Coldwater Resource Steering Committee Meeting
Constitution Hall - Lansing
February 6, 2012

Attendees: Jay Wesley, Jim Bos, John Karakashian, Dennis Eade, Jim Bedford, David Borgeson, Kristin Thomas, Josh Greenberg, Dean Molnar, Linn Duling, Rick Darby, Joe Boomgaard, Steven Hutchins, Amy Trotter, John Walters, Trevor Havelka, Nick Popoff, Steve Mondrella, Ray Danders, Don Wright, Tammy Newcomb, John Bebow, Brian Gunderman, Jim Dexter, and Christian LeSage (notes).

Welcome and Agenda Items
Brian Gunderman welcomed everyone, introductions were made, and we discussed the agenda.

1) Approve/modify October meeting minutes
2) Terms of Reference
3) Update on angler surveys on the Manistee and Pigeon rivers
4) Options for clarifying stream reach boundaries in the Fishing Guide
5) Crawford County trout stream maps
6) Leader length restrictions discussion
7) Brook trout possession limit discussion
8) Steelhead regulations discussion
9) Trout fishing seasons
10) Topics for future meetings
11) Kids fishing pond informational handout
12) Future meeting date and location

Approve/modify Minutes from October 2011 Meeting
The minutes from the previous meeting were approved by the committee without modification.

Terms of Reference [Handout]
Brian Gunderman informed the committee that the terms of reference were not formally adopted when first presented. Therefore, the issue is being brought up again for adoption. The draft Terms of Reference (TOR) includes changes to the timeline and process for approving meeting minutes. According to the draft TOR, draft meeting minutes will be provided to Committee members via e-mail within three weeks of the meeting. Members will have at least one week to propose changes to the draft minutes. Once all proposed changes are incorporated, the revised minutes will be e-mailed to members for approval. Members will have one week to approve the minutes. If a proposed modification to the minutes cannot be agreed upon by the members, then the Chair will ask those members in opposition to supply a written minority report that will be incorporated into the minutes by reference and attached to the minutes. Minutes will be posted on the Michigan Department of Natural Resources website after approval. Discussion arose about retaining names associated with comments and whether or not handouts would be posted online. ***The committee adopted the terms and decided that names should be associated with comments for posting. Attachments and handouts will be posted as appropriate meaning that certain draft documents may or may not be posted online.***

Update on Camper Surveys on the Upper Manistee River [Handouts]
During October 2011, surveys were mailed to people who camped at the upper Manistee River campgrounds from 2009-2011 (pre and post regulation change). Forest Management Division was concerned about how the new gear restrictions would affect future campground usage. Preliminary survey information was presented about the angler survey sent to campers who stayed at the upper Manistee River campgrounds.

- Survey findings indicated that 40% listed fishing as the primary or secondary reason for their stay there.
- 34% indicated that they would come back to camp there.
- Survey results from campers who stayed there in 2011 were considered biased towards the new gear restriction placed on that location.
- Overall there were 300 people surveyed with a 50% response rate (it was noted this was an extremely high response rate).
- There was no overwhelming response for or against the new gear restrictions.
- There were a few comments received about kids not being able to fish there due to restrictions on use of bait there.
- 13% of the campers indicated that they would camp there less in 2012 and 34% of respondents indicated they would camp there more in 2012.

Jay Wesley pointed out that the survey was conducted due to Forest Management's concern over the potential loss of revenue, not to make any regulation changes. The survey information needs to be broken down more since this information was provided to the Division shortly before the meeting. This analysis will include comparison of responses from campers pre- and post-regulation change and comparison of 2011 campground revenues to revenues from previous years. Management of these campgrounds has been transferred to Parks and Recreation Division (PRD), and the final results of the survey will be shared with PRD staff.

Kristin Thomas (Michigan Trout Unlimited) presented MI TU angler survey information collected from two Pigeon River and three Manistee River state forest campgrounds. The survey provided information on how implementation of gear restrictions may affect revenue, the proportion of campers that are anglers, and angler preferences. The upper Manistee River section has gear restrictions and the Pigeon River (control section) does not have gear restrictions. It was noted that on more than a few occasions people indicated that they had not paid yet, but would soon (indicates there's an enforcement issue). People that do not register and pay do not get entered into the pool of potential mail survey participants.

