

Northern Lake Huron Management Unit



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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 work 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 Operations 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 2013.



Partnerships and its Benefits

With limited personnel and funding, it is virtually impossible for the local fisheries managers to accomplish everything in a region full of water and diverse interests. We have a variety of groups and individuals that we work directly or indirectly with to help manage and maintain our region's aquatic resources. This resource "sharing and caring" has become more prominent in the last decade, and we here in NLHMU want to say "thank you" to all our resource co-managers. This includes activities ranging from pike marsh operators and walleye rearing cooperators, to stream stewards who help us monitor summer stream temperatures. A special thanks goes to Thunder Bay Walleye Club, Don Rygwelski, Sturgeon For Tomorrow, Northland Sportsmans Club, Mason-Griffith Founders chapter of T.U., Bay City Hunt Club, Joe Jarecki, Pickerel-Crooked Lake Association, Huron Pines RC/D, Headwaters Trout Unlimited, Anglers of the Au Sable, Upper Black River Council, and the Drummond Island Sportsmans Club. A big thank you!

Did you know?

The birthplace of Trout Unlimited began in our fisheries management unit in the Au Sable River watershed. This is a testimony to the greatness of the waters in our unit, and the commitment of the anglers that fish here.



Lake Huron Atlantic Salmon Program Grows

Most anglers know that Lake Huron is changing right before our eyes, and we have made some changes to fish stocking at our Huron side ports. Atlantic salmon have been stocked in the St. Marys River for decades by LSSU, and now that program is getting a boost. Fisheries Division has increased our capacity for Atlantic salmon rearing, and we have focused additional experimental stocking not only in the St. Marys River, but also at our Alpena and Oscoda ports. Our unit worked with the public to identify the best possible stocking locations with these additional, but limited, yearling fish. Atlantic salmon have a much different feeding strategy than Chinook salmon, and it is believed that they will thrive in the different forage base that exists today in Lake Huron. After an initial stocking in 2013, look for returns of these fish as soon as 2014!



Habitat Protection

Our field technicians spend a vast majority of their time on the water, running back and forth from project to project. Although biologists often are in the field, they spend a great amount of time protecting your water and fish communities at a computer. NLHMU biologists are routinely involved in: reviewing oil and gas development proposals, determining if best management practices (bmp's) are being used for public land forest cutting efforts, reviewing development on all our streams and lakes (e.g. seawalls, dredging, etc), and we even get involved with various land transactions. Many parcels have been purchased based on the recommendations of Fish Division professionals. Your team of biologists are well trained in BMP's around water, and often work with various resource groups to rectify poor habitat conditions (e.g. culverts, bridges, dams, erosion). Sometimes the pen can be mightier than the sword.....



Stocking and Management

Walleye Stocking 2013

From our **James Farm Pond** near Hillman we raised nearly 189,000 fingerling walleye and stocked the following lakes with 1.5" fish: West Twin Lake 91,041, Beaver Lake 42,480, Long Lake Montmorency Co. 17,010, Big Lake 14,000, Tea Lake 12,420, and Ess Lake 11,970.

From our **Reid-Berney Pond** near Alanson we raised 74,755 fingerling walleye and stocked 1.5" fish in these waters: Mio Impoundment 36,841, Long Lake Cheboygan Co. 21,828, Kleber Pond 9,186, and Otsego Lake 6,900.

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. The following lakes were stocked with 1.6 –2" fingerling walleye from the **Bay City rear-ing ponds**: Mullett Lake 466,000, Lk. St. Helen 226,247, Cooke Impoundment 108,200, E. Twin Lake 71,000, Otsego Lake 69,000, Cedar Lake 53,000, Alcona Impoundment 29,000, and Vaughn Lake 17,000.



