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Fisheries Assistant

Mary Beth Houel, Fisheries
Assistant

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What is the SLHMU?

The Southern Lake Huron Management Unit (SLHMU) encompasses the southern Michigan shores of Lake Huron including Saginaw Bay and all of the waters that make up the watersheds that drain into the southern portion of Lake Huron. Our work area includes all or portions of the following counties: Arenac, Bay, Clare, Genesee, Gladwin, Gratiot, Huron, Iosco, Isabella, Lapeer, Livingston, Mecosta, Midland, Montcalm, Oakland, Ogemaw, Roscommon, Saginaw, Sanilac, Shiawassee, St. Clair, and Tuscola. Fisheries staff working in this unit include a Unit Manager and Management Biologist who work out of the Bay City Operations Service Center, a Management Biologist stationed at the Lapeer State Game Area, a technician staff who work out of the Bay City Fisheries Warehouse, and 5 Fisheries Assistants (creel clerks) who work out of various ports.



Who we are.

We are public trustees employed to fulfill the mission, vision, and values of the Michigan DNR, Fisheries Division.

Fisheries Division Mission

To protect and enhance Michigan's aquatic life and habitats for the benefit of current and future generations.

Fisheries Division Vision

To provide world-class freshwater fishing opportunities, supported by healthy aquatic environments, which enhance the quality of life in Michigan.

Fisheries Division Values

The following six values guide the work for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Fisheries Division:

Integrity

Leadership

Innovation

Professionalism

Collaboration

Transparency

New Lake Huron Basin Coordinator - Randy Claramunt

In April 2016, Lake Huron Basin Coordinator Todd Grischke accepted a promotion to Assistant Chief for Fisheries Division leaving a vacancy for the Lake Huron Basin. In October 2016, Randy Claramunt accepted the position as the new Lake Huron Basin Coordinator where he will coordinate fisheries management for the Northern and Southern Lake Huron Management Units

Randy comes to the Lake Huron Basin with a vast background in Fisheries. For the past 15 years Randy has been stationed at the MDNR Charlevoix Research Station serving as a Fisheries Research Biology Specialist taking on the many complex issues of the Lake Michigan fisheries. We welcome Randy to his new role with Lake Huron.



2016 State Workers

SLHMU was funded to hire 2 seasonal State Workers to assist with the many duties of our field season. SLHMU State Workers are typically 13 week positions. They are a great benefit to SLHMU and these positions also provide on the ground experience for individuals interested in the natural resources profession.

Rachel Lokajty is from Bay City. She graduated from John Glenn High School in 2011. She attended Saginaw Valley State University and just recently graduated (fall 2016). She achieved a full ride academic scholarship that provided her the opportunity to obtain a Bachelor of Science degree in biology with a minor in chemistry. Her future goals are slightly undecided but most likely she will be attending another university to pursue a master's degree in a fisheries related field.

Javin Simrau is from the Gladwin area. He graduated from Gladwin High School in 2016. Javin has been very active in 4H raising and showing pigs for several years. Javin is currently enrolled at Delta Community College and is also taking classes at Delta through the MSU extension program. His goal is to attend Delta for 2 years and then attend Michigan State University to obtain a degree in fisheries and wildlife management. His path is undetermined after graduation.

Thanks Rachel and Javin for your hard work this past year!



Southern Lake Huron Fishery Update

(A summary of data from the Great Lakes Creel Census)

Fishing effort on Saginaw Bay and the Saginaw and Tittabawassee rivers decreased from 959,879 angler hours in 2015 to 697,856 angler hours in 2016. Walleye harvest, however, was only slightly down from 2015 with 167,703 fish harvested. Weather (many northeast blow days, and poor ice) limited the effort. The year 2016 was the first full calendar year during which the liberalized walleye regulations (8 fish per day and a 13 inch minimum size limit) and more restricted yellow perch bag limit (25 fish per day) on the waters of MH-4 and the Saginaw River were in place. It is too soon to tell whether the new regulations have had a significant effect on the fishery, and decreased fishing effort may have muted the effects of the regulations.

