

Northern Lake Huron Management Unit



FISHERIES DIVISION

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF
NATURAL RESOURCES

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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.

Intro / First Cast

2019-2020 Newsletter Double Issue!

Welcome to the latest Northern Lake Huron Management Unit Newsletter. Since we were not able to get a newsletter out in 2019, this will be a double issue – we will be covering surveys done in 2018 and 2019, as well as give you a glimpse of what we have planned in 2020!

There's been a lot going on in NLHMU since our last issue. One of our technicians, Tom Adams, retired in 2019 after 30 years with Fisheries Division. Tom was a great part of our management unit, and he will be missed. But we wish him the best in retirement! There's a story about Tom and his career later in the newsletter.

Dams continue to be a part of our landscape in northern Michigan, and some of those dams are owned by NLHMU. You will see a number of articles/updates in this newsletter about dams in our area – about some of the dams we own, about some large (and small) dam removal projects, as well as some dam repair projects.

We are always working towards making fishing better in Michigan and helping to improve public access to the state's worldclass fishery resources. We have been fortunate in Northern Lake Huron to have been involved in some land acquisitions that will let you explore some new waters! This issue includes a list of those parcels and the waters to which they will provide improved access. We hope you enjoy this update. As always, feel free to contact us if you have questions about the surveys or other information listed in this report. Happy fishing in 2020!



NLHMU-Owned Dams

Did you know?

Steelhead are really rainbow trout that spend part of their life in a lake environment, and part of their life in a stream environment? In Michigan, steelhead eggs are collected at the Little Manistee Weir, near Manistee. These fish are known as the Michigan strain of rainbow trout (RBT-MI). Steelhead spawn in streams, where the eggs hatch. Juvenile steelhead (also called parr) will spend 1-2 years in the stream, before migrating to the lake environment (smolting). Steelhead typically spend 2-3 years growing in the lake before returning to rivers to spawn.

Dams block steelhead migrations, and some dam removals will enable steelhead to access spawning habitat upstream.

The Northern Lake Huron Management Unit is responsible for several of the dams located within the unit. These are dams that Fisheries Division provided the impetus for initial construction and is also responsible for annual maintenance. Additionally, our unit pays for dam safety inspections every 3-5 years done by a certified engineer. The Northern Lake Huron Unit managed dams are: Big Creek Impoundment, Crawford County; Cornwall Dam, Cheboygan County; Foch Lake Dam, Montmorency County; James Farm Wall-eye Rearing Pond Dam, Alpena County; Roberts Lake Dam, Cheboygan County, and Tomahawk Flooding Dam, Presque Isle County. There has been plenty of action on the dam management front since our last newsletter in 2018.

Notice that there are only six dams on this list. In 2018 there were seven, and at that time the list included the Trout Brook Pond Dam in Chippewa County. In cooperation with Lake Superior State University, the NLHMU initiated a study to determine the amount of recreational effort the impoundment generated. It was determined that the small amount of effort expended on the pond did not justify the cost of maintaining the pond, or the impounding of the headwaters of a designated trout stream. With great support from DNR Parks and Recreation Division, and the United States Forest Service Hiawatha National Forest, the dam was removed, restoring Trout Brook Creek to a free-flowing brook trout stream.

The photo shows the Trout Brook Pond dam removal in progress.



The dam at Cornwall Flooding in the Pigeon River Country State Forest maintains water levels and is part of the Shore-to-Shore equestrian trail but it is aging and identified in need of major repair. DNR Fisheries Division owns the dam and has it professionally inspected every three years. To preserve the unique, valuable recreation opportunities that Cornwall Flooding provides, DNR is partnered with Huron Pines to renovate the dam. The project will: 1) protect the fisheries and wildlife of Cornwall Flooding, 2) maintain recreational uses including fishing, equestrian trails, hiking, wildlife-viewing and non-gas boating/paddling, and 3) restore the aging dam infrastructure to enhance dam safety and to improve long-term maintenance operations.

DNR and Huron Pines has received some funding from the DNR Dam Management Grant Program (\$50,000) and a one-time allocation of state funds (\$360,725) to repair the entire structure. This will include removal or capping of the old riser structure, removal and replacement of the pipe outlet, and rebuilding of the entire levee that supports the structure. We are currently working with engineers to design an appropriate structure. The work was previously scheduled to start in 2020, but this may be postponed to 2021 to account for financial or contractor logistics.