Education and Outreach Spotlight

We again did our share of outreach this year in NLHMU. We spend at least one week each year talking about what we do as professionals and examining our resources with the public. This year we did fish sampling demonstrations on rivers and lakes with the following: teachers with the Academy of Natural Resources, Illinois Trout Unlimited trout camp, and high school students from Wayne County. We also did our annual electrofishing and presentation on the banks of the Au Sable River with woman in the Reeling and Healing program (woman with cancer) as well as providing tours to students at the Swan River salmon weir. The picture here is biologist Tim Cwalinski on the South Branch Au Sable River with special high school students from Wayne County. You should see the looks on the kids faces when they have to net a big brown trout, or handle a beast lake trout from Higgins Lake!



Habitat Enhancement Spotlight

As mentioned earlier, Fish Division isn't alone in protecting the resources in our neck of the woods. The Au Sable River watershed is home to many different groups that care and protect the resource as well. Some of these groups include Anglers of the Au Sable, the Au Sable River Committee, the Big Water Preservation Society, and



the Mason-Griffith Founders Chapter of Trout Unlimited. These groups work directly with NLHMU to identify priority areas for restoration and maintenance. These groups have led or assisted on projects including: sand trap excavation at key locations, in-stream large woody structure enhancement, streambank erosion improvement, brown trout movement and habitat use studies, and water temperature and water quality monitoring.



Funding sources from such work come through grants acquired directly from these groups, or from the interest groups themselves. We in NLHMU look forward to a continued strong relationship with these groups to help manage this special resource, the Au Sable River watershed.

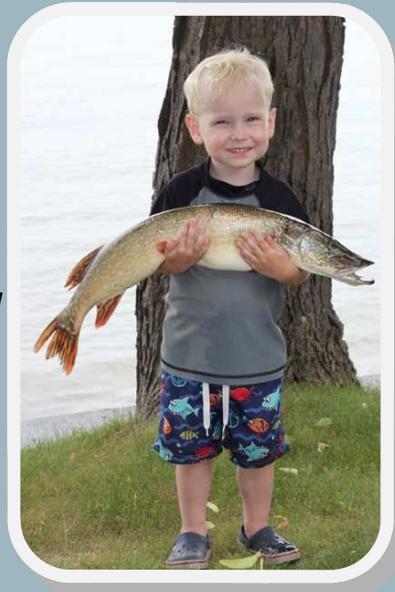
Angler Photo Center



Big Bear Lake young musky



McCormick Lake brown trout



Two Mullett Lake beasts!

Below center: Nothing like Braces and Bass!

Is this Brooke Shields with Mullett Lake rainbows?

Brady Bunch Pike and Trout



Miscellaneous

Fall Juvenile Walleye Evaluations

During fall 2013 we conducted another round of juvenile walleye assessments. Included in this were Burt and Mullett lakes. Burt Lake showed that it continues to produce a good year class of wild walleye, as the catch rate this fall of age-0 fish was the highest we ever documented during our periodic sampling. Mullett Lake juvenile walleye were relatively higher in abundance compared to previous years when we surveyed, and we theorize that this was related to a large stocking event by DNR in June 2013. Other waterbodies surveyed were the St. Marys River for young walleye, Frenchmans Lake, and Hubbard Lake. In 2014 we hope to evaluate walleye stocking efforts at many different lakes across our unit, regardless of whether they are stocked or not stocked.



Personnel Spotlight—Dave Borgeson

Dave Borgeson is the longest tenured employee in the NLHMU. He gained experience as a youngster doing stream habitat improvement in the early 1980s on both the White and North Branch Au Sable River systems. At the same time he was earning his Bachelor and eventual Master's Degrees from Michigan State University in Natural Resource Management. Upon completing his degrees, Dave worked as a Fisheries Technician in the Grand Rapids area for a number of years starting in 1987. In 1993, Dave was hired as a fisheries biologist in the Gaylord area, and eventually became the NLHMU fisheries supervisor in 2000, a role he still holds today. When not working, Dave enjoys bow hunting for deer, upland bird hunting, fishing, golfing, and watching his Spartans.