The Saginaw Bay yellow perch fishery continued to show signs of improvement in 2016. Perch harvest (open water and ice fishery combined) for 2016 was 223,614, up significantly from a historic low of 101,488 in 2014. Unfortunately, the perch fishery still remains a shadow of what it once was and no one should interpret this encouraging improvement as a “recovery”. Sport harvest of perch consistently exceeded a million fish annually from 1984 through 1998. Clearly, the yellow perch population is still depressed and has a long road to recovery, but at least trends are in the right direction. Heavy predation on juvenile perch by walleye, other predatory fishes, and double-crested cormorants is believed to be the main reason the perch population is depressed. Most of the improvement in the perch fishery in 2016 came in the months of September and October. Perch fishing remained very good in late fall and early winter. Growth rates of perch that survive the first year of life are very fast growing and some good sized perch are available. There may have been some improvement in juvenile perch survival that accounts for the increase in harvest, but only time and more data will tell.

Harbor Beach had the highest effort of the blue-water ports on the outside of the Thumb in 2016 and likewise had the highest overall harvest of 7,489 fish combined (Atlantic salmon, Chinook salmon, coho salmon, lake trout, and rainbow trout). Lexington had less overall trout and salmon harvest but had the most Atlantic salmon caught of any port. The Atlantic salmon rearing and stocking program is clearly paying dividends. Atlantic salmon harvest at Lexington was 429 fish in 2016, compared to 246 in 2015, and 7 in 2014, reflecting a nice upward trend. Port Sanilac harvested 102 and Harbor Beach 14 Atlantic salmon. Harbor Beach, Port Sanilac and Lexington all had higher harvests of Chinook salmon, coho salmon,



2016 Great Lakes Harbor and River Stockings

Southern Lake Huron Fisheries Management Unit

These are the current 2016 Fish Stocking Requests for various ports and rivers in southern Lake Huron. The actual numbers stocked depend upon hatchery inventories, but are usually very close to the stocking request.

IOSCO COUNTY

- Tawas Bay: 10,000 Steelhead trout – Tawas River
- East Branch Au Gres River: 10,000 (small) Steelhead Trout – north of M-55
30,000 Steelhead trout – 4.5 mi west of Lake Huron
10,000 Brown trout – north of M-55

OGEMAW COUNTY

- Rifle River: 10,000 (small) Steelhead trout – Sage Lake Road
50,000 Steelhead trout – at Selkirk
15,000 Brown trout – spread over five different sites

ISABELLA COUNTY

- Chippewa R: 12,650 Steelhead trout – west of Mount Pleasant

HURON COUNTY

- Caseville: Pigeon River 6,300 Steelhead trout
- Pinnebog River: 15,850 Steelhead trout at M-25
- Port Austin 10,000 Steelhead trout at the mouth of Bird Creek
- Harbor Beach: 30,000 Steelhead trout
60,700 Lake Trout (from MDNR hatchery program)
(Federal lake trout plants rotate between ports and vary from year to year.)

SANILAC COUNTY

- Port Sanilac: 30,000 Rainbow trout (Eagle Lake, domestic strain)
- Lexington: 30,000 Rainbow trout (Eagle Lake, domestic strain)
40,000 Atlantic Salmon (Landlocked)
10,000 Steelhead trout

Southern Lake Huron Fishery - Commercial Fishing

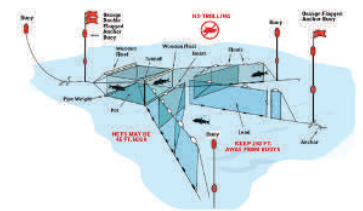
An experiment was started in June of 2015 where Fisheries Division partnered with state licensed commercial fisherman Dana Serafin to explore new fishing grounds for Lake Whitefish in Lake Huron south of Harbor Beach and north of Port Sanilac in an area lightly fished by sport anglers. This experimental fishery continues through the end of 2017. If Mr. Serafin finds the whitefish fishery to be economically viable, he would be granted a permanent license in exchange for surrendering his four Saginaw Bay licenses and leaving Saginaw Bay permanently. Over the past couple of years, Mr. Serafin's Saginaw Bay operation has accounted for slightly more than 50 percent of the commercial yellow perch harvest in the bay.

