

## Lake Michigan Citizen's Fishery Advisory Committee

April 26<sup>th</sup>, 2016

MUCC Headquarters

Lansing, Michigan

Attendees: Denny Grinold, Dana Bonney, Chip Klein, Jim Bos, Jim Bedford, Tom Hamilton, Keith Wils, Ken Lee, Mike Verhamme, Jim Schramm, Steve Huff, Eric Andersen, George Freeman, Bill Winowiecki, Frank Krist, Denny Kuenzer, Jim Fenner, Chuck Pistis, Paul Jensen, Dennis Eade, Ed Szymanski, Brian Gunderman, Scott Stoney, Wes Newberry, John Stegmeier, Dan O'Keefe, Bob Reider, Randy Claramunt, Donna Wesander, Scott Heintzelman, Dave Peterson, Ed Eisch, Todd Grischke, and Jay Wesley.

### **Introductions:**

Denny Grinold was congratulated for the Person of the Year Award from Michigan Outdoor News.

### **Fishing Report:**

Grand Haven – Fishing has been difficult. Few kings caught are hatchery origin. Lake trout has been ok. This spring some kings were caught at the mouth of the river and were full of alewife and shad. Coho are being caught out in 100-250 FOW. Walleye is decent off the pier, and lake trout meat color is red compared to white in the past.

PM River – Fall and winter steelhead was tough. The spring run was ok and is pretty much done.

Grand River – Toughest steelhead season since 1979-1980. Steelhead are smaller in size. This past season catch was 65% down based on personal log.

White River – Steelhead in the river late. There were a few coho in the fall and a sporadic spring for steelhead.

Bays de Noc – There are some small perch and a few walleye. Steelhead are down this year in the U.P. rivers but brown trout is good.

Frankfort – Steelhead was good last year in local spots. Last fall kings were really slow. Coho in Platte Bay were slow early and eventually showed up in late September after the tourist season. This spring brown trout have been sporadic with some lake trout being caught. No kings so far this spring.

Ludington – Brown trout down this year compared to last couple years. There are a few lake trout around with some small kings.

Saugatuck – Coho have been good in 200 FOW.

St. Joe – Coho have been good along with lake trout.

Empire – Brown trout were good early this spring.

Grand Traverse Bay – Cisco were real good in West Bay this spring with 1-4 pounders.

Lake Huron – Lake Ontario seeing similar declines in prey that Lake Huron experienced and what Lake Michigan is seeing now.

Manistee – Slow this spring with low activity. Brown trout has been slow so far, and the Manistee River run of steelhead is down.

Holland – Brown trout have been decent with spotty coho and mostly lake trout.

West Michigan Walleye – 300,000 walleye fry were put in Belmont Pond and the club will assist with harvest and raising some to fall fingerling size.

St. Joseph River – Fall steelhead was slow. Winter push of steelhead was good and this spring has been slow. Steelhead are smaller averaging 3-6 pounds. The clubs want more steelhead.

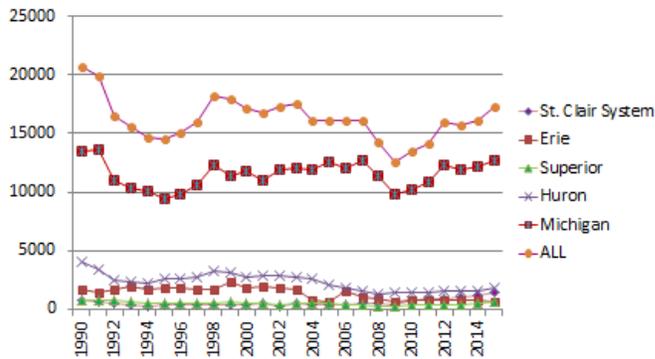
Salmon Ambassador Program – The program has a new app this year and will also accept coded wire tag fish.

**Lake Michigan Charter and Creel Report:**

Data provided by Tracy Kolb (MDNR) and Donna Wesander (MDNR).

