

FISHERIES DIVISION
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF
NATURAL RESOURCES

Northern Lake Huron Management Unit



ISSUE 3

JANUARY 2015

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What is the NLHMU?

The Northern Lake Huron Management Unit (NLHMU) encompasses all of the waters that make up the watersheds that drain into the northern portion of Lake Huron, from Sault Ste. Marie south to Oscoda. Our unit includes all or portions of the following counties: Chippewa, Mackinac, Cheboygan, Emmet, Presque Isle, Charlevoix, Cheboygan, Otsego, Montmorency, Alpena, Alcona, Oscoda, Crawford, Roscommon, Ogemaw, and Iosco counties. Fisheries staff working in this unit cover a diverse array of inland waters and Lake Huron ports. This diversity includes famous trout rivers, a large number of small inland lakes, some of Michigan's largest inland lakes, popular waters where lake sturgeon roam, and key Lake Huron fishing ports. All staff are housed at the Gaylord Customer Service Center except for fisheries assistants who are in charge of capturing angler catch statistics at various Lake Huron ports. This newsletter provides a snapshot of activities that our management unit conducted in 2014 and other useful information.



Dorsal spine x-section, walleye, Burt Lake, age-7

Fish and the Winter Doldrums

About the time this issue gets released, many of our anglers will be hitting the hard water trying to pass the winter. Winter is a tough period on fish in the northern hemisphere, and particularly in northern Michigan. Fish can go through a basic torpor, or state of inactivity. When fish feed in the winter, that converted energy typically goes into body maintenance, survival, or reproductive parts, and is typically not converted to tissue growth. Based on this typical pattern of less growth in the winter, and faster growth in the summer, we are able to age fish with bony structures (e.g. scales or spines; see photo above). Why burn energy all day long searching for prey items when they are not moving? For example, bluegill in some lakes simply lay patiently during the winter day while waiting for their food source such as plankton to move as the sun sets. Anglers need to adapt to the winter habits of fish's by fishing the best periods of the winter (early and late ice), or the best periods within a day. Dissolved oxygen levels can be reduced severely in harsh winters due to excessive ice and snow cover. This in turn will affect the tendencies of the fish we seek. Plan your winter trips accordingly!

Did you know?

Brook trout rarely live past age-3 in our rivers, even in streams where harvest is not occurring. Their life strategy in flowing water is to mature early, live fast, die young. Lake life is easier!



Stream Temperature Monitoring

Our fisheries unit has a very aggressive stream temperature monitoring program. We accomplish this feat each year with small temperature meters placed seasonally or year-round at selected locations. The meters are hidden in the waterbodies in the spring and typically removed in the fall. The recorded data are then downloaded to a spreadsheet where we can analyze it for regional trends, and most importantly, for trends at a specific river across years or even decades. Since 2002, our fisheries unit has accomplished this feat at over 400 locations, and encompassing nearly all of our watersheds. Quite often we are assisted by various organizations to accomplish these goals as well. Groups such as the Upper Black River Council, Canada Creek Ranch, Headwaters Trout Unlimited, and Mason-Griffith Chapter Trout Unlimited have become important players in helping us gather such information.

We always strive for fisheries data in our rivers, but knowing their thermal regimes (in the past, currently, and in the future) also allows us to better understand our fish communities and their limitations. There isn't a creek too small, or a river too wide and deep we can't tackle on such a project.



Stocking and Management

Walleye Stocking 2014

From our **James Farm Pond** near Hillman we raised nearly 144,000 fingerling walleye and stocked the following lakes with 1.6" fish: West Twin Lake 68,929, Big Bear Lake 25,553, Lake Esau 18,900, Big Bradford Lake 9,033, Opal Lake 7,324, Dixon Lake 5,000, Crooked Lake, Montmorency Co. 5,000, and Jones Lake 4,245.

From our **Reid-Berney Pond** near Alanson we raised 119,818 fingerling walleye and stocked 1.4" fish in these waters: Black Lake 59,068, Caribou Lake 52,488, and Frenchman Lake 8,262.



The St. Marys River system received spring fingerling walleye spread throughout the river system as produced in the cooperative **eastern UP walleye ponds** with assistance from CORA and the Drummond Isl. Sportsmans Club. Black Lake and Mullett Lake also received fish from these ponds.

The following lakes were stocked with 1.4 –2.2" fingerling walleye from the **Bay City rearing ponds**: Lake St. Helen 150,830, Cedar Lake 70,784, Van Etten Lake 82,769, Otsego Lake 64,316, Lake Winyah 61,928, Clear Lake Ogemaw Co. 46,639, and Au Sable Lake 40,436.

