

Coldwater Resources Steering Committee Meeting Notes October 30, 2015

Attending: Troy Zorn, Nick Popoff, Bill Ziegler, Phil Schneeberger, Jay Wesley, Scott Heintzelman, Bryan Burroughs, Jim Francis, Jim Dexter, Christian LeSage, Dean Molnar, Andrew Carlson, Roger Hinchcliff, Ray Danders, Bernie Campes, Dennis Eade, Don Wright, Jim Bedford, Linn Duling, Bryan Darland, Mike Verhamme, Terry Lyons, Steven Mondrella, Gaylord Alexander, Jim Schramm, Suzanne Stone.

Notes: Suzanne Stone and Troy Zorn.

Lake Superior Basin Team's Splake Stocking Evaluation Criteria (Phil Schneeberger)

Phil's presentation identified six criteria that are being used to evaluate effectiveness of splake plants at Lake Superior ports: 1) 5-year average cost per splake creeled; 2) 5-year average return rate to the creel; 3) relative importance of splake (percent of all fish caught) to the local fishery; 4) relative angler use rate at the port (angler hours); 5) diversity of the salmonid fishery at the port (number of other salmonids available); and 6) seasonality of the port's splake fishery. Each criterion had three tiers for possible scores connected to targets established by the LSBT, and criteria were weighted based on their relative importance when computing the overall score. The LSBT used these criteria to compare splake stocking success at Munising, Marquette, Copper Harbor, and Keweenaw Bay. The results provide a transparent approach to compare planting sites, and to help justify potential changes to splake stocking activities at sites. The criteria can also be modified to use when considering new stocking locations. Phil's presentation will be made available to committee members.

Trout Trails www.michigan.gov/trouttrails (Suzanne Stone)

Suzanne provided an overview of this web app for introducing anglers to trout waters in Michigan that they may not necessarily have been aware of. Several folks commented that they (and some of their kids) really like the site and look forward to seeing it grow. Suzanne estimated that the site gets 100-200 hits per day. The app has received an award from ESRI, and the nationwide recognition from the GIS/story mapping community has given the Michigan DNR the opportunity to beta test many new ESRI products and platforms. Suzanne's presentation will be made available to committee members.

Inland Trout Angler Survey Update (Andrew Carlson)

Andrew provided some preliminary analysis results from the Michigan Inland Trout Angler survey that was conducted in spring 2015. This survey was sent to individuals that purchased a 2013 All Species license, a 2014 fishing license, and provided their email to the Michigan DNR. Thus, it was intended to target anglers that fished for coldwater species. The link to the SurveyMonkey-based survey was emailed 83,000 people and 4,161 took the survey. Andrew presented a comparison of responses between "members" identifying themselves as affiliated with major stream trout fishing organizations in Michigan (Michigan TU, Anglers of the Au Sable, and Federation of Fly Fishermen), and "non-members" who did not identify themselves with these clubs. Andrew presented results from over 25 survey questions, so only a general summary of findings are included in the notes. He noted that members and non-members were generally similar in regards to how many years they have fished streams for trout which species

they targeted and their level of satisfaction with various aspects of inland trout fishing and management on Michigan streams. These broad groups of anglers generally differed in their tackle and harvest practices for inland stream trout. For questions related to fishing trip planning and selecting streams to fish, the two groups responded similarly to some questions (e.g., items taken, species sought, regions fished), but differently to others (e.g., desire for trophy brown trout). It was pointed out that the survey was not a purely random sample of Michigan trout anglers, and that conducting such a survey, though worthwhile, would be complex and add significant cost and time investment. It was also noted that members, compared to non-members, were likely over-represented in the survey, and that further work may be needed to better understand how this might influence survey results. In addition, Andrew will be looking at the web-based survey results and angler responses to questions for inland trout in lakes.

Artificial Fly/Lure Only, Year-Round Fishing (Don Wright)

Don started off the discussion with a picture of a 22" brown trout he caught on the last day of trout season- his fishing highlight for the year. He proposed that MDNR explore opportunities for opening at least some stream reaches throughout the state to artificials only, catch and release fishing for inland trout. He pointed out that MDNR recently did this for bass, and thinks providing a similar opportunity for inland trout will result in little to no impact on populations because: 1) trout fishing pressure outside of opening couple weeks is very low; 2) trout fishing pressure is likely even lower outside the traditional trout season on gear restricted stretches; 3) catch and release regulations will keep harvest to zero; 4) mortality with artificial lures/flyes is low; 4) current year round fishing on gear restricted streams has caused no known problems. Don said he would like to see some real fish survey data to test his theory. To get some handle on angler use, the inland trout survey asked the question: In a typical year, about how many times do you fish for inland trout in Type 3, Type 4, or Gear Restricted streams outside the standard fishing season? Nearly 50% of non-members and over 70% of members indicated that they did this at least once. Considerable discussion ensued regarding: the possibility of extending the season in spring and/or fall; some pros and cons of implementing such a change for each of the major regulation types; whether such a change could open the door to poachers in some areas; concerns about excessive targeting of browns on redds; whether it would get more youth out fishing, etc. Most members were in favor of looking into it further, and a follow-up discussion is proposed for the next meeting.