Mr. Serafin's success in the first year (2015) of the whitefish experiment was very encouraging. His catch was almost 100,000 pounds, despite missing the spring fishing season and fishing only half the number of nets allowed under the permit. By-kill of other species (mainly lake trout) was very low over the entire fishing season. His success the second full season (2016) was again positive. He harvested just over 170,000 pounds. He only fished half of his ten authorized nets. The DNR rode the vessel 3 times (spring, summer and fall). No problems were encountered.

For 2017, the Harbor Beach permit will be unchanged, but Mr. Serafin's licenses in Saginaw Bay will be further restricted. Three licenses may not be fished at all; and one license is limited to setting and tending no more than 15 of the 33 traps nets listed from Jan 1 – May 30 and Sept 1 – Dec 31, 2017, and no yellow perch may be retained in 2017.

This experiment could prove to be a win – win situation for both commercial and sport fishing interests. It has the potential to harvest a lucrative and sustainable whitefish stock in an area of southern Lake Huron that has gone un-fished for 30 years while at the same time reducing commercial harvest of yellow perch in Saginaw Bay, reducing by-kill of walleye, and relieving conflicts over fishing grounds between sport and commercial fishermen.

The DNR again plans three ride along observation trips in 2017.



Trap Net



iced lake whitefish, Lake Huron.



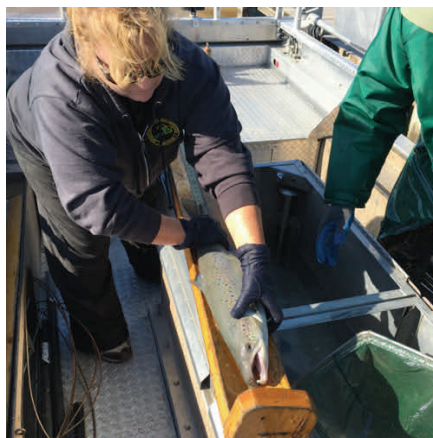
Lake Huron Fishery - Atlantic Salmon update

Fisheries Division began planting Atlantic Salmon in Lexington harbor in 2013 as part of a lake-wide experiment to see if Atlantics could adapt to the current Lake Huron food web and partially replace Chinook Salmon in the blue-water fishery (Chinook populations declined sharply after the collapse of alewife in 2003.). Other Atlantic Salmon plant sites included the St. Mary's River, the Thunder Bay River at Alpena, and the Au Sable River at Oscoda.

An electrofishing evaluation was conducted in Lexington harbor in November 2015 . We collected 10 mature Atlantics while observing many more. The boated fish averaged 20 to 24 inches in length and 4 to 5 pounds in weight and were in beautiful condition. Their size and our knowledge of Atlantic Salmon biology in Lake Huron indicate they were most likely from the 2014 Lexington plant although not marked in 2014.

We continued to evaluate the harbors in fall of 2016. Timing was based on angler reports and weather. Atlantic Salmon were showing up in increased numbers. Fifty-three Atlantics were captured by electrofishing in Lexington and Port Sanilac. Of these, 50 were AD clipped. Size ranges were from 20– 29 inches. The Atlantic Salmon stocked at Lexington appear to be surviving well and contributing to the fishery out in the big lake and in the harbor. Anglers are slowly learning to catch them.

As the hatchery continues to improve its ability to raise Atlantic Salmon, we are hopeful of seeing improved returns of Atlantics in future years.



2016 Projects

Annual Walleye Tagging– Study 436

2016 again showed an increase in our fieldwork effort in diversifying the tag distribution in the tributaries around Saginaw Bay.