Stocking and Management

Inland Trout Stocking 2014

Our fisheries unit annually stocks trout into various inland lakes and streams in our management area. We rarely stock into waters that have healthy wild populations of trout. Stocking efforts enhance low numbers of wild trout, or stocking efforts are made where trout will survive but are unable to sustain themselves through natural reproduction. We evaluate survival of such stocking efforts through fall gill netting and electrofishing surveys. However, angler reports are essential to our management decisions and anglers can assist us by telling us what they are catching, or not catching.....

The following unit inland waterbodies were stocked in 2014:

BROWN TROUT

Lakes: Avalon, Bridge, Bright, Fifteen, Ford, McCormick, O'Brien, Trout Ck Pond, Weber

Rivers: Au Sable, Carp

RAINBOW TROUT

Lakes: Bear Den, Big Chub, Crater, Dukes, Heart, Loon, Pickerel, Reid, Silver, South Hoist, West Lost

Rivers: Au Sable

BROOK TROUT

Lakes: Hemlock, Section Four, Lost, South and North Twin, West Lost, Ford

SPLAKE

Lakes: Avalon, Clear, Thumb



Take our pop quiz and see how well you know fisheries and northeast Michigan? Answers can be found below.

1. Which stream in NE MI flows underground, and is also known as the underground spring? A) Little Ocqueoc River, B) Hunt Creek, C) Devils River, D) Sturgeon River
2. The Atlantic salmon program in Lake Huron is managed cooperatively with what university? A) Michigan State, B) Notre Dame, C) Lake Superior State, D) Michigan Tech
3. What is the most common lake name in our fisheries unit? It has 7 lakes. A) Clear, B) Long, C) Tomahawk, D) Silver
4. The word "Gogomain" refers to what in our unit? A) Swamp or river, B) Fanatic trout angler, C) Lake, D) Rare turtle
5. The state record lake sturgeon, weighing 193 pounds, was caught in our unit in which lake? A) Burt, B) Black, C) Huron, D) Mullett
6. Of the following rivers in our unit, which one receives a very large pink salmon fall spawning migration? A) Charlotte, B) Cheboygan, C) Carp, D) Ocqueoc
7. Of the following lakes in our unit (Heart, Opal, McCormick, Thumb, Fifteen, Mullett, Beaver, Otsego), which two do not contain rainbow smelt? A) Opal and Otsego, B) Beaver and Fifteen, C) Mullett and McCormick, D) they all contain smelt
8. The famous "Mason Tract" of land sits along the banks of what river? A) North Branch Au Sable, B) East Branch Au Sable, C) Sturgeon River, D) South Branch Au Sable River
9. The correct name of a rare brook and brown trout hybrid is what? A) Spotted Trout, B) Lotic Trout, C) Tiger Trout, D) Leopard Trout
10. Which of the following local rivers, through its entire length, is the coldest river? A) Black, B) Au Sable, C) Pigeon, D) Sturgeon
11. What are the five largest lakes by surface acreage in our unit, in descending order? A) Black, Burt, Mullett, Fletcher Floodwaters, Hubbard, B) Burt, Mullett, Black, Hubbard, Fletcher Floodwaters, C) Mullett, Burt, Hubbard, Black, Fletcher Floodwaters
12. Of the following walleye lakes (West Twin, Hubbard, Van Etten, Cedar, Otsego, Burt, Black, Esau), which two have self sustaining walleye populations and are not currently stocked? A) Esau and Black, B) Hubbard and Burt, C) Cedar and Van Etten, D) West Twin and Otsego.
13. We stock Great Lakes strain muskellunge in the following lakes? A) Black, Besser, Cooke, Cornwall, B) St. Helen, Mio, Alcona, Black, Rush C) Burt, Grand, Long, D) Besser, Winyah, Cooke, Otsego, Big Bear
14. Atlantic salmon were stocked at the following locations in 2013 and 2014? A) St. Marys River, Au Sable River, Thunder Bay River, B) Harrisville Harbor, Hammond Bay, Rockport, C) Rockport, Presque Isle, St. Marys River
15. The Les Cheneaux Islands region is a popular fishing location for what species? A) Burbot, muskellunge, brook trout, B) brown trout, steelhead, walleye C) herring, Atlantic salmon, northern pike, D) northern pike, herring, yellow perch



Answers: 1-A, 2-C, 3-C, 4-A, 5-D, 6-C, 7-A, 8-D, 9-C, 10-D, 11-B, 12-B, 13-D, 14-A, 15-D

How did you do? If you got less than 8 correct, you need to brush up on your local fisheries biology. If you got 8-12 correct, you get an attaboy. If you got 13 or more correct, you should consider a job with us!