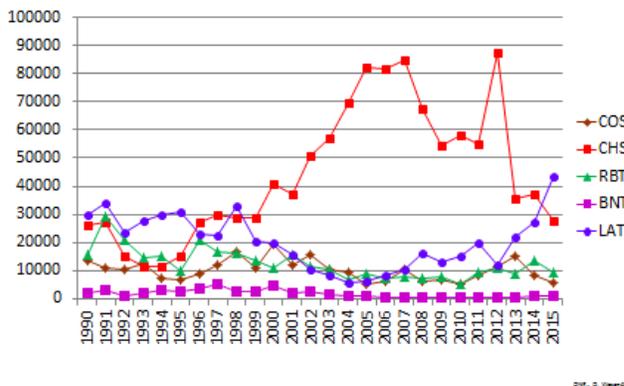
Charter excursions in Michigan waters was dominated in 2015 by Lake Michigan (12,758) followed by Lake Huron (1,756), St. Clair System (1,460), Lake Erie (638), and Lake Superior (633). Lake Michigan excursions increased since 2008, which had 9,750 excursions. This is an indication of better economic conditions with different customer expectations.

Number of Charter Fishing Excursions by Great Lake  
(State of Michigan waters only)



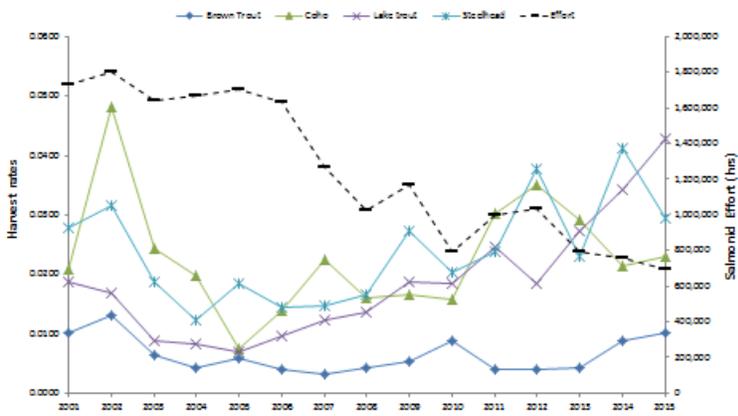
There were 537 Charter Operators throughout Michigan in 2015 with 12% running more than one boat and 44% of operators reporting online. Lake Michigan Charter harvest was mostly lake trout (43,251) followed by Chinook salmon (27,566), steelhead (9,443), coho salmon (5,478), and brown trout (1,051).

Lake Michigan Total Charter Angler  
Harvest, 1990-2015

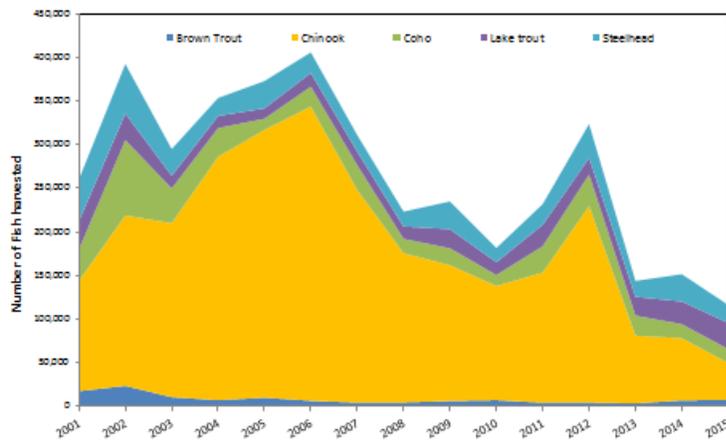


Creel salmonid effort continues to decline since 2001 at 699,231 hours in 2015. Chinook salmon harvest rate was 0.0608 (42,513 fish harvested) followed by lake trout (0.0429 or 29,997), steelhead (0.0294 or 20,557), coho salmon (0.0229 or 16,012), and brown trout (0.0101 or 7,062).