History of Brown Trout Management in Michigan Streams (Zorn)

Troy provided an overview of 130 years of history of brown trout management on Michigan streams. He noted our abundant freshwater resources, and that Michigan trout streams are set apart from other trout regions of the world due to our relatively flat topography, porous glacial deposits, and hydrologically-stable groundwater-fed streams. He went over the logging impacts, loss of grayling, introduction of other salmonids (browns in the 1870s), and early trout management and research, which has resulted in some of the longest trout population data sets in the nation and possibly the world. Brown trout in Michigan streams are typically piscivorous, cover-loving, crepuscular, a challenge for anglers, and often migrate seasonally. Over 95% of Michigan's stream trout populations are self-sustaining, with populations being regionally synchronous temporal synchrony in spawning times, fry emergence times, and spring flow conditions among streams.

Increased wood habitat, warmer winter temperatures, and increased nutrients were beneficial to trout in the Au Sable River. Troy discussed four main aspects of managing trout in Michigan streams, namely resource assessment (fixed, random, and discretionary stream surveys), fishing regulations, habitat management, and fish stocking. He highlighted MDNR's online Stream Fish Population Trend Viewer, which anglers can use to track changes in trout abundance, growth, and survival at population index sites throughout the state. MDNR has a long history with trout fishing regulations, which were put into place in early 1900s to address overharvest. He mentioned habitat protection issues, impact assessment studies, and habitat rehabilitation efforts occurring around the state. He stated that MDNR rears three strains of brown trout, annually stocks about 730,000 browns (46% of annual hatchery production of browns) into streams, and that number of streams stocked has leveled off over the last couple decades. We have been able to evaluate fish populations and ceased stocking where not effective. When asked about MDNR's position on fracking, staff noted that the Water Withdrawal Assessment Tool model was not developed for assessing impacts on fish from large, short-term withdrawals, and that recommendations on potential impacts are made to MDEQ on a case by case basis.

Coldwater River Fiasco and Need for Drain Code Reform (Bryan Burroughs)

Bryan provided the group an update on the Little Thornapple River, a key brown trout fishery in Barry County, which is governed by an inter-county drain board. Last year, the Drain Commissioner decided to do maintenance and wood removal of that drain to reduce water levels at an upstream lake for residents. Work occurred in a 13.5 mile stretch, presumably to have a larger pool of people to assess for the work. The contractor went outside of the contract scope, didn't just cut dead ash along streamside, and pulled everything out of the stream, excavated the stream bed and banks back. Most of the work was unnecessary and some was illegal. The contractor gave away his equipment and is fading away, and insurance is not covering work out of scope. Now people in drainage district are being assessed to fix the problem after being assessed for the work originally proposed. A lot of furious people were present at public meetings. People will be re-taxed to pay for a short term stream stabilization plan, and a consultant is developing a long term restoration plan for the waterway. The inter-county drain board says they are going to fix it...it's a mess. The 14 miles of destruction may have broken the temperature regime for brown trout and we don't know if it can be restored. The association of drain commissioners (ADC) may not be ready to make changes to the drain code, since it allows them to do things that no one else is allowed to do. Dexter is meeting with DEQ next week to work with the inter-county drain board, since such incidents keep happening over and over, to see what the ADC is going to do about these types of activities. The ADC is talking amongst themselves of what can be done better to prevent this in the future. Fish Division's Habitat Management Unit is having a working group with agency folks and drain folks to create a more proactive approach. DNR can provide more technical expertise. There is considerable interest in doing something with the drain commissioners to help prevent this from happening again, but it needs to be done surgically without opening up the entire drain code. Let Bryan know if you are interested in doing some advocacy work on this issue.

Stream Trout Population Trends (Troy Zorn)

Troy presented data from 2015 surveys at 14 fixed (population index) sites on trout streams. For brown trout, abundance values of all size groups are at or above long term average for most sites. Abundance of brook trout for size groups up to 7" were at or above average at most sites, but 8"

and longer brook trout were below average at most sites. Total numbers of rainbow trout (juvenile steelhead) were mixed, with some sites being above average and others below. MDNR has also received funding from the Great Lakes Fishery Trust to create a tool for evaluating fish and habitat conditions in any Michigan stream reach by comparing its characteristics to benchmark values computed from standardized survey data collected at similar types of streams throughout the state. Contact Troy for more info on this project.