- Upper Manistee River survey days: 6 weekdays and 8 weekend days.
- Pigeon River survey days: 9 weekdays and 7 weekend days.
- 226 people were surveyed
- Total percentage (including both rivers) of campers who were anglers was 34%
- Pigeon River campgrounds– 53% of campers were anglers
- Manistee River campgrounds – 25% of campers were anglers. The percentage of campers that were anglers was 46% at the Upper Manistee River campground, 35% at the Goose Creek campground, and 3% at the Goose Creek Trail campground.
- Overall, 18% of the campers at the Manistee campgrounds and 15% of the campers at the Pigeon River campgrounds indicated that fishing was their primary motivation for camping at those locations. Percentages for individual campgrounds were Upper Manistee (35%), Pigeon Bridge (25%), Goose Creek (24%), Pigeon River (15%) and Goose Creek Trail (0%; 79% were there for equestrian)
- Camping satisfaction was high.
- For anglers on both streams, aesthetics was the most commonly listed primary priority, followed by successfully catching a fish . No respondents indicated that harvesting fish was their primary priority.
- Catching fish was tied with aesthetics for the most commonly listed secondary priority. Twenty-seven percent of anglers on the Pigeon River and 13% of anglers on the Manistee River listed harvesting fish as their secondary priority.

- For all anglers (camping and not camping) flies were the preferred type of terminal tackle (57%), followed by artificial lures (25%) and natural bait (18%). This data was compiled from interviews with 92 anglers. Although percentages varied, this same general pattern was observed on both the Pigeon and Manistee rivers.
- Based on these results, it does not appear that the gear restrictions will reduce campground revenue on the Upper Manistee River.

A discussion ensued about how information from this survey will be used in the future in respect to regulations or whether or not this information can be used to assess angler preferences in other locations. Applying this information to other areas of the state is not necessarily appropriate. Committee members also expressed concerns about the small sample size in this survey. Brian Gunderman reminded the Committee that this survey is just one of many tools that the Division uses for analyzing fishing regulations. Questions arose about concerns on the Pere Marquette River and ***Brian Gunderman indicated that creel information concerning the Pere Marquette River will be presented at the next meeting.*** John Bebow pointed out that the Manistee River campground surveys were conducted because Forest Management Division was concerned that campground usage would decline after gear restrictions were implemented, but the data indicate that campground usage probably will increase.

A discussion broke out about the public trust doctrine and gear restrictions. Ray Danders questioned if restricting certain gear types was consistent with the public trust doctrine. Do gear restrictions affect harvest and if not, why do it? Brian Gunderman pointed out that the Division has established specific biological criteria for streams that can be considered for gear restrictions. Jim Dexter stated that there always will be some people who disagree with any regulation change. More discussion ensued about whether or not the public trust is utilized in determining regulations and how that fits into the decision process. Tammy Newcomb pointed out that the public trust is a body of laws focused on preventing harm to the resource and does not preclude the Department from setting regulations. Ray Danders indicated that setting gear restrictions is okay to protect a trout population, but not to restrict angler opportunities for those who use bait in favor of another group. Dave Borgeson replied that gear restrictions are not aimed at any group and no one stops anyone from being able to tie on a fly. Everyone has an opportunity to choose what terminal gear they use (like for deer: bow, gun, crossbow, muzzle loader, etc.).

Options for Clarifying Stream Reach Boundaries in the Fishing Guide [Handouts]
Christian LeSage provided several handouts of the gear restricted streams pages from the fishing guide. During the October 2011 meeting, Committee members suggested that latitude and longitude (lat/long) be included either along with or instead of the TRS (township, range, and section) location information.

- Dave Borgeson said that it would be even better if there were good endpoints (bridges or roads) that people could find on maps or identify when on location.
- Dean Molnar agreed that road names and bridges would be the best landmarks for reach boundaries. A physical location would be defined better than lat/long, but putting both TRS and lat/long would be fine
- This information could be added to the guide to help anglers and would not need to be added to the actual fisheries orders.
- Dave Borgeson provided some suggestions for eliminating unnecessary text from the gear restricted stream regulation descriptions.
- ***The Committee recommended that lat/long and TRS be listed for stream reaches without obvious endpoints (i.e., those that do not end at a confluence or road crossing). Neither lat/long nor TRS would be listed for stream reaches with obvious endpoints (e.g., road crossings or confluences). Fisheries Division staff will consult with Law Enforcement Division regarding these suggestions prior to development of the 2013 Fishing Guide.***

Crawford County Trout Stream Maps

Trevor Havelka presented three versions of the trout streams map for Crawford County to show options for helping anglers identify the fishing regulations for particular stream reaches. Options included (1) a 5 minute hatch grid, (2) grid ticks with lat/long along the perimeter, and (3) only lat/long along the perimeter.