Tittabawassee River (5-days)	1923 tags
Kawkawlin River (3 Days)	750 tags
Au Gres River (2 days)	150 tags
Shiawassee River (2 days)	127 tags
Rifle River (1 day)	50 tags
Days spent in 2014— 8 days	
2015—10 days	
2016—13 days	



3000 Jaw tags are applied annually. Of these, 10% or 300 were marked as REWARD tags. Our total tag data base which dates back to 1981 as having 108,669 records. These are worth \$100 to the lucky angler who turns them in. Verification of reward tags is necessary. All tags can be reported by this link to the DNR webpage, by phone, or the tagging information can be mailed to the address stamped on the tag.

http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-153-10364_52259_48361-180574--,00.html

Tag return proportions appear to be in proportion to how they were applied in all different locations.

The Saginaw Bay office processed 645 tag returns in the 2015 “fishing year” which was April 1, 2015-March 30, 2016.

The most useful things we learn from this are estimates of total mortality (& survival) as well as exploitation rate. From those we can calculate fishing mortality and natural mortality. It also gives us a population estimate and a little bit of info on movement.

A stronger estimate of the population size is based on the Statistical Catch At Age (SCAA) model. An estimate of **2,148,730** age-2 and older walleye make up the Saginaw Bay Stock. That’s from fishing year 2015 (April 1 2015 through March 30, 2016).



2016 Projects

SLHMU Walleye and Northern Pike Production

Each year, newly hatched walleye (fry) obtained from our hatcheries are put into rearing ponds in April and allowed to grow until they reach 1-2 inches. The fingerlings are then harvested in June and stocked into various water bodies around the State. In 2016, SLHMU raised **1,176,243** walleye fingerlings for stocking.



Kawkawlin Rearing Pond	372,240
Auburn East Rearing Pond	210,874
Auburn West Rearing Pond	323,707
Tawas Rearing Pond	195,722
<u>Au Gres Rearing Pond</u>	<u>73,900</u>
	1,176,443



SLHMU also produces northern pike fingerlings from its Sanford Rearing Marsh. Adult northern pike (10 pairs of males and females) are transferred from Sanford Lake to the rearing marsh and allowed to reproduce naturally and free of predators. After 6 weeks, the rearing marsh is drained and northern pike fingerlings are harvested and stocked into public waters. In 2016, the Sanford Rearing Marsh produced 5,285 fingerlings averaging 4.5 inches. Four lakes were stocked.



In 2017, SLHMU plans to operate all 5 walleye rearing ponds along with the Sanford Rearing Marsh. We look forward to another productive year. Future plans may also include exploration of rearing fall walleye fingerlings.



To obtain information on where we stock fish, visit the DNR, Fisheries website at: http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-153-10364_53405-355970--,00.html

2016 Projects

Summary of 2016 Walleye Plantings from Rearing Ponds in the Southern Lake Huron Fisheries Management Unit

<u>Southern Lake Huron Fisheries Management Unit (Bay City)</u>	
Budd Lake – Clare County	12,821
Wixom Lake – Gladwin County	151,525
Pratt Lake – Gladwin County	12,667
Wiggins Lake – Gladwin County	20,428
Lake Lancer – Gladwin County	58,488
Secord Lake – Gladwin County	49,956
Long Lake – Iosco County	35,466
Loon Lake – Iosco County	34,983
Otter Lake – Lapeer County	6,923
Peach Lake – Ogemaw County	19,694
Devoe Lake – Ogemaw County	14,405
Rifle Lake – Ogemaw County	18,877
George Lake – Ogemaw County	17,286
TOTAL	453,519
<u>Northern Lake Huron Fisheries Management Unit (Gaylord)</u>	
Van Etten Lake – Iosco County	73,347
Cedar Lake – Iosco County	53,198
Clear Lake – Ogemaw County	47,307
Lake St. Helen – Roscommon County	148,415
TOTAL	322,267
<u>Eastern Lake Superior Fisheries Management Unit (Newberry)</u>	
Au Train Basin – Alger County	26,070
Muskallonge Lake – Luce County	15,392
TOTAL	41,462
<u>Lake Erie Fisheries Management Unit (Detroit)</u>	
Lakeville Lake – Oakland County	35,979
TOTAL	35,979
<u>Central Lake Michigan Fisheries Management Unit (Cadillac)</u>	
Intermediate Lake – Antrim County	79,907
Fife Lake – Grand Traverse County	43,836
Manistee Lake – Manistee County	47,401
Tippy Dam Pond – Manistee County	21,930
Lake Mitchell – Wexford County	47,730
Lake Cadillac – Wexford County	30,272
Hodenpyl Pond – Wexford County	51,913
TOTAL	322,989
<i>TOTAL PLANTS FROM ALL SLH WALLEYE PONDS.....1,176,216</i>	