Roundtable Updates and Comments

Mondrella: 90% of the people want to keep the regulations the way they are. Has gear restrictions questions for lower section on the Pere Marquette River, and thinks areas are being underutilized due to gear restrictions.

Burroughs: Pere Marquette gear restrictions should be looked at for the next 2-year trout regulations cycle. Look at a section of river, such as the Pere Marquette, and determine what is best and if the river is really impacted.

Dexter: There was a one year creel study (2010), and we will be revisiting it with everything else and when we re-evaluate the Pere Marquette regs to see if changes are necessary.

Burroughs: Be objective of how to evaluate – liked the way Phil was transparent in his evaluation for splake.

Wright: Fair, balanced evaluation criteria are needed.

Burroughs: Pigeon River Golden Lotus dam removal is occurring today. We need to be digging into what we are doing with steelhead and this may need greater scrutiny due to the decrease in salmon fishing; Great Lakes net pens proposals may add diseases too.

Eade: Michigan Steelheaders feel we need to increase the stocking. Need a new well at Thompson, but there is no money for it. We all need to get on board with this to let our legislators know that it is a priority for tourism and sportsmen of the state. If Chinook are going away then we need to focus on steelhead. Thompson has the perfect temperature of water, but we need a geothermal well there to take care of it and possibly raise browns elsewhere.

Dexter: This year we added 150,000 steelhead to our system by moving brown trout out of Thompson and down to Harrietta and Oden. We have set the stage to make these changes but these added steelhead won't be large in size because we don't have enough water at the right temperature to get them to the right size. These smaller fish will have to be stocked in streams where they can stay for another year before moving out. Some will go to inland waters and others to Great Lakes tributaries. Once we have the governor's support, then it will be time to push the legislators. Right now there is an anticipated \$600 million hit to general fund for roads, and the DNR is specifically requesting general fund support for the Thompson SFH well. Game and Fish currently has a potential \$8 million deficit in the 2016 budget. The legislature will listen to their constituents. The Thompson well is going to cost between 1 and 3 million dollars. Dexter has requested a total of \$36 million, of which about \$7 million is for rearing additional steelhead that would be at least 7.5 inches before release. Today, 1.15 million steelhead are reared, and the 150,000 additional fish represent a 10% increase in production.

Bedford: What about reducing the bag limit? Limiting the number of fish might help. Maybe Michigan anglers are spoiled?

Burroughs: We need to move on steelhead and Atlantics before we lose the salmon completely and see businesses shutting down. There is going to be intense pressure coming down from the loss of Chinook. More people come here to fish than Alaska and we don't want to lose that. Would be great to manage based on science and what is best for all citizens, rather than politics.

Dexter: That's where we always start out! Since, there were minimal biological effects of reducing the steelhead bag limit, it became a social question. And, when we asked anglers if they wanted to catch more fish or eat more fish the response was, eat more fish.

The working guy that only gets to go fishing once or twice, they want a larger bag limit because they can only afford to make one trip. Wages have been flat and the economy has a lot to do with the "keep" mentality.

Troy Zorn provided an updated timeline for the Trout Management Plan. Dexter stated it was ambitious, and that all will do their best to meet it.

- Jan 31, 2016- 1st draft for author review
- Feb 15- return comments to coauthors
- Mar 4- revisions to Zorn
- Mar 21- revisions out for Fish. Div. Trout Committee review
- Apr 7- Fish. Div. Trout Committee comment due date
- May 15- Revised draft for Schneeberger & Dexter's review
- May 15- Coauthor presentations to CRSC
- June 15- Revised draft for CRSC, Fish Div Management Team (MT)- if desired, and public review (Press release)
- July 15- CRSC, MT, and public comments due
- Nov 15- Revised draft for "info" at CRSC & MT meetings
- Dec 15, 2016- Seek MT approval

Dexter: Reminder on aquaculture reports coming out – there will be a public meeting probably at the RAM center within the next few weeks. There will be only one meeting, so comments are important and will be used to contribute to a briefing document. There will also be a presentation on what we know about chumming in the state to the NRC on December 10th at Lansing Center. What other states think about chumming will also go into the report.

Burroughs: TU provided comments on net pen aquaculture. MDARD advocates for agriculture, but we are the recreational fishing side. We need the DNR on this issue to help us like MDARD helps the agricultural producers.

Popoff: Seth and I sent an update on mud snails in the Pere Marquette River. They are pervasive in the river, so we will start looking at adjacent rivers for surveys next. Wash your gear!