Three generations of anglers fishing Cornwall Impoundment.



Anglers fishing Cornwall Impoundment.

NLHMU Website

Looking for contact information for NLH personnel? Want to see survey reports from the unit, or read previous NLHMU newsletters? Don't forget to bookmark our management unit website which can be accessed [here](#).

Lake Kathleen / Maple

The Maple River near Pellston is now flowing freely. The Maple River Dam, which formed Lake Kathleen, was removed in 2018 by Conservation Resource Alliance (CRA) and a group of partners, including MDNR Fisheries Division.

First, the basics: The Maple River Dam was a 1200-foot long earthen embankment about 15 feet high, creating the 42-acre Lake Kathleen. The East Branch Maple River and West Branch Maple River each flowed into the impoundment. The mainstem Maple River then flows approximately 7 miles until it empties into Burt Lake. The Maple River Dam was originally built in 1884, and served as a hydroelectric dam from the early 1900s until 1951, when it failed and washed out the road below it, Woodland Road. The dam was rebuilt in 1967 and the impoundment has been in private ownership since then. The dam removal in 2018 removed the sill and spillway of the dam, restoring a more natural, riverine channel.

Fisheries Division and CRA have worked with the previous and current landowners for a number of years to address concerns about the dam. Personnel from Northern Lake Huron Management Unit and the Habitat Management Unit first met onsite in October of 2002 to discuss options for the future management of the aging structure. In late 2003, CRA sought funding to look at management options as well. The owner of the dam at that time, Paxson Offield, was very supportive of conservation and wanted to do what was right for the river. Mr. Offield passed away in 2015, but the new owner, Rick Holton, has carried on that stewardship ethic.

CRA compiled a team to work with Mr. Offield, then Mr. Holton, on removal of the dam. There were a number of complexities associated with this barrier, however, that needed to be addressed: the Hungerford's Crawling Water Beetle, an endangered aquatic insect, was known to be in the watershed; the Michigan Monkey Flower, a threatened plant, grew on the earthen embankment; and the dam was a barrier for sea lamprey migration. An Environmental Assessment (EA) was written to address these and other concerns.

Removal of Lake Kathleen was the final piece of CRA's ambitious "Free Span the Maple" initiative, which sought to remove all barriers in the watershed, including undersized culverts. The final phase of this project included the removal of Maple River Dam, as well as the replacement of the road just downstream and a small two-track road over the East Branch Maple River. Fisheries Division has been involved in the initiative by serving as advisors for the project, as well providing funding through the Aquatic Habitat Grant program. Between 2004 and 2017, Fisheries Division contributed \$579,168 in funding to the Free Span the Maple River Connectivity Initiative. The bulk of this funding was from 2016, when we awarded \$430,168 in AHG funding to the final phase of the project, including dam removal and road stream crossing replacements.



Lake Kathleen Dam Removal—continued

Removal of the Maple River Dam will yield a number of benefits:

- Cooler water downstream for trout. A Fisheries Division temperature study of the watershed found that the dam raised the average July water temperature downstream by 5.4°F, changing the stream's classification to being marginal for trout.
- Watershed connectivity. The dam fragmented this stream, and its removal reconnects the system. This allows for the natural transport of nutrients, sediment, and wood that can provide habitat.
- Fish passage. Species such as brown trout and rainbow trout from Burt Lake will be able to use the Maple and its tributaries seasonally for spawning and nursery habitat.



West Branch Maple River flowing through Former Lake Kathleen Impoundment.

More fishing access!!!