## Creel Harvest Rate and Effort

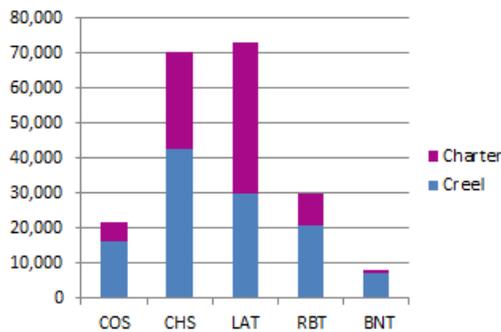


## Creel Harvest



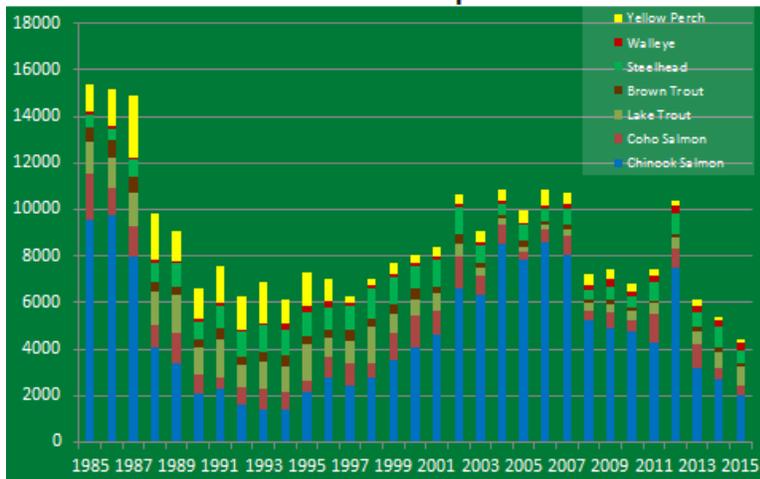
Total harvest (both creel and charter combined) was mostly lake trout (73,235) followed by Chinook salmon (70,110), steelhead (30,005), coho salmon (21,522), and brown trout (8,135).

## Lake Michigan Total Harvest of salmonines 2015



Lake-wide sport harvest (all states combined) was the lowest in 2015 compared to all years back to 1985. The harvest was mostly Chinook salmon (1,997,000 lbs) followed by lake trout (824,000 lbs), steelhead (570,000 lbs), coho salmon (416,000 lbs), walleye (340,000 lbs), yellow perch (148,000 lbs) and brown trout (146,000 lbs).

