

Coldwater Resources Steering Committee
General Office Building, State Secondary Complex, Lansing
Meeting Notes 5/6/14

Attending: Linn Duling, Tom Buhr, Jim Schramm, Bryan Burroughs, Jim Bos, Jim Bedford, Steve Hutchins, Don Wright, Terry Lyons, Christian Lesage, Mark Tonello, Troy Zorn, Phil Schneeberger, Steve Mondrella, Nick Popoff, Seth Herbst, Dave Borgeson Sr., Dennis Eade, Jim Dexter, Jay Wesley

Welcome and introductions

Troy Zorn welcomed everyone, and introductions were made.

Retail business and other organizational representation on CRSC (Jim Dexter)

Jim Dexter has been working to find an appropriate retail business rep for the committee. One important detail is that it would be preferable that they have a relationship with the American Sportfishing Association (ASA). Also, we are looking for someone who would represent diverse angling interests, not just one particular niche of anglers. Jim wants to have a conversation with Jay's and their general manager may be interested. Another suggestion was Cabelas. Randy Van Dam from D&R Sports Center in Kalamazoo is being considered for the Warmwater Resources Steering Committee.

10 Brook Trout Bag Limit Update (Phil Schneeberger)

Phil presented on the experimental evaluation of the 10 brook trout bag limit that is in effect on select UP streams and is in response to some UP anglers who have been asking for a return to a 10 fish daily limit on brook trout in the UP. In a public opinion poll on the issue prior to implementing the new regulation, the results were quite even, with about half polled in favor of the 10 fish limit, and about half in favor of retaining the current 5 fish limit. Five study stream sections were chosen, with regulations on those sections switching to ten fish per day beginning in 2013. The five study streams included sections of the Dead, Driggs, E. Br. Ontonagon, E. Br. Huron, and the E. Br. Tahquamenon. The evaluation began last summer with creel surveys on four streams (E. Br. Tahquamenon, upper Tahquamenon, Bryan Creek and Two-mile Creek). Spring electrofishing had been scheduled, but was cancelled due to late snow and high water. The same will likely happen this year. Summer electrofishing surveys to track populations are occurring on most study streams. Creel surveys showed fairly low effort and harvest on most streams surveyed. Surveys of UP anglers were also conducted using post cards and on-line methods. Looking at all survey methods combined, the results showed that 57% of respondents preferred the 5 brook trout bag limit, though responses differed somewhat depending on stream or region of the UP. Much discussion ensued. Stay tuned, as the study is ongoing (Phil would like to stress that we shouldn't make too much of the findings thus far because they're from only the first year of a 5-year evaluation and because sample sizes were small). Phil will provide a brief written summary of his presentation to the committee for distribution.

Stream fish population trend viewer (Troy Zorn)

Troy Zorn gave a presentation on the new Stream Fish Population Trend Viewer that will soon be available to the public on the DNR website. This tool will allow anglers to access trend data on growth, abundance, and survival on important species sampled via electrofishing at Fisheries Division's Status and Trends fixed sites. Creation of the viewer was funded by a grant from the Great Lakes Fishery Trust.

Aquatic Invasive Species Update (Seth Herbst)

Nick Popoff introduced Seth Herbst, the new Aquatic Invasive Species Coordinator for Fisheries Division. Seth then presented a Powerpoint regarding potential upcoming aquatic invasive species that threaten Michigan waters. The first was the New Zealand mudsnail, which does not occur in Michigan waters yet, but is in southwestern Wisconsin and Lake Michigan near Chicago. They are very prolific and could have impacts on the food chain in Michigan's trout streams. They can survive being out of the water for as long as a month and may even be able to survive bleach treatments. The second threatening species is an algae known as Didymo or "rock snot." It can colonize gravel and other hard surfaces in trout streams, affecting spawning and the aesthetics of trout streams. It has been spreading throughout much of the US, but is not yet in Michigan. Seth then showed a model wader wash station. He is looking for partners (bait shops, fly shops, Watershed Councils, etc.) to build and maintain them. One of the primary values of the wader wash stations is to increase awareness of invasive species among the public. Nick stated that he would send out the construction plans for the wader wash stations to the committee via email, in addition to the proper chemicals and techniques for using them. Bryan Burroughs asked if Seth would write an article for TU publications and Seth agreed to do so.

Coaster Brook Trout Study Update (Troy Zorn)

Troy Zorn updated the group on the new coaster brook trout rehabilitation study he is working on. Coasters historically occurred in over 100 Lake Superior tributaries, but occur in only a handful of rivers until recently. One interesting quote he came across stated that "the streams near Marquette had been fished out by 1865." Troy noted that research conducted by Michigan Technological University showed that exploitation by anglers may be limiting coaster brook trout populations. Stocking efforts of supposed coaster strain brook trout starting in the early 2000s in Michigan have not been successful. Troy cited the recent resurgence of coaster brook trout along Minnesota's north shore tributaries to Lake Superior, likely due to the combination of a 20-inch minimum size and 1-fish bag limit in streams and a 20-inch minimum size limit in Lake Superior. Ontario recently enacted protective stream regulations for brook trout and have seen promising results thusfar. He and others think that highly protective lake and stream regs will be important for rehabilitating coaster brook trout runs in Michigan too. Troy is hoping to institute some regs on portions of Lake Superior tributaries between Marquette and L'Anse. Evaluation of the regulations will occur via angler diaries and electrofishing surveys.