We often get phone calls from anglers reporting something they have never seen before, maybe a variation in a fish's color, a parasite on the skin of fish, or maybe even a report of a fish kill. Sometimes these oddities are quite representative of a fish population. We sample many fish every year, whether at lakes or streams, or those we handle at our rearing ponds and salmon weirs. Through our eyes, these oddities may be rare, but are more typical for a population of fish. Variations in fish color (see two northern pike



from Long Lake) are fairly common yet they still captivate our professional eyes. Species hybridization is also quite prevalent in the aquatic community. Hybrids are typical for some species (e.g. panfish), and less typical for others (see Tiger Trout picture, a hybrid brook and brown trout). Fish kills are also very common and we receive reports of them frequently from anglers, especially in the spring. Natural fish kills are rarely complete, and often take a small percentage of the fish population.



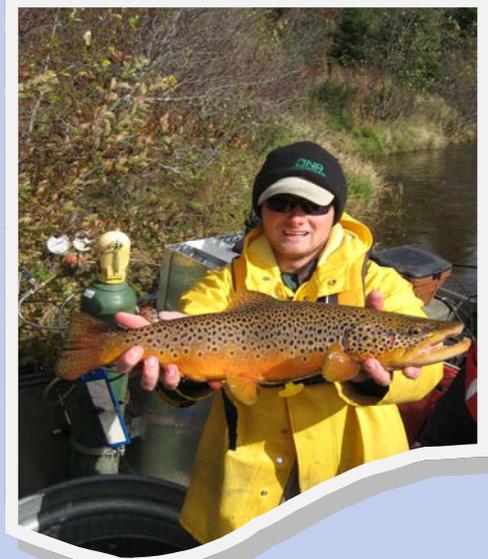
Frankly, this can be good for some fish populations if the population is not in balance. Fish parasites are another common factor and often lead to a barrage of angler phone calls to us during certain years. Ever seen a freshwater jellyfish (picture to right) or lake bryozoan? Look at them on a website and then consider you swim with these natural creatures each year. Again, all normal parts of an aquatic community, at least through our eyes.



A Grass Lake largemouth bass and volunteer



Au Sable Mio reach male brown trout



Crooked River musky

A spring rainy day shocking steelhead on the lower Au Sable River.



A tub of fish to process



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 2013:

Black River juvenile sturgeon survey, Cheboygan Co.
 Jackson Lake, Montmorency Co.
 Trout Brook Pond, Chippewa Co.
 Dukes Lake, Chippewa Co.
 Twin Lakes, Cheboygan Co.
 Au Sable River –Mio trout estimate
 Au Sable River– Oscoda steelhead evaluation
 Harrisville Harbor steelhead evaluation
 Chub/Bridge Lk trout evaluation—Otsego Co.
 Bear Den Lake trout evaluation—Presque Isle Co.
 Black Rv trout estimate—Montmorency Co.
 Lk 15 trout evaluation—Montmorency Co.
 McCormick Lk trout evaluation—Montmorency Co.
 St. Marys River fish community assessment—Chippewa Co.
 Mullett and Burt Lk juvenile walleye assessments—Cheboygan Co.
 Frenchmans Lake juvenile walleye assessment—Chippewa Co.
 Hubbard Lake juvenile walleye assessment—Alcona Co.
 St. Marys River juvenile walleye assessment—Chippewa Co.
 North Br. Au Sable River trout estimate—Crawford Co.
 Pigeon River trout estimates—Otsego Co.
 Atlanta Pond, Montmorency Co.
 Shupac Lake species removal—Crawford Co.
 Hunt Ck trout estimate—Montmorency Co.
 Inland Waterway walleye tagging, Cheboygan Co.



2014 Scheduled Surveys

If we don't answer the phone, we are probably at the following locations come 2014.