## Lake-wide Overall Sport Harvest

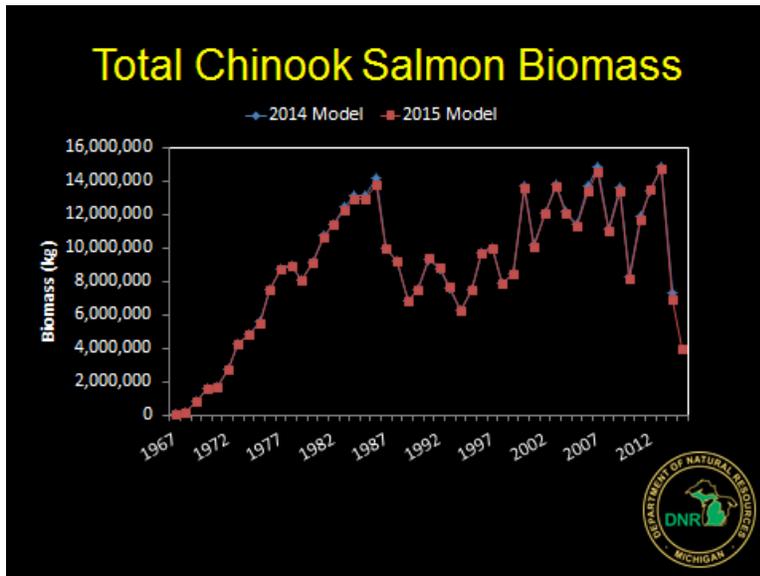


### **Predator Prey Ratio Model:**

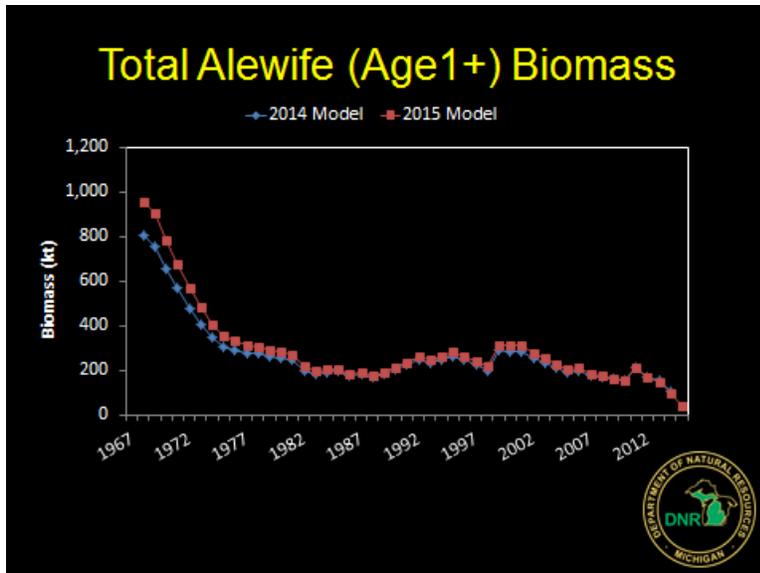
Data provided by Randy Claramunt (MDNR) with assistance from Dave Warner (USGS), Jory Jonas (MDNR), the Salmonid Working Group, and MSU-QFC.

The Predator-Prey Ratio (PPR) is used by the Lake Michigan Committee (Four states and Tribes) to evaluate and communicate balance in the lake and to inform stocking decisions. The current PPR model was developed using predator and prey knowledge and assumptions from 2008. Randy along with several other biologists worked diligently through the winter to update the model with 2015 data and

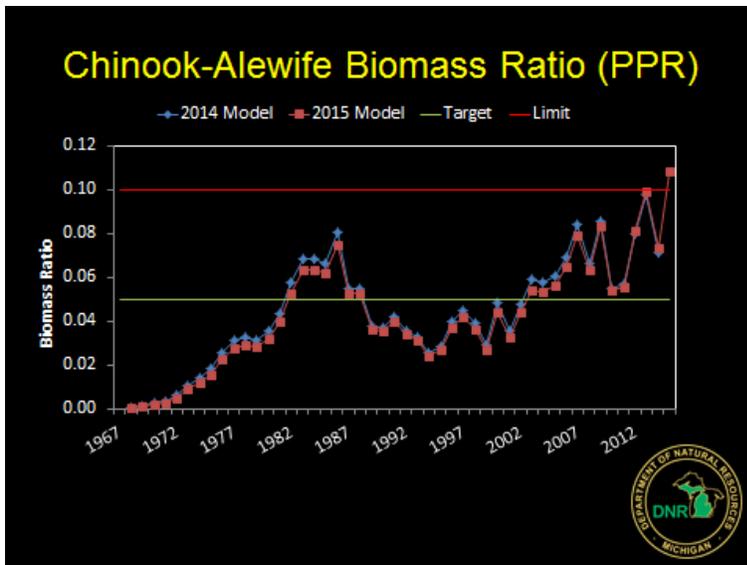
knowledge. Both models seem to give comparable results. Total Chinook salmon biomass declined since 2012 and currently is at levels last seen in the 1970's.