Northern Lake Huron Management Unit staff have been working hard to **increase fishing opportunity and access** to our world-class fisheries. We've been fortunate to have a number of parcels or access sites acquired or funded for improvement in recent years. Here's a list of some of the highlights:

- **Storey Lake acquisition** – 2100 acres +, Storey Lake, Stewart Creek (trout stream)
- **Walled Lake acquisition** – warmwater fishery, quality lake regulations; a mile of frontage on the Upper Black River
- **North Branch Au Sable, Lovells Twp access**. A Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF) grant was recently awarded to Lovells Township for a safe, legal access to the North Branch.
- **City of Sault Ste. Marie MNRTF grant** – will restore safe shoreline fishing access to the St. Marys River near Cloverland Powerplant
- **Black Lake Marina** – Black Lake
- **Burt Lake State Park access site** – increased capacity
- **Maghielse Tract acquisition** – 1,000-acre + along Au Sable River near Grayling
- **Guimond Tract access site**– 52 acres, 1400' of frontage on West Branch Big Creek near Lovells
- **Rattlesnake Cr. / East Branch Black River**

Stocking and Management

Walleye Stocking 2018

We raised over 410,000 spring fingerling walleye in our James Farm Pond in 2018 that averaged 1.2 inches in total length. We stocked the following lakes from this pond: Otsego Lake 111,723; West Twin Lake 116,629; Big Bear Lake 35,000; Lake Esau 25,119; McCollum Lake 35,000; Bradford Lake 20,000; Jones Lake 14,353; Dixon Lake 14,718; Opal Lake 18,286; and Thunder Bay River 30,000.

We raised over 62,000 spring fingerling walleye in our Reid Berney Pond in 2018. These fish averaged 1.4 inches in total length, and were stocked in the following lakes: Caribou Lake 52,998; and Frenchman Lake 9,121.

The St. Marys River system was stocked with 467,962 spring fingerling walleye that were produced in ponds operated by Sault Tribe and cooperatively with the DNR, Sault Tribe, and the Drummond Island Sportsman's Club.

NLHMU lakes were once again the beneficiaries of production from the Bay City (Southern Lake Huron Management Unit) rearing ponds. Fish from these ponds were stocked into the following NLH Lakes in 2018: Van Etten Lake 109,445; Cedar Lake 50,000; Lake St. Helen 203,256; Clear Lake 38,295; and Five Channels Pond 22,760.

Walleye Stocking 2019

The James Farm and Reid Berney Ponds were not used in 2019 due to maintenance activities. We were once again fortunate to receive almost 210,000 walleye spring fingerlings from the Bay City rearing Ponds operated by the Southern Lake Huron Management Unit. These fish averaged 1.3 inches in length at time of stocking, and were stocked into the following NLH waters: Tea Lake 13,053; Big Creek Impoundment 7,253; East Twin Lake 77,216; Ocqueoc Lake 12,734; Long Lake (Montmorency Co.) 18,416; Long Lake (Cheboygan Co.) 18,734; Ess Lake (13,416; Big Lake 16,253; and Au Sable Lake 32,270.

The St. Marys River system was stocked with over 380,000 walleye fingerlings in 2019 at various locations. Fish were reared in Eastern Upper Peninsula rearing ponds operated by Sault Tribe and cooperatively with Sault Tribe, the DNR, and the Drummond Island Sportsman's Club. These fish were stocked at: Potagannissing Bay 171,821; Sault Ste. Marie area 20,068; Lake George 85,662; Raber Bay 60,731; and Lake Nicolet 44,186.



St. Marys River Updates

St. Marys River Fish Community Survey report available

The St. Marys River Fisheries Task Group recently completed the writeup for the 2017 fish community survey of the river. The full report is available for download at: http://www.glfcc.org/pubs/lake_committees/huron/St%20Marys%20FCS%20Report%202017.pdf. The abstract for the report is provided below:

The St. Marys River fish community was jointly assessed by the member agencies of the St. Marys River Fisheries Task Group under the Great Lakes Fishery Commission in 2017, the 9th such survey since 1975. A gillnet based survey, 44 nets sets each survey year resulted in indices of abundance and population status. Abundance of two cool water species of importance, Walleye and Yellow Perch, were not significantly lower than the 2013 estimates, and have remained stable in the River since 2006. Smallmouth Bass abundance has varied since 2002, with significant peaks in 2006 and 2013. Cisco have maintained stable but lower overall abundance within the River in 2017; however, Northern Pike have continued to increase since 2002, with the highest River abundance reached in 2017. Growth rates, as indicated by length at age at capture, were generally near or below regional averages and may reflect the northern latitude of the St. Marys River. Total annual mortality rates were 59% for Yellow Perch, 49% for Northern Pike, 48% for Smallmouth Bass, 62% for Cisco, and 61% Walleye but were generally deemed within acceptable ranges for these species. Diets varied by species and reflected both piscine prey and invertebrates, especially crayfish. Ruffe were documented for the first time in the Fish Community Survey in 2017, and were reported by anglers in the upper river during the same year. Round gobies continued to be observed in the diets of some predators indicating that they continue to persist in the river fish community. Recommended are timing future surveys with full river-wide creel surveys for maximum information and to increase the frequency of both.