- Committee members asked about adding more roads to the maps. This is possible, but it would add a lot of clutter to the maps
- Someone asked whether maps could be produced for each county. Trevor indicated that it could be done.
- A few Committee members liked the grid lines, but others felt the lines were distracting.
- Various formatting suggestions were offered, including
    1. adding lat/long and extra roads as options that can be turned on and off (possible with a smart phone app);
    2. using Google maps to show an angler's location in real time (app feature);
    3. producing separate maps for each county (possible, but will require extra staff time for reformatting); and
    4. adding endpoints for gear restricted stream sections to the map (e.g., Gleason's Landing)**.**
- ***The Committee recommended option 3 (lat/long only around perimeter) for the trout stream maps. The Committee also recommended producing individual maps for each county and adding important landmarks (e.g., the Sheep Ranch and Gleason's Landing) to the maps.***

Leader Length Restrictions Discussion [Handouts]

Rick Darby expressed concerns about people using long leaders to "floss" or "line" spawning trout and salmon. New York has a 4 foot leader restriction (maximum of 4 ft between the hook and the nearest weight) in place to help reduce the lining or flossing practice. The issue in New York was raised when hatchery personnel noticed a great deal of scarring or snag wounds on fish that were used in their egg take events. Fran Verdoliva from the New York Department of Environmental Conservation (NYDEC) reported that there were noticeably less marks on the fish captured at weirs after the regulation change. This type of snagging is more common in areas where fish congregate (e.g., below dams).

- Snagging of any type is illegal in Michigan, but many anglers do not recognize lining as snagging.
- Rick Darby stated that leader length restrictions (i.e., setting a maximum distance between the hook and the nearest weight) would be a valuable tool for informing anglers that lining fish is unethical and illegal.
- Dave Borgeson indicated that a person with a 2 foot leader can still line or floss fish
- Jim Bedford agreed that this method of snagging fish is unethical, but questioned whether a leader length restriction would actually reduce snagging.
- Rick Darby replied that when NYDEC enacted these regulations, snagging was noticeably reduced on the Salmon River.
- Steve Hutchins stated that most anglers eventually will come to the realization that lining is snagging and will stop doing it. This would be yet another regulation for our conservation officers to enforce. They already have too much work and not enough officers.
- Joe Boomgaard pointed out that it already is illegal for anglers to keep fish that are not hooked in the mouth.
- Dean Molnar reminded the group that anglers seem to find new ways to snag fish regardless of the regulations that are enacted. Do we want to impose another regulation on our anglers? Education is the key to reducing snagging. Sport fishing organizations can play an important role in educating anglers and providing positive peer pressure to reduce snagging. Our conservation officers are very good at catching violators, but there are not enough officers in the field.

- Ray Danders asked if there have been any scientific studies on the prevalence of snagging in Michigan and its effects on fish populations. Rick Darby replied that there have not been any studies, so we are relying on anecdotal information.
- Jim Bedford emphasized the importance of educating our anglers about this issue. Some guides are using this technique.
- John Karakashian stated that it is important for guides to know the regulations and educate their clients regarding legal fishing methods.
- Steve Hutchins supported the concept of preventing snagging but did not support adding another regulation.
- Jim Bos did support the proposed regulation change. Jim stated that the regulation change would be an important educational tool and should be relatively easy to enforce.
- Brian Gunderman suggested that the sport fishing groups help inform their members and other anglers that lining is just a form of snagging and is illegal.
- Jim Dexter asked how Law Enforcement Division interpreted whether a fish was legally hooked. Dean Molnar answered that the hook must be inside the mouth. The hook cannot be on the outside of the mouth.
- ***Fisheries Division staff will have additional discussions after the meeting to decide how to proceed with this issue. Division staff also will work with our Marketing and Outreach Section to produce educational materials to help anglers understand what constitutes snagging.***

Brook Trout Possession Limit Discussion [Handouts]

Nick Popoff outlined the process for gathering public comments on the proposal to increase the daily possession limit for brook trout in the Upper Peninsula from 5 fish to 10 fish. Comments will be solicited through the DNR web site during spring 2012. Division staff will develop a short briefing statement to go along with the proposal. The online survey will consist of several questions to collect information on anglers' fishing practices, motivations for fishing, opinions regarding the proposed regulation change, and basic demographic information. Local management unit staff also will be having public meetings to discuss brook trout possession limits and other potential regulation changes. These meetings will be completed by the end of June. Once these meetings have been held, Division staff will compile and summarize all public comments regarding brook trout possession limits. This summary will be presented at the next Committee meeting in August 2012. If the Division decides to pursue a regulation change, the Committee will be given an opportunity to provide a formal recommendation (for or against) the proposal at the August meeting. The proposal subsequently would be submitted to the NRC for information only in September and October and for action in November.