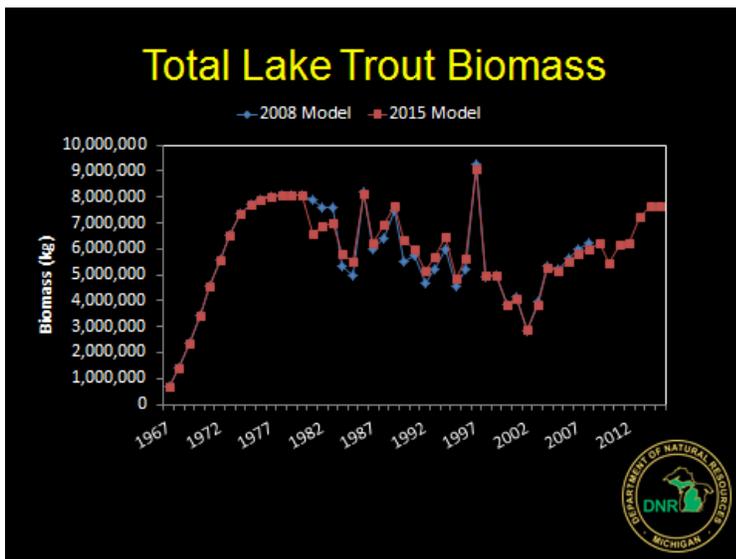
Alewife biomass declined significantly between 1967 and 1982. More recently, alewife biomass declined steadily from 2011 to 2015 and is at a historic low at 36.7 Kt.



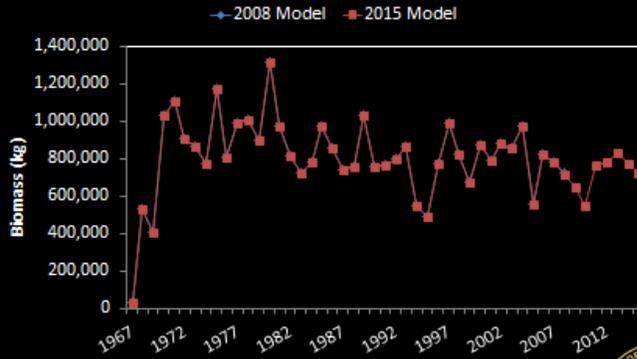
The PPR has a target (0.05) representing a healthy ratio of 20 pounds of alewife to one pound of Chinook. The limit (0.10) represents an unhealthy ratio, similar to what Lake Huron experience in 2004 with 10 pounds of alewife to one pound of Chinook. The 2015 ratio is above the limit at 0.108 indicating an unhealthy ratio.



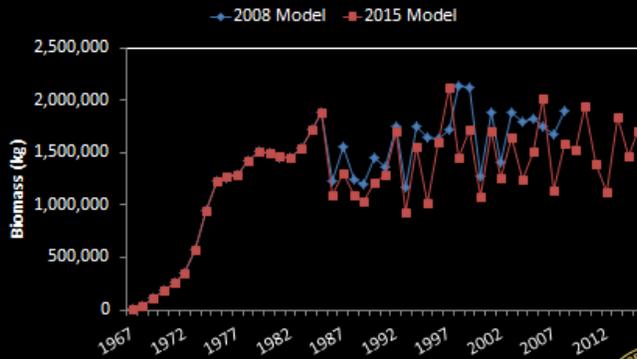
Updates to the PPR model go beyond the alewife and Chinook dynamic and look at other predators and prey becoming more of a fish community model. Lake trout biomass has increased since 2002. Coho and brown trout biomass is variable over time. Steelhead biomass increased significantly from 2008 to 2012 and is beginning to decline.