St. Marys River Creel Report Available The St. Marys River Fisheries Task Group recently completed the report for the 2017 St. Marys River open-water creel survey. The full report is available for download at: http://www.glfcc.org/pubs/lake_committees/huron/2017%20SMR%20Creel%20Report.pdf.

Some key take-aways from this survey:

- The survey covered both Michigan and Ontario sides of the river, from the Compensating Works/Rapids downstream to DeTour.
- There were an estimated 232,921 angler hours of fishing effort on the St. Marys River from May 1 - October 31, 2017, more than half of which was targeted effort for walleye.
- Anglers on the St. Marys River in 2017 came from Michigan and Ontario, as well as 17 other states and 3 other provinces. Anglers that year came from as far away as Hawaii, Washington, the maritime provinces, and British Columbia!
- The amount of fishing effort in the St. Marys River in 2017 was almost 35% as much as all the fishing effort in the Michigan waters of Lake Huron!

Personnel Corner

Tim Cwalinski is a senior fisheries biologist within the Northern

Lake Huron Management Unit. He grew up near Cleveland, Ohio, fishing farm pond country and Lake Erie tributaries. He received his B.S. from Lake Superior State University, and his M.S. degree from Ball State University in 1993 and 1996, respectively. He worked for the Indiana DNR as a fisheries biologist from 1996-2002. He enjoys fishing, hunting, camping, traveling, and playing racquetball. Tim is a fan of his Ohio sports teams, including the Cleveland Indians and Ohio State Buckeyes football.

Personnel Spotlight-Tim Cwalinski



Recent Retiree— Tom Adams

Tom began his career with Fisheries Division while attending Lake Superior State College. Tom spent the summer of 1981-1983 as a seasonal worker at Drayton Plains Fisheries Station. After graduation from LSSC in 1983, Tom tried to obtain a permanent job with the DNR, but he was unsuccessful due to a hiring freeze. Finally, in 1987, Tom was hired as a fisheries technician at Drayton Plains. In 1991, Tom transferred to the Hunt Creek Fisheries Research Station where he worked for 20 years assisting with inland trout research. During this time, Tom helped continue one of the oldest annual trout stream electrofishing efforts in the nation, assisted with efforts to reintroduce Alewife and Grayling into Michigan waters, and was very involved with efforts on the Pigeon River to document the impacts of the dam failure that occurred in 2008. In 2011, Tom moved to the Northern Lake Huron Management Unit in Grand Island where he was a valuable member of the technician crew. Tom served as the Unit's safety officer, and he is an authority on the use and deployment of temperature loggers in lakes and rivers throughout the State. One of Tom's favorite duties is electrofishing lakes during the fall. After more than 30 years of service, Tom retired at the end of March 2019. Tom recently bought a camping trailer, and he is looking forward to visiting the country's national parks with his wife, Janice. Tom is looking forward to ice fishing, but he also is planning to spend some time in Florida during the winter. Congratulations Tom on your 30 years of service, and good luck in retirement!



2018 Lake & Stream Surveys, field work



Status and Trends Surveys

- Chain Lakes (Iosco County)
- East Branch Big Creek South (Oscoda County)
- Minnehaha Creek (Emmet County)
- North Branch Au Sable River (Crawford County)
- Shupac Lake (Crawford County)
- South Creek (Roscommon County)
- South Tomahawk Lake (Montmorency County)
- West Branch Maple River (Emmet County)
- West Branch Sturgeon River (Cheboygan County)



Status and Trends Surveys

- Chain Lakes (Iosco County)
- East Branch Big Creek South (Oscoda County)
- Minnehaha Creek (Emmet County)
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- South Creek (Roscommon County)
- South Tomahawk Lake (Montmorency County)
- West Branch Maple River (Emmet County)
- West Branch Sturgeon River (Cheboygan County)

