

Lake Michigan Citizen's Fishery Advisory Committee Meeting

September 29th, 2015
Spring Lake, MI 49456

Attendees: Jay Wesley, Denny Grinold, Sarah Carlson, Brian Gunderman, Chuck Pistis, Ed Szymanski, Jim Vandermaas, Dennis Eade, Jeff Dehn, Tom Hamilton, Wes Newberry, Scott Heintzelman, Greg Houtteman, Eric Anderson, Bill Winowiecki, David Engel, Ron Westrate, John Stegmeier, Jim Schramm, Jim Bedford, Denny Kuenzer, John Robertson, Theresa Krist, Steve Vanderlaan, Jim Bos, Jory Jonas, Chip Klein, Chuck Bronte, Frank Krist, Dan O'Keefe, Chris Wilson, Carson Prichard, Mike Verhamm, Gregg Marinz, Jim Dexter, Howard Meyerson, Donna Wesander, Steve Huff, Kevin Pangle, Darren Kramer, and Paul Jensen.

Fishing reports

Grand Traverse Bay – Lake Trout good all season, salmon non-existent, none at the weir. Great off shore lake trout.

Lake Huron – Great smelt hatch, Lake Trout great, quite a few Walleye.

Grand Haven – Salmon slow, Steelhead good.

Grand River – Summer Steelhead numbers worst ever on Grand and other river throughout the basin.

Manistee – Brown Trout fishing the best it's been, Steelhead good, Lake Trout phenomenal, Salmon disappointing, lots of baitfish the last couple of weeks.

Muskegon – High percentage of wild fish both Chinook and Lake Trout.

South Haven – Lake Trout phenomenal.

Pere Marquette River – Has very few spawning Salmon.

Chicago Harbor – Coho fishing good, large alewife spawn.

Saugatuck – Okay.

Glen Arbor – Perch fishing 2-5 bites in am, Lake Trout good away from tribal nets, Coho showed up last week.

Sleeping Bear Point – Cisco getting larger this year.

Traverse Bay – Kings non-existent.

West of Frankfurt – Early summer good, last two months great, July and August – Kings dismal at best.

Manistee – Double the catch in Arcadia/Frankfort area for Lake Trout, north of Arcadia, Kings not there.

Michigan City – Worst Coho in 25 years, very west side of lake had some fish, Lake Trout fishing was great.

Wisconsin/Kenosha – Fishing better there, tremendous amount of baitfish, great Steelhead in June.

Saugatuck – Excellent for Lake Trout, Kings 5 -10 bites total, Alewife are bigger, Gobies smaller. Perch getting caught also.

Grand Haven – A few Browns for a change, fishing did not pick up until Mid-May, June sucked, July not great, Chinook – 90% natural reproduction, late July/August saw some next year Chinooks, very few two – three year olds. Had a five hour trip with no bite, first time ever. Run at Grand Haven early Sept, last three weeks for Coho's – before daylight, bite for 1 hour, last two weeks best all year, not biting where they are supposed to, way out of temp, 66 degree water is where everything is at, Lake Trout are eating Alewife, very few nice Chinook.

Holland – 4 – 7 fish per trip, no consistency, water never turned over this summer, no Lake Trout available, did not target.

Whitehall – Catch down substantially, very few Steelhead, very few Kings, average 3-4 this year.

South Haven – Great Lake Trout, perch really spotty, Salmon and Skamania at Allegan Dam on Kalamazoo River

White River – Last 3 weeks landed some Coho, also using Rapala's and catching Pike, Chinook not good, landed one for entire outing, lower river – locals fish key holes and there before daylight, others not catching any fish, nothing normal this year.

Several comments that they thought they didn't know what they were doing this year because the fishing was so inconsistent and difficult at times.

Fish Division Updates

Central Lake Michigan – Little Manistee Weir – typically well under way, but not this year, and Boardman is the same. Medusa is doing a little better and had a second harvest. Rivers in area have low returns so far. Manistee has a few Chinook. Betsie had an early run. Egg take last year was 2,781, a historic low. Fish aren't at the weir yet so egg take may be latest ever. We may do egg take at a backup facility. Platte weir had a very slow start for Coho but picked up in the last week or so. There were a couple thousand small jacks early and adults running 3 – 5 pounds.

St Joseph River – poor Skamania run, fair number of Coho, a few Chinooks and a handful of Steelhead have gone through the Berrien Springs fish ladder. The water is still warm so hoping for a better run when temperatures drop.