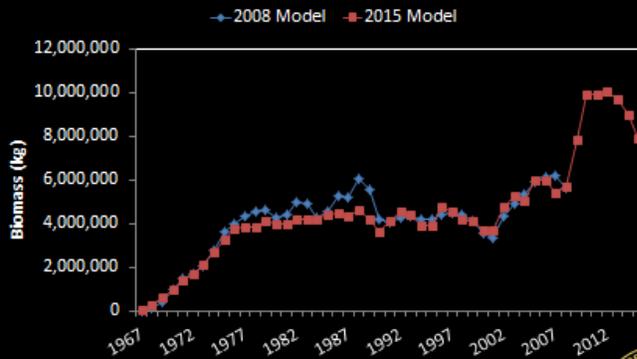
## Total Coho Salmon Biomass



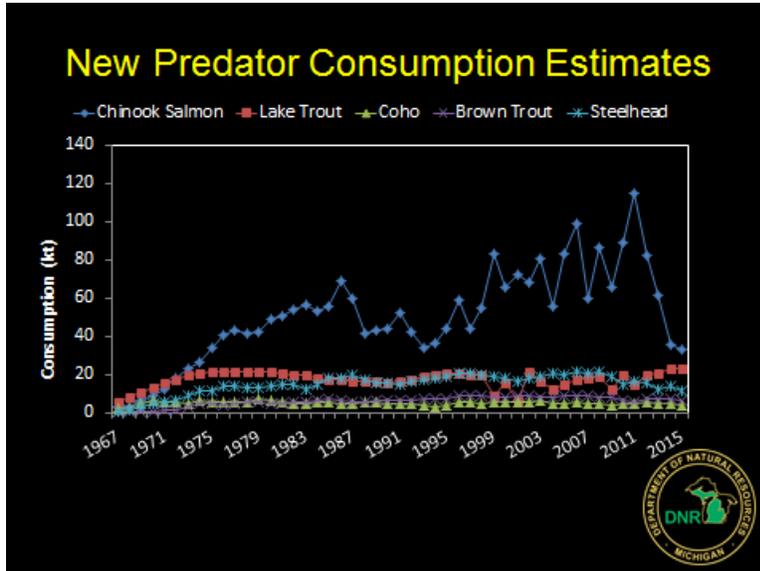
## Total Brown Trout Biomass



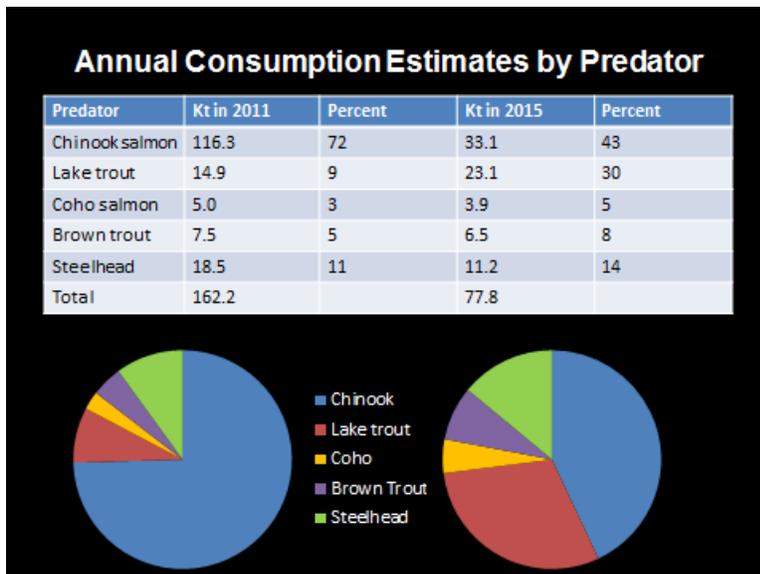
## Total Steelhead Biomass



The updated model adjusts all predator consumption rather than keeping constant. Total predator consumption was dominated by Chinook salmon through 2011 with a sharp decline through 2015. Lake Trout and Chinook salmon consumption are starting to converge due to low alewife and chinook abundance and increasing lake trout abundance, although lake trout may only consume 20% of their diet with alewife. Steelhead, brown trout, and coho follow with lower consumption.