Discretionary Surveys

- Inland Waterway -Muskellunge tagging
- Brownlee Lake (Alcona County) – measure dissolved oxygen
- Carp (Trout) Lake (Chippewa County) – Fall walleye survey
- Cedar Lake (Alcona County) – investigation of LMB dieoff
- Club Stream (Otsego County) – investigate low trout numbers
- Foch Lakes (Montmorency County) – fish survey
- Footo Pond (Iosco County) – investigate smallmouth bass
- Jose Lake (Iosco County) – fish survey
- Mullett Lake (Cheboygan County) – Fall Walleye Survey
- North Branch Au Sable – Collect fish for disease testing
- North Branch Au Sable at Eamans – Population estimate
- North Branch Au Sable at Twin Bridges – Population estimate
- North Branch Au Sable (multiple sites) – investigate declining brook trout numbers
- North Branch Au Sable (multiple sites) – investigate declining brook trout numbers

2019 Lake & Stream Surveys, *field work*

Discretionary Surveys

- Black Lake, Cheboygan County – fall walleye survey
- Burt Lake, Cheboygan County – fall walleye survey
- Carp (Trout) Lake, Chippewa County – fish community netting survey
- Carter Creek, Roscommon County – fish community electrofishing survey
- Crooked Lake, Emmet County – fall walleye survey
- Douglas Lake, Cheboygan County – fall walleye survey
- East Twin Lake, Montmorency County – fall walleye survey
- Grand Lake, Presque Isle County – netting survey for walleye and smallmouth bass
- Long Lake, Alpena County – fall walleye survey
- Mullett Lake, Cheboygan County – fall walleye survey
- Pigeon River, Cheboygan County – population estimates at 4 stations
- St. Marys River – Lake Munuscong, Chippewa County – fall walleye survey



Management Evaluations

- Au Sable Lake, Ogemaw County
- Au Sable River – Mio to Alcona Reach population estimate (also 3 single pass evaluations)
- Avalon Lake, Montmorency County – netting to evaluate splake stocking
- Clear Lake, Montmorency County – netting to evaluate splake stocking
- Clear Lake, Ogemaw County -- fall walleye survey
- Lake St. Helen, Roscommon County – fall walleye survey
- Long Lake, Cheboygan County – fall walleye survey
- Van Etten Lake, Iosco County – fall walleye survey



Status and Trends Surveys

- Crooked Lake, Emmet County
- Guthrie Lake, Otsego County
- North Branch Au Sable River, Crawford County – fixed site
- Thunder Bay River, Alpena County – random site
- West Branch Maple River, Emmet County – fixed site

Management Units Conduct More than 230 Fisheries Surveys in 2019

Note: A version of this story appeared in a February 2020 edition of the DNR Digest.

Did you know that the DNR professionals from eight Fisheries Management Units across the state have been hard at work doing over 230 surveys on waterbodies across Michigan? In 2019, fisheries staff conducted 132 surveys of inland lakes and 101 surveys of streams throughout the state. If you fished one of those lakes or streams, you may have seen the survey crew collecting data on one of Michigan's world-class fisheries.

Fisheries Division lake surveys are done for a variety of reasons, and can be categorized as management evaluation, status and trends, or discretionary surveys. Management evaluations are often conducted to monitor specific management actions, such as fish stocking or a habitat improvement project. State of



Michigan hatcheries stocked more than 21 million fish in Michigan waters in 2019

https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-350-79119_79146_82446-511028--,00.html,

but it is the responsibility of the Fisheries Management Units to determine if the management action has had the desired effect. For example, did the stocking of walleye in an inland lake improve growth of a yellow perch population, thus providing a more attractive perch fishery for anglers? The field surveys will address that and other important questions in evaluating our fish stocking activities and the overall health of a lake.

Surveys are also conducted to track the 'status and trends' of fish communities and important aquatic habitat on different lakes each year throughout the state. These surveys are used to compare lakes geographically and through time. Field units also conduct discretionary surveys to answer questions from the unit biologists, anglers, or the general public. For example, surveys may be conducted to assess existing population status and habitat suitability for threatened and endangered fish species.