Habitat Enhancement Spotlight-Pigeon River

The Pigeon River is a prominent river flowing through the heart of Michigan's elk country in the northern Lower Peninsula. It has a wild trout population and attracts many anglers from across the Midwest. Since 2008, the State of Michigan has been in legal discussions with a private dam owner on the upper Pigeon River, and has done this with partners such as Trout Unlimited and the Pigeon River Country Association. Operation of the dam over the decades had adverse effects on the river including significant downstream water warming, silt flows, flow peaking operations, and even some documented fish kills. With agreement reached, the dam has been drawn-down slowly in 2014, with full structure removal slated for 2015 and possibly beyond that. This will completely open many river miles upstream to fish passage, will reduce water warming with the absence of the shallow lake, and will simply provide a more stable environment downstream for all aquatic organisms. The dam removal process is being administered by Huron Pines resource group, with funding provided by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources



in the form of an Aquatic Habitat Grant for \$272,000. The private landowner will also be responsible for part of the restoration costs. Look for a much healthier Pigeon River environment in the next few years. The included pictures demonstrate the river section that was once under the impoundment.

Angler Photo Center



Au Sable River brown trout

Otsego Lake northern pike



Northern pike near Onaway

Smallmouth bass, Au Sable River



Ocqueoc Lake walleye

Au Sable River steelhead



Miscellaneous

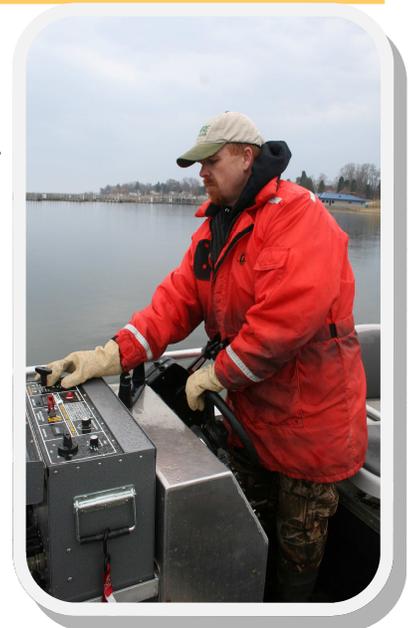
Asian Carp Training/Sampling Exercises

Quite often anglers ask us about the potential impacts that Asian carp may have on our northern aquatic ecosystems. To some degree, we don't exactly know, and frankly don't want to find out. It is best to keep such invasives out, but our track record indicates that many do reach our doorsteps (e.g. zebra and quagga mussels, gobies, rusty crayfish). With that said, it is important to understand that Fisheries Division has been going through internal exercises in the last two years to essentially learn more about how to sample Asian carp and their cousins (common carp, grass carp). These exercises have included personnel and equipment from our fisheries unit. These training exercises (rapid response, coordination, sampling techniques) recently took place in southeastern Michigan along Lake Erie and its tributaries, and along the length of the Illinois River in conjunction with the Illinois DNR. We often set our management gaze on our own neck of the woods and water, but our statewide responsibilities always keep our eyes on the bigger picture. The picture here is our technician Tom Adams holding up a grass carp from Lake Erie.