Inland Lake and Stream Surveys

During the course of the year, SLHMU conducts a number of inland lake and stream surveys. Typically, habitat and biological data is collected during open water season and analyzed during the winter months. Completed reports are ready in the spring of the following year.

The following surveys were conducted in 2016 and reports are available upon request:

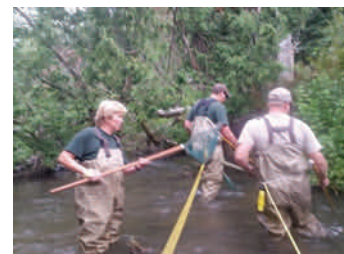
Inland Lakes

- | | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| Haitco Lake, Saginaw County | West Londo Lake, Iosco County |
| Six Lakes (Round, Hoffman, Long, Stong– Isabella, Mecosta Counties) | |
| Johnson Lake, Ogemaw County | Holloway Reservoir, Genesee County |
| Buck Creek Pond, Iosco County | Sanford Lake, Midland County |
| Lake Chemung, Livingston County | Long Lake, Lapeer County |
| Ross Lake, Gladwin County | Coldwater Lake, Isabella County |



Streams

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Shiawassee River, Shiawassee County | Silver Creek, Iosco County |
| Scott Drain, Tuscola County | S. Br. Tobacco River, Clare County |
| Vaughn Creek, Iosco County | N. Br. Tobacco River, Clare County |
| Kearsley Creek, Oakland County | Newton Creek, Clare County |
| Kintz Creek, Lapeer County | |



The following lakes and streams are scheduled for surveying in 2017:

Inland Lakes

- | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Martiny Lakes, Mecosta County | Four Lake, Gladwin |
| Tee Lake, Ogemaw County | Indian Lake, Iosco County |
| Round Lake, Iosco County | Big Fish Lake, Oakland County |
| Stevenson Lake, Isabella County | Lake Lancer, Gladwin County |
| Ross Lake, Gladwin County | Pratt Lake, Gladwin County |
| Peach Lake, Ogemaw County | Holloway Reservoir, Genesee County |
| Dickinson Lake, Oakland County | Lake Nepessing, Lapeer County |



Streams

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Tittabawassee River, Gladwin County | Salt Creek, Isabella County |
| Cass River, Tuscola County | N. Br. Cass River, Tuscola County |
| Pine River, Isabella County | Chippewa River, Isabella County |
| Gamble Creek, Ogemaw County | |

Status of the fishery reports are available for select waters and are listed by county.

http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-153-10364_52259_19056-333302--,00.html

Southern Lake Huron - Dam Removal Update

Shiatown Dam Removal

The Shiatown Dam Removal Project in Bancroft, MI was delayed another year and is now scheduled for removal in summer of 2017. This project is spear headed by the Friends of the Shiawassee River and has received funding from the DNR Dam Management Grant Program (\$162,000), the US Fish and Wildlife Service (\$30,000), the Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network (\$62,000), and the DNR Aquatic Habitat Management Grant Program (\$362,000).

Corunna Dam Removal

The City of Corunna, with assistance from the Friends of the Shiawassee River, has obtained the necessary funding to proceed with the removal of the Corunna Dam on the Shiawassee River. Contributions have been secured from the MDNR Aquatic Habitat Grant Program, Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network, US Fish and Wildlife Service along with local funds. Dam removal and park improvements are scheduled for summer of 2017.