Steelhead Stocking Evaluation

Au Sable River, Harrisville Harbor

Fish Removal / Transfer Project

Shupac Lake

Fish Community Surveys

Big and Little Tomahawk Lakes, Castle Rock Pond, Voyer Lk,

Douglas Lk, Crooked Lk, Foch Lake, various streams

Trout Population Estimates

Pigeon Rv, Au Sable Rv, S Br Au Sable Rv, W Br Big Ck

Fall Juvenile Walleye Index

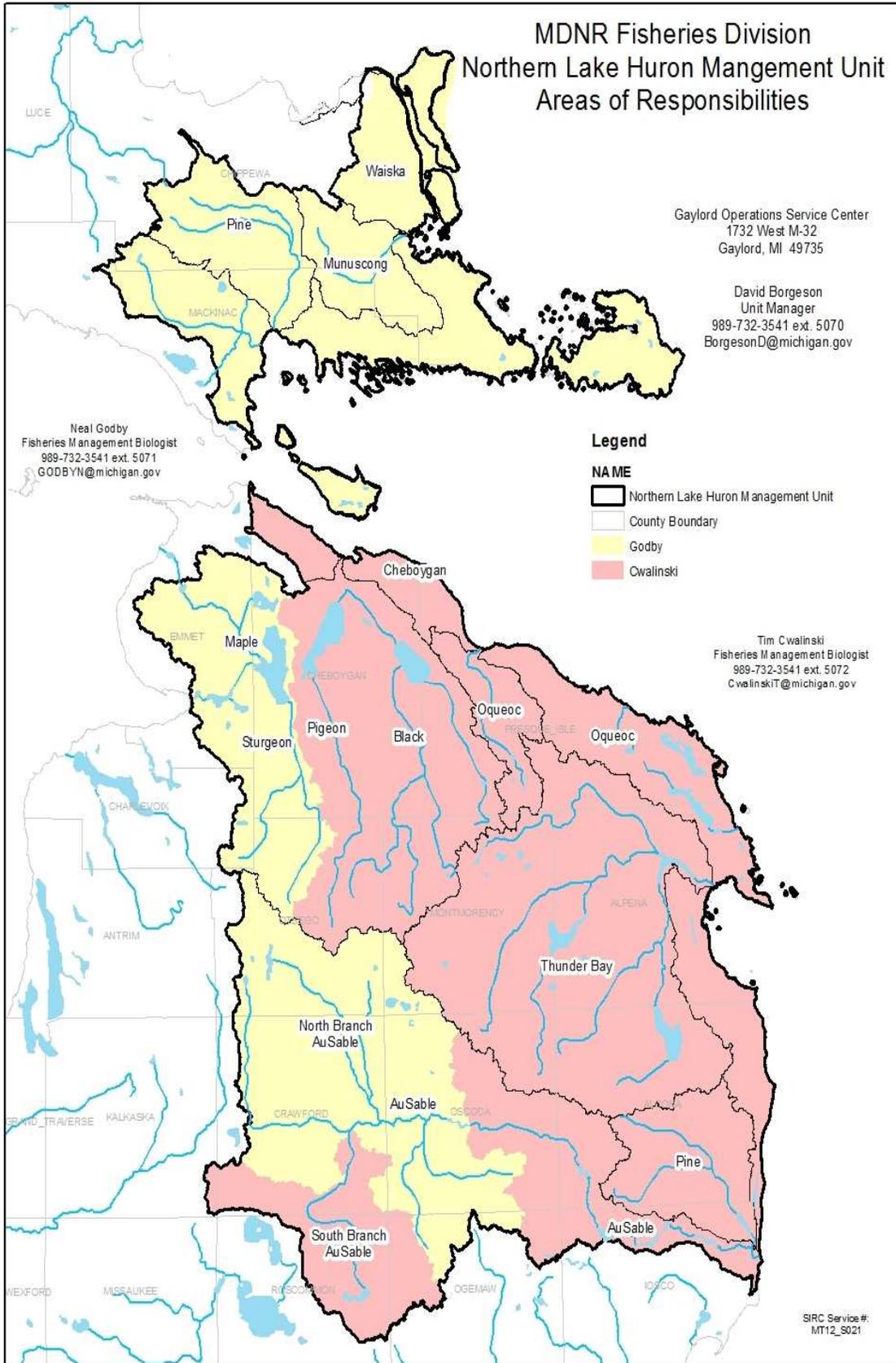
W and E Twin Lk, Otsego Lk, Black Lk, St. Marys Rv, various others,

Grand Lk, Long Lk

Trout Stocking Evaluation

Heart Lk

Contact us at any time



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