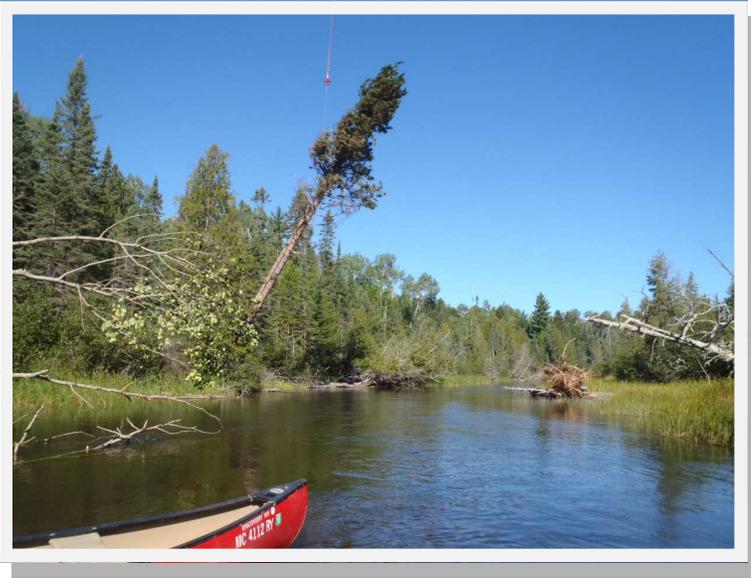


Personnel Spotlight—Emmett Sweeney

Emmett Sweeney is a fisheries technician in our fisheries management area. He grew up in Lapeer and served his country in the Marine Corps. He attended both Lake Superior State University and North Central Michigan College, earning his Associate Degree in Biology from the latter institution. He first started working with the DNR Fisheries Division in 1998 at Oden Hatchery as a state worker. He then took on different roles at the hatchery as a fisheries assistant, a trades helper, and eventually as a fisheries technician through 2008. In that year, he transferred to the management side of the Division and has been working as a fisheries technician in the Northern Lake Huron Management Unit since 2008. Emmett's skills are a good blend of fisheries knowledge and mechanical skills that serve the regional fisheries well. He has two teenage sons and is married. In his off time he enjoys deer hunting, and fishing primarily for walleye, trout, and panfish.



The South Branch Au Sable River received a habitat facelift in 2013. As part of a long term plan in the Au Sable River watershed to restore and enhance coldwater communities, 982 whole trees were placed strategically in the river in complexes for the purposes of providing extra fish cover and for sediment management. Trees were carefully removed



from upland areas on state forest land, and transported to the river where ground crews organized their placement. The reach of river where habitat was enhanced stretched from the mouth of Thayer Creek downstream many miles to the confluence with the mainstream. Funding was made possible from the Consumers Power Habitat Improvement Account and was contracted out to Restoration Dredging Inc. DNR Fisheries Division administered the grant and oversaw all project details. A review of the structures in the spring of 2014, following a high water event,

showed that the complexes were holding well and already providing benefits. In addition, large brown trout were already holding in some of the structures placed immediately upstream of the M72 Highway bridge. Keep an eye out for these structures as you fish the river, and if you see root wads attached to the trees, you know it came from the air via a helicopter.





Douglas Lake, largemouth bass



Higgins Lake, lake trout and teacher



Harrisville Harbor, Atlantic salmon



Cranky tenant of Castle Rock Pond



Black Lk sturgeon season freeze team



Van Etten Creek, steelhead

General Lake & Stream Surveys

During the spring and early summer our unit conducts fish community surveys on lakes when temperatures reach 55-75 degrees Fahrenheit. Our stream fish surveys are mostly done from July through early September. A variety of gear types are used on lakes while direct current electrofishing is primarily used on rivers and smaller creeks. Some surveys are general examinations of the fish community, while others are directed towards a specific species. Here is where we focused our efforts in 2014:

- Harrisville Harbor, Steelhead and salmon assessment
- Au Sable River/Van Etten Creek, Steelhead assessment
- Little and Big Tomahawk Lake, Fish survey
- Cochran Lake, Fish survey
- Roberts Lake, Fish survey
- Crooked Lake, Mont. Co, Fish survey
- Douglas Lake, Fish survey
- Beaver and Robinson Creeks, Fish survey
- Elliot Ck/Mcmasters Ck, Fish survey
- Moyer Creek, Fish survey
- Castle Rock Pond, trout/fish community survey
- N. Br. Manistee River, Trout population estimate
- Manistee River, Trout population estimate
- South Br Au Sable River, Trout population estimate
- West Br Big Creek, Trout population estimate
- Pigeon River, Trout population estimate
- North Blue Lake, Bluegill transfer evaluation
- Au Sable River, Trout population estimate
- Au Sable River, Fish survey
- Black Lake, Fall juvenile walleye index
- Mullett Lake, Fall juvenile walleye index
- Grand Lake, Fall juvenile walleye index
- Long Lake, Fall juvenile walleye index
- Lake Esau, Fall juvenile walleye index
- St. Marys River, Fall juvenile walleye index
- Pickerel and Silver lakes, Trout evaluation
- Otsego, Opal, Frenchmans, Big Bear lakes, Fall juvenile walleye index

Northern Lake Huron Management Unit personnel



2015 Scheduled Surveys

Look for us at the following potential locations and others in 2015

- Spring trout and salmon investigations various northeastern Lake Huron ports
- West/East Twin Lake walleye population estimate
- General fish community surveys Ninth Street Pond, Bridge Lake, Burt Lake, Rush Lake, Horseshoe Lake, Wildwood Lake, Bluegill Lake
- General stream surveys at Black River near Tower, and East Branch Big Creek near Luzerne
- Trout population estimates Au Sable River, South Branch Au Sable River (multiple stations), Pigeon River (multiple stations), Sturgeon River
- Fish community evaluations small streams Alcona County and McPhee Creek Emmet County
- Fall walleye indices St. Marys River system
- Fall juvenile walleye assessments at lakes yet to be determined
- Fall trout stocking evaluations at lakes yet to be determined