Bays de Noc – Finishing up inland and Bays de Noc survey. Walleye production was good this year. Great numbers of young of year yellow perch. We are hiring two technicians and a biologist for Northern Lake Michigan Management Unit.

Chief Dexter – Fisheries Division working on Fiscal year 2017 budgets, and requests of interest include increase Steelhead production and cold water natives (Sturgeon, Walleye, Northern Pike, Muskellunge). Aquaculture - Senator Rick Jones introduced a bill to ban fish farming in the Great Lakes. Information was sent via email by Denny Grinold.

Questions – Report of perch production?

Chief Dexter – Everyone reporting off the chart production of yellow perch based on trawl and netting surveys.

Committee member – 4 to 7 inch long yellow perch being reported all summer around marinas to the north.

GLFC Advisor Update

Great Lakes Fishery Commission – The annual meeting was in Grand Rapids this year. We discussed the removal of the 6th Street Dam. The Dam removal would open up sea lamprey spawning habitat. The technical merits of the sea lamprey barrier are in question and need to be figured out before the project moves forward.

GLFC Advisors Resolution – asking for line item budget so GLRI becomes permanent. Right now it is provided through Obama Administration.

Net Pen Aquaculture in Great Lakes – Senator Jones introduced bill to ban in Michigan waters and hopefully others will follow. Chairman Grinold stated that Senator Jones is brave putting it out there, and he hopes other Senators will sign on. Also, there is a bill in draft to eliminate all Microbeads. It is important to contact local Senators to request their support on these bills.

Enbridge Line 5b (Straits of Mackinac) – there is still a lot of concern with this pipeline under the straits. Recently, Senator Gary Peters introduced bill called “Pipeline Improvement and Preventing Spills Act” (copy given). This bill needs our support. It does not remove pipelines but is the first step in the process.

Straits of Mackinac exercise – Enbridge brought top CEO’s to that area to observe the exercise. They were stunned by the beauty and were also concerned about a spill in that area. They were very aware that a spill would be devastating to the Great Lakes and Enbridge Corporation. Most important thing is spill response, and hopefully the pipe will be removed.

Questions -

What if a boat drops anchor and damages the pipeline?

-Working to have a no anchor area, Federal Government needs to be involved. Coast Guard is working on it.

Anyone talking about the pipeline by Port Huron?

-Yes, quite a bit of activity on that also.

Great Lakes Mass Marking Program

Chuck Bronte from USFWS presented on findings to date for Chinook salmon mass marking. Chinook that are caught out of southern ports of Michigan tend to be stocked from various Wisconsin sites with some from Manistee stocking sites. Northern ports also catch mostly Wisconsin stocked fish along with Manistee area and southern sites. Grand Traverse ports primarily catch Grand Traverse Bay stocked fish with some from Manistique. Lake Huron stocked Chinook continue to move to Lake Michigan with 730 out of 815 caught or 90% recovered in Lake Michigan. On average 59.8% of Chinook caught in Lake Michigan are from wild origin. Michigan anglers catch 69% wild fish. The 2013 year class was down to 37.4% wild fish in Lake Michigan due to poor survival. Michigan's highest recovery stocking sites for the 2012-2014 year classes are Medusa Creek, South Haven, Saugatuck, Lake Macatawa, and St. Joseph with consistently low recoveries from Ludington, Little Manistee River, and Manistee. The take home points are that Chinook move throughout the lake and contribute to the fishery regardless of where stocked, Lake Huron Chinook continue to come to Lake Michigan, wild fish are a major component to Michigan angler catch, and some traditionally good stocking sites are showing poor survival.

Comment – Wisconsin returns are only stocked fish, not wild. Net pen information only from recent year classes, not effective numbers. Lake Huron and Lake Michigan movement much more prevalent now, older data showed less movement.

Questions –

When does data become actionable?

Lake committees drive those discussions and the timing is not right. We need to wait to see several year classes before any major changes are made, and we need to be careful on making changes too quickly in regards to moving fish stocking locations.

Do we monitor water temps and levels in regards to Salmon and Trout stream stocking efforts?

Chinook salmon are stocked when they reach size and are pre-smolts. It does not always match ideal conditions in receiving streams.

Jory requested feedback on which fish to target for next mass marking efforts –

Lake Trout – would like similar presentation on Lake Trout, a lot of information not being utilized. Chuck said that they would be able to roll that out at the Spring Meeting, still needs some refinement.