Annual consumption estimates have also changed between 2011 and 2015. Chinook declined from 116 Kt in 2011 to 33 Kt in 2015. Lake trout increased from 15 Kt in 2011 to 23 Kt in 2015. Coho, brown trout, and steelhead all declined slightly.



These data indicate that Lake Michigan is predator heavy and that Chinook and lake trout are the primary predators on the remaining alewife.

### **Gobies – The New Alewife:**

Date provided by Randy Claramunt (MDNR)

Mr. Claramunt discussed the difficulty in assessing goby abundance using current assessment gear. USGS bottom trawls that cannot effectively sample over rocky habitat only estimates 5 Kt of gobies. If you look at densities of gobies on rocky habitat and extrapolate that density over the entire rocky habitat in Lake Michigan, 951 Kt of gobies is estimated. If you look at current consumption of predators, the estimate is 80 Kt of gobies now and it may have been 160 Kt. The consumption estimates indicate that goby biomass has leveled off in Lake Michigan. However, it continues to be the most abundant prey source in the lake.

### **Chinook Salmon Stocking Discussion:**

The State of Lake Michigan 2011-2015 was presented in Milwaukee in March. The Lake Michigan Committee was concerned about continued declining prey biomass and agreed to discuss further stocking reductions with their respective agencies. If another Chinook salmon reduction is pursued, the Lake Michigan Committee would consider going to level 4 of the stocking strategy or 20% of 2012 stocking levels. This would put future Chinook stocking lake-wide at 665,500 compared to 3.3 million in 2012. A reduction would include all states. In addition, the Lake Michigan Committee is requesting reductions in Lake Huron due to 90% of stocked Chinook moving to Lake Michigan to feed before returning to Lake Huron. At the very least, both Michigan and Wisconsin are interested in maintain broodstock locations in the Little Manistee River and Strawberry Creek. The Lake Michigan Committee will continue to discuss stocking reductions throughout the summer with a decision by fall before egg take.

A joint Lake Michigan and Lake Huron Citizen's Fishery Advisory Committee is scheduled for June 22<sup>nd</sup> in Clare to further discuss the issue.

Discussion and questions:

- Why do we still have smelt in Lake Superior?
  - Superior lacks calcium in the water, which has restricted zebra and quagga mussels to a few bays.
  - Better balance of nutrients, predators, and prey.
  - Fully restored cisco population for prey.
- What are reasonable catch rates? Maybe that is how we should be thinking of management.
- Can we do anything large enough to help?
  - Maybe just let it go.
- Wisconsin needs to reduce stocking if there is another cut.
- We might already be below the threshold for stocking and may need to consider more.
- Are we meeting predation thresholds with our current stocking? Perhaps the low numbers of Chinook stocked per site are just going to predators. When more are stocked, some go to

predators and some survive. There also used to be alewife around to take some of the predation pressure off the smolts. Maybe consider combined stocking to address predation.

- Are we willing to wait a year?
- According to the Coded Wire Tag returns, the Chinook salmon stocked along Wisconsin survive much better than the Chinook stocked on the Michigan side of the lake. To be effective, salmon stocking cuts should be focused along the Wisconsin side.
- How are the net pens doing? Currently, all Chinook go to net pens except Kids Creek, Little Manistee River and Medusa Creek (although they go into a holding pond).
- Returns to Little Manistee Weir have been low. MDNR is looking at holding half the smolts in the ponds to help with survival and imprinting.
- Swan Weir was need in 2015 to meet Chinook egg take quotas.
- Anglers and Charter customers may not want to fish if they hear we are no longer stocking Chinook salmon despite the wild fish out there.
- We need to market the fishery that we have now, so people know that there is more to the lake than just Chinook salmon.
- A brief poll of advisors showed that half (13) in attendance would like to see another reduction in Chinook stocking.