Contact us at any time

MDNR Fisheries Division Northern Lake Huron Mangement Unit Areas of Responsibilities

Gaylord Operations Service Center
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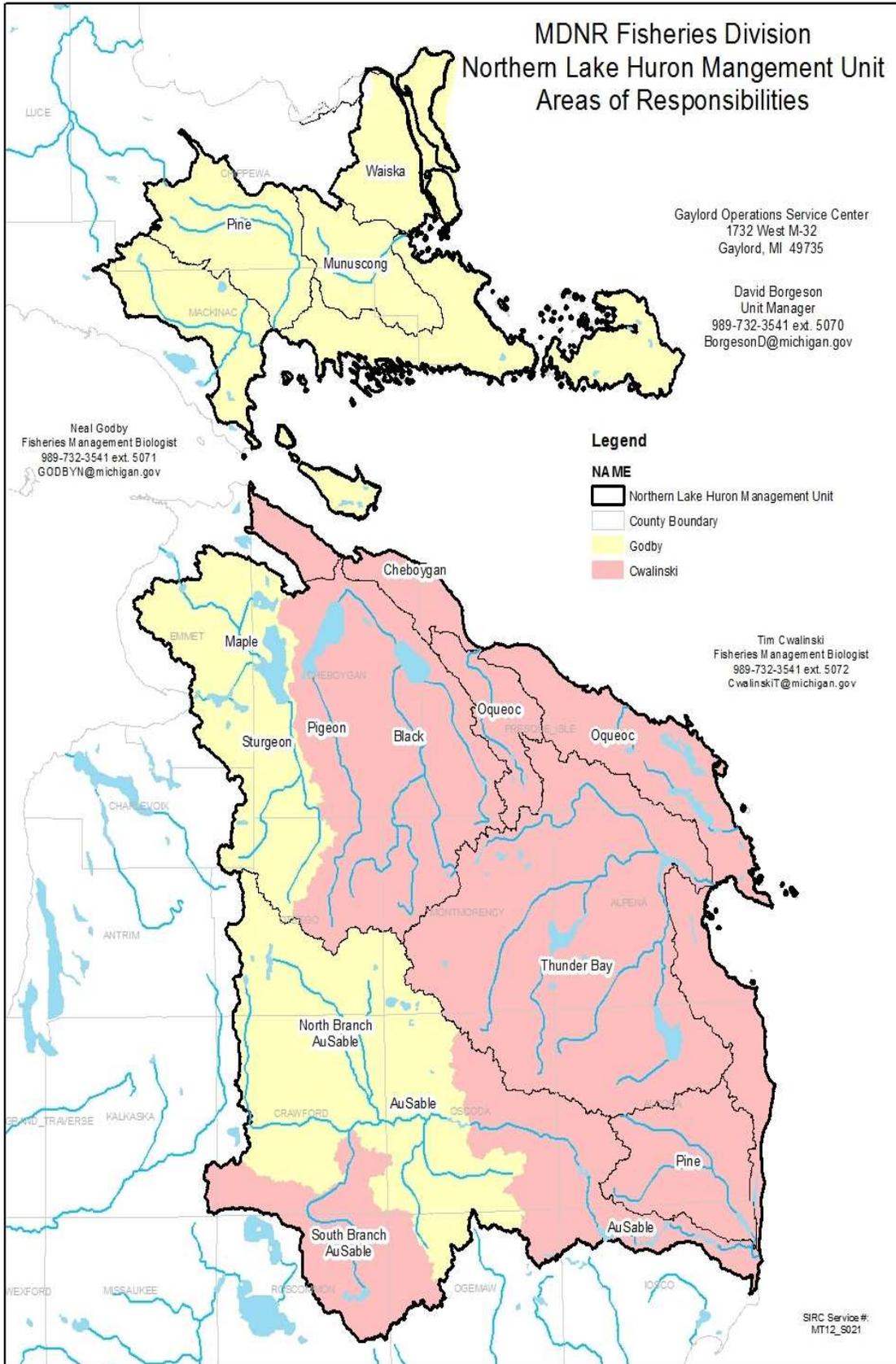
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Legend

- NAME
-  Northern Lake Huron Mangement Unit
 -  County Boundary
 -  Godby
 -  Cwalinski

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