Similar to lakes, streams throughout the state are surveyed for different purposes. Management evaluations may be done to assess the success of stocking, effectiveness of fishing regulations, or if habitat projects have improved the fish population. Two types of status and trends surveys are done in streams: fixed sites and random sites. At fixed sites, we annually estimate the fish population abundance (usually trout in cold water streams and smallmouth bass in warmer waters) in a stream, on a three-year rotation. Random sites, on the other hand, are intended to give us a snapshot of what species are present in a stream and their relative abundance. Instream habitat data are collected at all our status and trends sites.

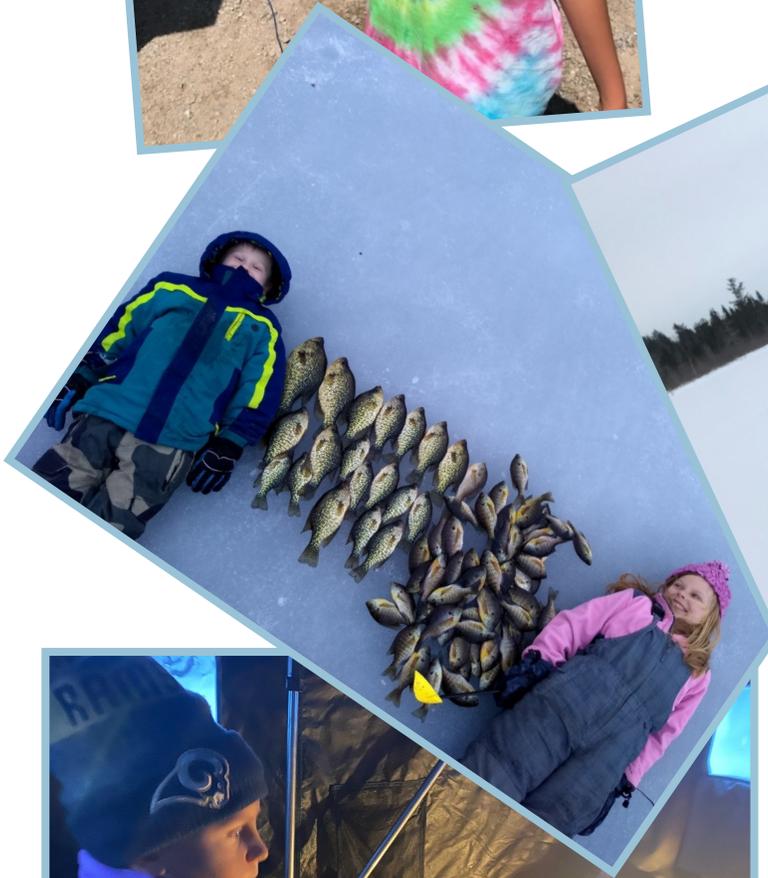


DNR crew conducting a stream survey with electrofishing gear. Photo courtesy of Darren Kramer, DNR.

It is critical that lake and stream surveys are conducted to evaluate the success of fish stocking, but they also are important to help inform the decisions on what other management actions may be needed. For example, every lake and stream survey that is conducted will help in the early detection of invasive species or to describe the presence of any aquatic animal that is threatened or endangered.

Lake and stream surveys form the basis for fisheries management in waterbodies throughout the state. Our crews hope to see you on one of Michigan's lakes or streams in 2020. If you'd like to learn more about what surveys have been done in your part of the state, please contact the appropriate management unit. A map of the Management Units and contact information can be found at: https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-350-79136_79236_80245---,00.html.

Angler Photo Center



Looking Ahead

Scheduled Surveys

2020

Spring Fish Community Surveys:

-Rainey Lake (Presque Isle County) and Black Lake (Cheboygan/ Presque Isle Counties)

-KP Lake (Crawford County)

Spring Muskellunge Evaluation:

Cooke Pond

Stream Fish Community Surveys: South Branch Pine River (Alcona County); Robinson Creek; others to be determined

Trout Population Estimate: South Branch Carp River (3 sites): Upper West Branch Pine River (Chippewa County); Pigeon River; Au Sable River; South Branch Au Sable River (2 sites)