Hamilton Dam Removal

The City of Flint continues to pursue funding for the replacement of the Hamilton Dam on the Flint River. Hamilton Dam is severely deteriorated and one of the top priorities for removal in the State. This project has many complex issues associated with it and is tied to contamination clean-up in the upstream impoundment as well as the Flint Riverfront Restoration Plan.



Shiatown Dam



Corunna Dam



Hamilton Dam

2016 Field Pictures





Assist Wildlife Division--Waterfowl banding

Assist Parks Division (I & E) for Free Fishing Weekend



Assist other Management Units/ Statewide Projects



Trout unlimited Kids camp (from Illinois)



Great Lakes Muskellunge egg take

What do we use to sample a stream or wadeable river to assess fish populations?

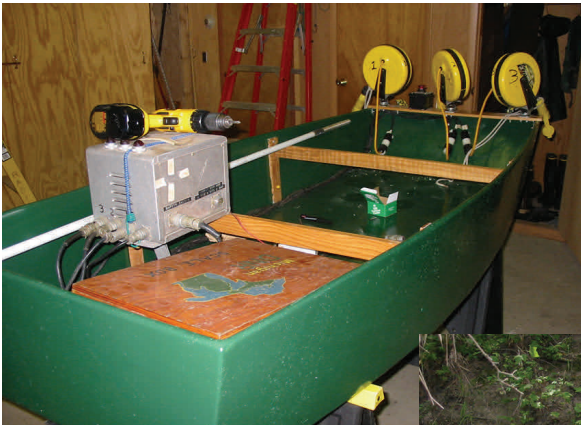
The answer is a barge or stream shocker. What is a stream shocker you might ask? A stream shocker is a small boat like tub that can be pulled or dragged through the water to house the equipment necessary to shock and capture fish (with generators and electricity). Since streams are dynamic aquatic systems that are difficult to predict and sample with nets we must use other means. Fish move frequently, use habitats differently, and can generally remain undetected. Most people think that they know a stream pretty thoroughly, but time and again, electrofishing surveys turn up surprising results. Similar to stun guns used by police to temporarily debilitate people, electrofishing temporarily stuns fish to allow fisheries personnel to scoop them up with nets. Fish are then placed in holding tanks where they quickly recover before being evaluated and returned to the water. Larger streams and rivers require electrofishing units mounted on boats, whereas smaller streams and creeks require electrofishing units carried as backpacks. Electrofishing is the most effective method to sample a stream. The electrical current pulls fish out of even the best hiding places such as logs and undercut banks. We use electrofishing surveys to estimate species abundance, determine growth, recruitment, and health, and remove unwanted species. Monitoring stream fish populations helps us to determine stocking rates, fish health, and to determine if adequate habitat is available prior to a stream restoration.

A few years ago it was necessary to replace our old stream shocker. The task was completed by one of our own fisheries technicians (Vince Balcer). This is no easy process; it takes time and lots of expertise with the use of fiberglass and resins. The boat needs to be buoyant, watertight and light weight. Most of our access points we sample are not right along the road and usually several hundred feet to the river's edge so the lighter the boat the better. The equipment in the boat consists of three reels, probes, a generator, a control box, battery, safety switch and tub to hold fish for processing. The reel allows for sampling both left and right of the barge at one time. The probe is the equipment in the water that stuns the fish hooks up through an electrical cord. The generator is how the electricity is produced and the control box regulates the current evenly to each probe. There is an element of danger but we take extra precautions when having electricity in the water.

On a yearly basis we will sample anywhere from 8-12 streams that will require the use of a stream shocker.