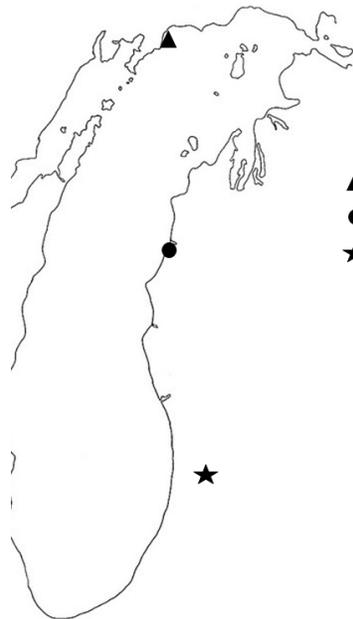
Steelhead Micro-Chemistry Research

Kevin Pangle from Central Michigan University gave a presentation on otolith (fish ear bone) chemical analysis, which could determine where Lake Michigan steelhead hatch. Lake Michigan has a mix of stocked and wild fish. The question is – “where do the wild fish come from?” Certain elements, such as strontium, occur at different concentrations in a watershed’s bedrock geology. Since a steelhead’s otolith continues to grow and contains microchemistry signatures of its surrounding water, otolith chemistry can be used to determine where a steelhead was born and spent its early life. Between 2013 and 2015, CMU students have collected juvenile steelhead from 36 streams in the Lower Peninsula, 4 in the Upper Peninsula, and 6 in Wisconsin. The mean accuracy using this technique is 80% with some streams greater than 90%. If streams with poor accuracy are pooled with neighboring streams (share similar bedrock features), the mean accuracy goes to 91%. Once enough streams have been surveyed, the next step is to collect adults and determine their origin. This technique works well in identifying the hatchery that the fish were raised in as well.

Small Yearling Steelhead Plan for Lake Michigan

Fish Division has made the decision to move some brown trout from Thompson Fish Hatchery to Harrietta Fish Hatchery to make room for more steelhead. This move is possible because brown trout stocking numbers have gone down over the years especially in inland streams. The space at Thompson will allow an additional 150,000 small yearling steelhead to be raised. They will be smaller than normal production steelhead because of geothermal well limitations at Thompson.

There will be 66,000 (6 – 6 ½ inch) steelhead stocked into Lake Michigan waters including Manistique (20,000), Manistee (30,000), and the Rabbit (16,225).



Small Yearling Steelhead Proposal

River	Current Stocking	Proposed Small Yearlings
▲ Manistique	8,000	20,000
● Manistee	51,000	30,000
★ Rabbit	8,000	16,225

-Move 8,000 (large) from Rabbit to Kalamazoo River to increase Kalamazoo from 14,000 to 22,000.

Comments/Questions–

- Concern that there were negative results previously for this type of stocking, fish were not smolting, particularly in Betsie River. Also that some waters (Manistee) will be too warm for them to survive. Jay stated that even if only 50% survived at least we would have something.
- What about stocking Coldwater River, won't impact as no natural production. May plant them upstream of Hamilton Dam to give them more habitat throughout winter.

Lake Michigan Committee Updates

2016 Chinook stocking plan – at the spring meeting, the LMCFAC was split 50/50 regarding whether further reductions should be made in 2016. This was a big change when we had a unanimous decision to reduce stocking in 2013. Given that the Predator/Prey Ratio is in an ok area, alewife seemed to spawn this year, and both hatchery and wild Chinook year classes from 2013 and 2014 appeared to be down, the Lake Michigan Committee agreed to hold the current stocking rates for 2016.

Questions:

How good was the smolt?

-We have estimates of age 1 survival and some age 0 from the mass marking project. There are no studies looking at smolt migration out of rivers.

Concern that if we are going to continue reduced stocking we should shut down the fishery for a period of time to give them a chance to spawn. Why not protect the naturally reproducing fish?

-Jay stated that the population issue is not a lack of egg production or spawning stock right now, it is a lack of prey for fish survival once they smolt out into the lake.

Lake Trout Management – There are several guiding documents for the management of lake trout, which include:

- Fish Community Objectives
- 2000 Consent Decree
- Lake Trout Rehabilitation Plan (1985)
- A Guide for the rehabilitation of Lake Trout in Lake Michigan (2008)
- A Fisheries Management Implementation Strategy for the Rehabilitation of Lake Trout in Lake Michigan (2011)

The Fish Community Objectives are currently harvest based and seek sustained harvest of 6 to 15 million pounds, which 20-25% is lake trout. The Lake Michigan Committee (LMC) agrees that this needs to be reduced and also changed to abundance based estimates that relate more closely with lake productivity.