Water Temperature Monitoring: Sturgeon River watershed, Maple River watershed

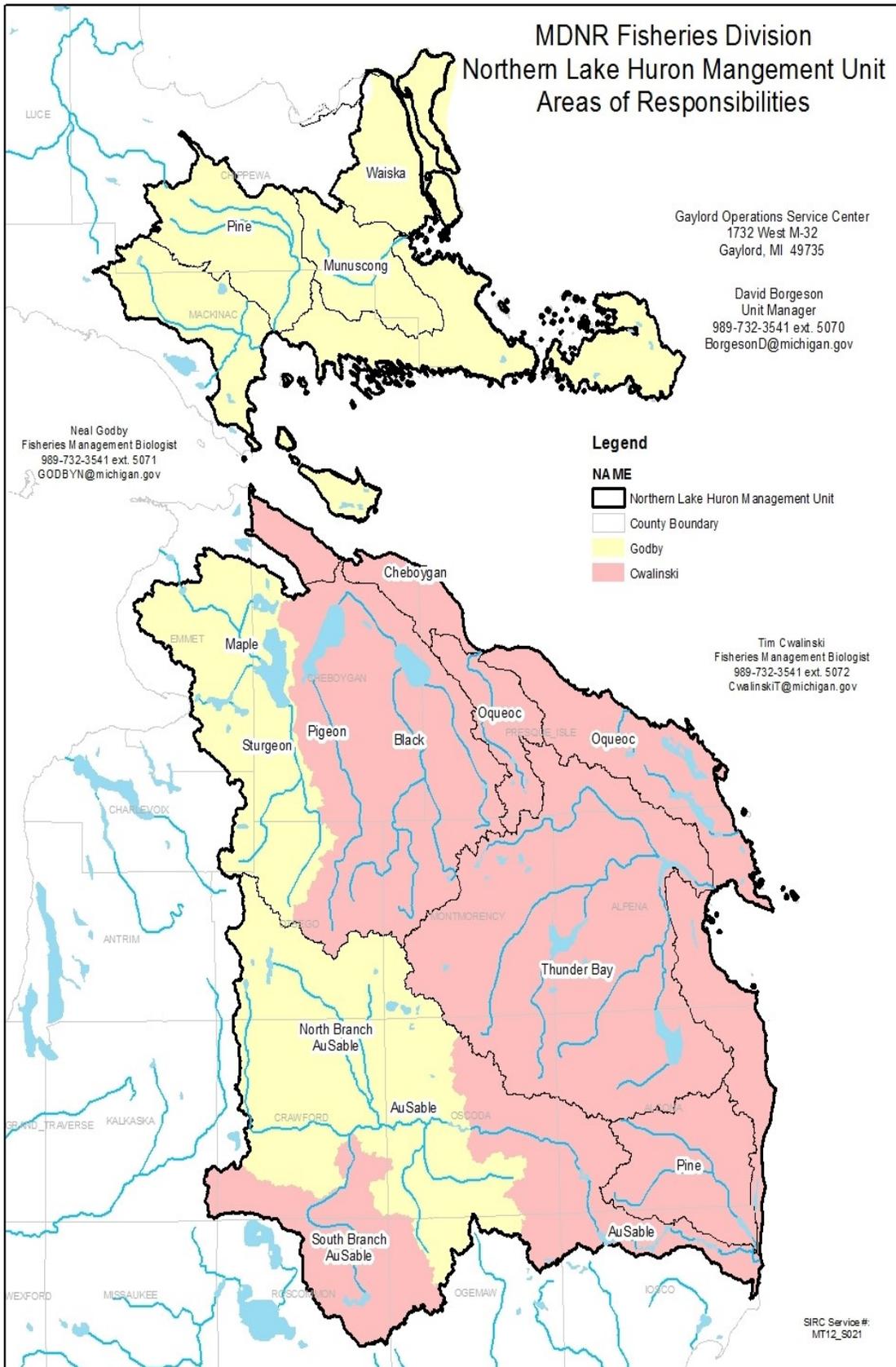
Fall Juvenile Walleye Index: St. Marys River, Black Lake, Mullett Lake, others to be determined

Fall Trout Stocking Evaluations: Au Sable River below Mio, others to be determined



Contact us at any time

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