#### **Great Lakes Commercial Net Pen Aquaculture:**

Presented by Ed Eisch (MDNR Fish Production Section Manager).

Mr. Eisch presented “Considering the legal, social, economic, and environmental issues regarding proposals for commercial aquaculture net pens in the Great Lakes.” He talked about the Aquaculture Workgroup, proposals presented to the Quality of Life Agencies (DNR, DEQ, DARD), current law, economic analysis, environmental and ecological reviews, the review of science, and social input and public engagement process.

The Quality of Life agencies recommendation was against the pursuit of Great Lakes commercial net pen aquaculture.

Legislation has been introduced on both sides of the issue.

For more information, visit the Michigan Department of Agriculture & Rural Development website at:

[https://www.michigan.gov/mdard/0,4610,7-125-48096\\_48099\\_71766-368088--,00.html](https://www.michigan.gov/mdard/0,4610,7-125-48096_48099_71766-368088--,00.html)

#### **Fish Division Updates:**

- Brain Gunderman is the new Unit Manager at Plainwell and will be overseeing the Southern Lake Michigan Management Unit.

- Lake Michigan Management Plan process continues to proceed. Alignment with guiding principles and draft goal statements was sought at the Sea Grant Ludington Fishery Workshop and at the Michigan Fish Producers Association meeting with some success. However, we felt that better engagement with and expanding the constituent base was needed. To accommodate that, Focus Groups will be developed in the U.P., Northern Michigan, and Southern Michigan. We want angler groups, individual anglers, local community leaders, watersheds, and Chambers of Commerce/Visitors Bureau represented on the Focus Groups. Please contact Jay Wesley if you want to volunteer or have recommendations for members.
- Charlevoix Research Station has lots of information on their website that you might be interested in. They also welcome advisors to ride along the S.V. Steelhead during Lake Michigan sampling efforts, so you can see firsthand what is caught in the assessments.
- The walleye egg take on the Muskegon River was successful this year.
- Little Manistee Weir returns of steelhead have been low. The fall and winter fish spawned before the grates were put in. Fish have been slowly coming in for several weeks and the females are slow to ripen. One egg take has taken place and a second is scheduled for the first week in May making this the latest egg take on record.
- Boardman River dam removal continues with the Cass Road bridge replacement and Boardman Dam scheduled for removal in 2018.

#### **Law Enforcement Update:**

Steve Huff (DNR, Commercial Fish Conservation Officer) gave an update on Law Enforcement Issues.

The Great Lakes Enforcement Unit is in need of additional staffing. The majority of the unit staff will be eligible for retirement in two to three years. This combined with unfilled positions and increased responsibilities has created a need for more staffing. The unit has a wide range of on the water responsibilities including commercial fish enforcement as well as providing security and safety to water related events. Aquatic invasive species enforcement demands continue to increase and have become a large part of the job. Inspecting and monitoring shipments of live organisms from overseas, bait shop inspections, and live food markets is ongoing. Red swamp crayfish were found near Lake Macatawa in Holland and being used as fish bait. Officers found a local market that was selling the crayfish and took appropriate enforcement action. No live red swamp crayfish have been found in Lake Macatawa. Ongoing violations continue to be a challenge in Bays de Noc, especially with illegal activity associated with subsistence gill netting. The 2015 Law Enforcement Academy graduated 35 new officers. There are currently 17 in this year's Academy.

#### **Bay de Noc Report:**

Ken Lee of Delta County Convention and Visitors Bureau provided data showing a decline in sport harvest since 2004. The average harvest from 1985 to 2007 was 29,501 fish. Harvest in 2015 was only 4,007. Anglers in that area are very concerned with the decline and illegal netting activity.

**Next Meeting:**

June 22<sup>nd</sup> in Clare at Jay's Sporting Goods - joint advisors meeting with Lake Huron.

October 4<sup>th</sup> for regular fall meeting with location to be determined.