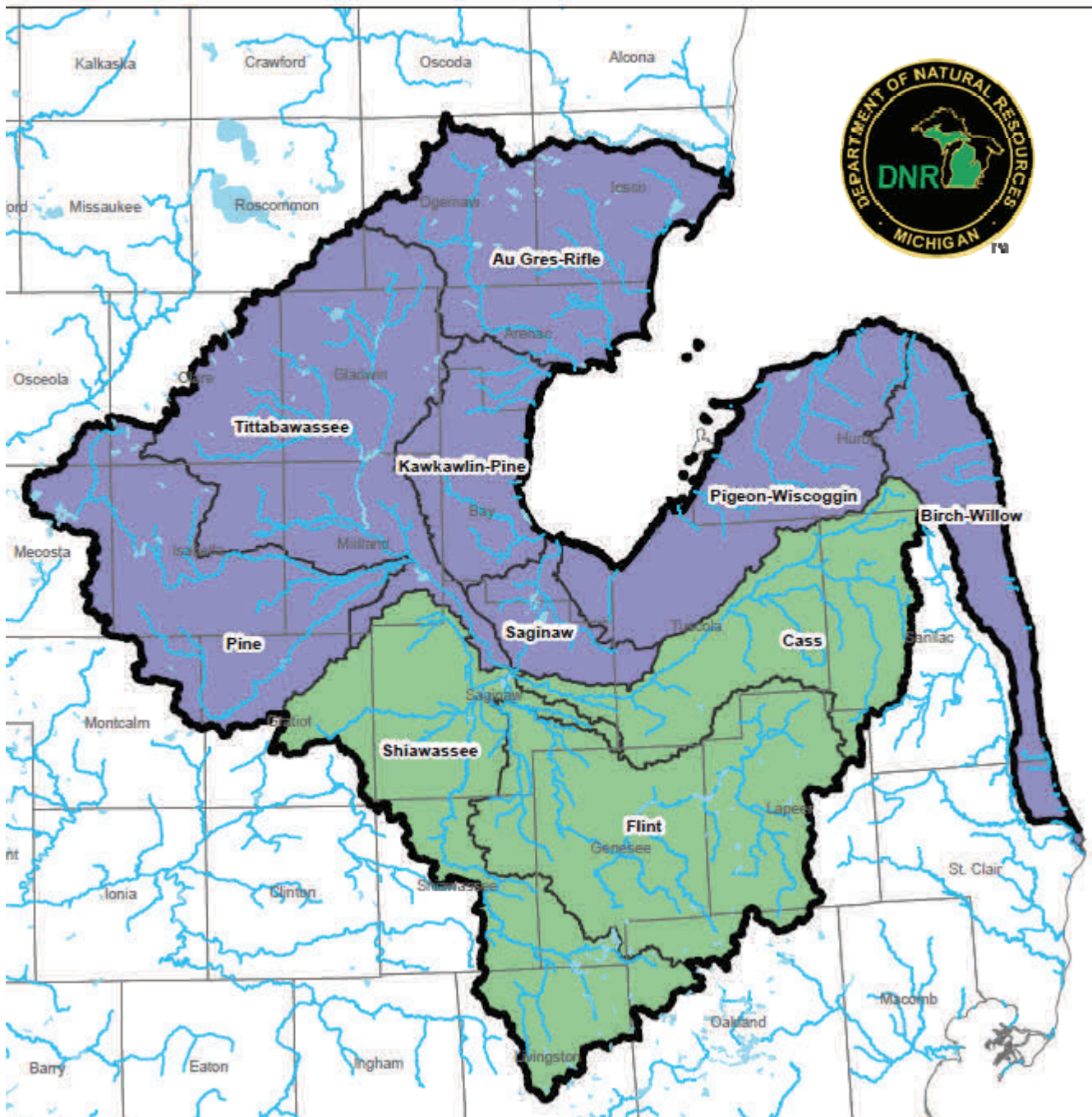
Here is the process that was used to build our new stream shocker:








The finished project in action sampling trout on Houghton Creek. This piece of equipment is very valuable and we could not complete our stream surveys without a dependable stream shocker.

Southern Lake Huron Management Unit Areas of Responsibility



-  Leonardi
-  Schrouder
-  Management Unit Boundary

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