010	124,018	77,200	92,358	34,074
2011	137,426	77,200	74,765	71,523
2012	99,977	77,200	100,987	70,847
2013	100,653	77,200	110,547	77,849
2014	94,300	77,200	95,318	65,129
2015	116,437	85,390	95,098	64,229
2016	115,461	77,200	124,636	47,208
2017	124,292	77,200	108,218	83,522
2018	94,300	77,200	93,224	92,861
2019	109,961	61,539		

In addition to following the new bag limit regulation, anglers can help ensure the State stays below the required harvest limit by **NOT** practicing catch and release fishing for Lake Trout. Peer-reviewed, published research conducted by the DNR in partnership with Michigan State University has demonstrated that on average, 41% Lake Trout released by recreational anglers will die after release. This is caused by physiological stress from the catch event compounded

by changing water temperatures as a fish is brought to the surface. Not all dead Lake Trout will float at the surface, and many that appear to swim away at release will die within 24-48 hours. These deaths due to catch and release mortality don't promote wise use of the resource and also contribute to the total State harvest when it is compared to the annual limit. Please consider keeping the first Lake Trout you catch, and then take advantage of the many other fishing opportunities within MM-4.

*For more information please contact one of the DNR Fisheries Biologists below:*

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