Trout Management Plan Update (Troy Zorn)

The Department is planning to write an inland trout management plan over the next few years. Michigan has never had one, it has been a goal for some time, and it has been

identified as a priority task in Fisheries Division's Strategic Plan. A number of Fisheries Division folks will be working on it. Some other states have trout management plans, and we'll be looking at these plans and Michigan's pike and musky plans as we develop ours. Steve Hutchins asked why we need to do this, and Troy responded by stating that the plan will tell what we did in the past, describe what we're doing now and why, and identify what we should do in the future. The plan will provide support for current and future management of resident trout populations and fisheries in Michigan. Public opinion surveys will be used to gage the interests of trout anglers in the state. The plan will enable us to align Fisheries Division's management with the public's desires, within the constraints of the Division's capabilities and the biological potential of our coldwater resources. The authors intend to spend 2014 reviewing other agencies' trout management plans, designing a survey to gage public opinions on resident trout management, and outlining a plan for Michigan. In 2015, they plan to implement the public survey, write a draft of the plan, and have it internally reviewed. In 2016, they intend to have the plan externally reviewed, make revisions, and finalize it for distribution.

Treble Hook Restriction Regulation (Mark Tonello)

Mark Tonello explained that illegal activities on NW Michigan streams, particular during the salmon run in the fall, continue to be a major problem. This is despite the fact that snagging has been illegal for 25+ years. Law Enforcement Division has asked that we help them address the issue by tweaking fishing regulations on certain streams where problems exist. Here is the current draft proposed regulation:

“From August 1 to November 15, terminal fishing gear is restricted to single point, non-weighted hooks, no larger than ½ inch from point to shank. Treble hooks (no larger than 3/8 inch from point to shank) may only be used when attached to a lure. A lure is defined as a body bait, plug, spinner, or spoon. A lure is **not** a device primarily constructed of lead, commonly referred to as a “grabber,” “lead minnow,” “salmon slayer,” “torpedo,” or “Turk’s tickler.”

This gear restriction shall be enacted for the following waters:

Benzie County: All waters of the Betsie River.

Manistee County: All waters of Bear Creek. All waters of the Betsie River. The Manistee River from Tippy Dam downstream to Railroad Bridge below M-55 (T21N, R16W, S6).

Mason County: The Big Sable River downstream of Hamlin Lake Dam.”

Several questioned why the regulation was not written to cover more waters. Tonello explained that this was the compromise that was arrived at within the Department. The streams listed are those that have annual, recurring, intense law enforcement issues on them. Another comment was that if this law is enacted, it may shift snagging effort to other rivers that don't have the regulation. Those rivers named included the White, Muskegon, and Pere Marquette rivers. Tonello explained that if this regulation is successful and that happens, we can certainly add more waters in the future. It was pointed out that if this regulation is proven effective, it can be extended to other Michigan waters that have other restrictions that are intended to prevent snagging. Tonello also

explained that Law Enforcement Division has met with the County Prosecutors for all three of the counties affected by this proposal, and all three were wholeheartedly in favor.

Streamside Vegetation Effects (Dave Borgeson Sr.)

Dave provided a handout and slide presentation concerning the impact of vegetative succession on Michigan trout streams. He highlighted scientific studies comparing streams habitats with meadow vs. forested riparian conditions, suggesting forested corridors are more amenable to increased erosion and sedimentation. He presented a series of photos to illustrate his point. He feels that much of the sand problems we now face in our trout streams are caused by the vegetative transition from meadow to forest. The studies he summarized and slide presentation showed meadow sections to be more erosion resistant, narrower, deeper, and “healthier” with better trout populations. Dave stated that we should be trying to keep meadow streams in that condition instead of encouraging forest succession. He believes that current US Forest Service and DNR Forest Management policies that favor old growth succession in riparian zones are misguided and put our trout streams at risk. Discussion ensued. A couple of people stated that the presentation turned their view of riparian forests providing better habitat for trout “on its head.” Jim Bos stated that this point of view is not a one-size fits all, but that it might make sense in some small headwater streams. It was pointed out that changes in stream habitat conditions that Dave observed reflected the slow return of logged and farmed landscapes towards their forested, pre-settlement conditions (i.e., evolution of the channel and instream habitat towards a new equilibrium), and that he was fortunate to fish these streams prior to and during this transitional period. Others mentioned that while open riparian habitat may be feasible along some streams, large-scale management or riparian corridors to favor very early successional stages could potentially lead to significant beaver issues on many coldwater systems. It is also notable that Trimble’s (1997) research was conducted in southwest Wisconsin, which was predominantly grass lands before settlement – a fact that is significant in assessing the most appropriate riparian cover for a given area.

Potential Issues and Topics for Future CRSC Meetings (Troy Zorn)

Potential topics suggested for future discussion included:

- Presentation on the Nuhfer et al. (2014) study of steelhead and brown trout interactions in Hunt Creek
 - Dr. Lupi (MSU) Trout Angler Preference Survey
 - DNR Trout Management Plan progress
 - Further discussion on instream habitat issues
- Please contact Troy Zorn with any additional topics.

Next CRSC meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for September 24, 2014, from 10:00-3:00 in the Visitor Center’s Classroom at Hartwick Pines State Park near Grayling.