The current Lake Trout strategy agreed to 2.74 million yearling equivalents plus or minus 10%. Annual stocking has increased to 3.1 to 3.3 million Lake Trout. The LMC decided to go back to the 2.74 million, which will require the elimination of 550,000 fall fingerlings in Lake Michigan. Fall fingerling stockings will be discontinued at Grand Haven, Saugatuck, New Buffalo, Michigan City, Wind Point, Manitowoc, and Kewaunee.

Lake trout fall assessment goals are being met at the South Refuge Reef Complex, Illinois Reefs, Leland, and Sheboygan. The Northern Refuge Reef Complex is still well below targets/goals. Given this information, there may be some opportunity to move some lake trout from the southern part of the lake to the north or reduce stocking in the south. The LMC will continue to discuss this topic through the fall and winter.

Questions –Going back to stocking on reefs instead of rivermouths?

Most of the stocking has been out on the reefs except for some Michigan Hatchery stockings and Federal fall fingerlings. Some of these reefs are close to shore and/or fish are moving off them to nearshore areas.

Will study show difference between reef and near shore?

Yes, coded wire tag returns show site fidelity.

Comments –

Lake Huron stocking is all on off shore reefs and the nearshore fishery is still excellent. Stocked fish stay in general neighborhood, but travel near shore.

Concern that stopping fall fingerling stocking will hurt near shore fishing, however, we don't expect to see a problem.

Question – At what point are the goals met and when does that affect stocking?

That is what we are tracking now for Lake Michigan, Lake Superior is rehabilitated, and they spent a few years deciding when to “pull the trigger”. Lake Huron is dealing with this question now. We are monitoring and will set specific guidelines.

What happens when we meet the goals? We stop stocking.

Lake Michigan Fishery Management Plan

Jory Jonas presented survey results and alignment between both DNR's and Citizen Advisor's vision and goals for Lake Michigan. In general, there was very good alignment with impediments including Aquatic Nuisance Species, Food Web, Politics, and Funding. Advisors also ranked Native American, and MDNR ranked Habitat and Knowledge (research). With the ideal Lake Michigan fishery question, we were aligned with a diverse fishery and stable or balanced ecosystem. Advisors had native species restoration as their top. That was a point of conversation as Fisheries Managers were managing for a diverse fishery with Chinook salmon as the primary sportfish. Managing for native species restoration would require elimination of alewife resulting in much lower populations of Chinook. After some discussion, it was determined that there may have been some confusion with the wording. It is interesting though that native species restoration typically shows relatively high approval in other polls.

Management Plan – we will be taking an umbrella approach where common goal statements and our mission will be at the peak. Guiding principles, documents, and FCOs will be the ribs and objective and goals will be supports. The webbing is actions and details to address goals,

principles, objectives, and mission. Key concepts will include defining the ecosystem, core ecosystem services, and threats. Key terms will be persistence, resilience, resistance, adaptability, transformability, and sustainability. It will also embrace uncertainty and change; build knowledge and understanding of the system; develop management practices that measure, interpret, and respond to ecological feedback; and support flexible institutions and social networks in multi-level governance systems. We will recognize and build from other strategies that have been deemed successful. We plan to engage with our agency partners, staff, tribal representatives, the public and legislators through various facilitated meetings, surveys, and webinars. Planning for the engagement process will begin this fall and staff will begin developing the parts throughout the winter. The goal is to have a draft by spring. This document will be living and will require frequent updates based on ecosystem changes and feedback so that we may continue to be adaptable in our management approach.

Law Enforcement Update

CFS Steve Huff – Majority of his time spent protecting Lake Trout and dealing with aquatic invasive species.

Aquatic invasive species are a high priority that everyone will have to deal with. Inspections are done at airports to ensure invasives are not brought in with ornamental fish or overseas shipments. He works with USFWS to keep invasives out of bait fish, retail and wholesale, please inform him if you believe there is a problem with a bait fish dealer. They also work with other states counterparts for out of state bait dealers.

Hired new officer in the unit that will be working in the Bays De Noc regarding subsistence fishers. Hoping to hire 4 – 5 positions in 2017 if they are approved.

Muskegon – conflicts between nets and commercial fishermen.

Involved in Enbridge exercise in the Straits, everyone still has a lot to learn. There is a very strong current and oil could move fast if there is ever a break.

Questions –

Could violators' names be printed in local paper so peer pressure could help to deter future violations?

Bi-weekly report put out, but does not list names. There would have to be a local paper willing to request information and print.

Next Meeting

Scheduled for April 19th, 2016 at MUCC, Lansing MI.