- Nick Popoff asked the Committee if they had any suggestions regarding the review process.
- Amy Trotter supported the idea of an online survey. Facebook has been a very effective communication tool for MUCC.
- Steve Hutchins pointed out that we are working hard to protect non-native trout species. Why are we thinking about raising the possession limit on our native trout species? The Committee has discussed this regulation change at previous meetings, but never made a recommendation.
- Ray Danders stated that changing the brook trout possession limit may not cause biological problems, but there will be a lot of social consequences and controversy.
- Brian Gunderman reminded the Committee that the NRC commissioners asked Fisheries Division to consider changing the brook trout possession limit in the Upper Peninsula. Fisheries Division completed the biological review and concluded that this regulation change would have minimal biological effects. Thus, the Division is obligated to continue the review process and collect public comments. This is a social issue, so public input is critical.
- Ray Danders suggested that the DNR develop a forum similar to the other online sport fishing forums.

- Jim Dexter replied that the DNR was considering this option, but would have to limit the scope of the forum to minimize the staff time involved in managing the forum.
- Jay Wesley stated that he and other Division employees regularly check the existing sport fishing forums and post information on fishing regulation proposals.
- Nick Popoff indicated that the Division will issue a news release regarding the brook trout possession limit proposal. Sport fishing groups can help spread the word and encourage their members to complete the online survey and attend the public meetings.
- Jim Dexter stated that there is a notice in the 2012 Fishing Guide (page 3) indicating that the Division is going to be reviewing brook trout regulations this year and directing anglers to the DNR – Fishing web page for more information.
- When interpreting the public comments, Don Wright recommended putting additional weight or importance on comments from people who live in or near the Upper Peninsula.
- Nick Popoff indicated that the survey will ask for the zip code of the angler's primary residence, so we will be able to separate responses by regions.
- Dave Borgeson reminded the Committee that the brook trout possession limit was reduced from 15 fish to 10 fish in the 1960s and from 10 fish to 5 fish in 2000. Ever since the last change, Upper Peninsula anglers have been complaining that 5 fish is not enough. Perhaps some number between 5 and 10 would be appropriate.
- Nick Popoff provided the Committee with a copy of the survey that was developed by the Esocid Committee for gathering public input on northern pike regulations. The format of the brook trout survey will be similar and will include basic demographic questions and questions specifically pertaining to brook trout fishing. Fisheries Division plans to open the online survey by early April.
- Don Wright asked if it would be possible to add questions pertaining to minimum size limits.
- Jim Dexter indicated that the Division would consider that option.
- ***Fisheries Division staff will compile the comments received during the online survey and public meetings and present a summary at the next Committee meeting.***

Steelhead Regulations Discussion [Handouts]

Prior to the meeting, Brian Gunderman distributed a summary of past steelhead discussions within the Committee. The Lake Michigan Basin Team discussed the possibility of reducing the daily possession limit for steelhead on four streams during the January 31-February 1 meeting, and Brian provided a brief synopsis of those discussions. The Basin Team recommended reducing the daily possession limit on the Platte and Little Manistee rivers to 1 fish. (Note: On the Little Manistee River, this change would apply only to the portion of the stream downstream of the weir. On the Platte River, the regulation change would apply to the portion of the stream downstream of the upper weir.) The Little Manistee River is the Division's primary egg take location and the Platte River is the back-up egg take location. Steelhead runs have been down in recent years, and the Basin Team thought that the reduced bag limit might reduce harvest and help the Division capture enough adults to supply eggs for our steelhead stocking program. The Basin Team also discussed similar possession limit reductions on Bear Creek and the Pere Marquette River but did not recommend pursuing the regulation changes at this time.

Brian Gunderman established some sideboards for today's steelhead discussion. (1) We are not going to consider changing any of the regulations that we established in 2011 at this time. (2) Fisheries Division does not plan to pursue order changes in 2013 (for the 2014 fishing year). We have had several major regulation changes during the past few years, and Division staff need time to catch up on other projects. The earliest that any additional steelhead regulation changes (aside from the Platte and Little Manistee changes) could be implemented is April 1, 2015. The purpose of today's discussion is to identify any potential steelhead regulation changes that we should be considering for 2015.

- Dave Borgeson asked how many steelhead we would be protecting with the reduced possession limits on the Platte and Little Manistee rivers.
- Brian Gunderman replied that, based on creel and fish passage data from the St. Joseph River, we could be "saving" about 10% of the spawning run. These regulation changes are not intended to increase natural recruitment, as research by Seelbach has indicated that it takes relatively few steelhead to saturate the spawning habitat on the Little Manistee River. The purpose of the regulation change is to protect the gamete source for the Division's hatchery program.
- Dave Borgeson asked about the possibility of a spring fishing closure to reduce harvest on the Little Manistee River instead of reducing the possession limit.
- Brian Gunderman replied that local field staff had rejected this option because they thought that it would reduce fishing opportunities more than the proposed option.
- Ray Danders stated that most steelhead spawning occurs after the April 1st opener and expressed concerns about anglers stepping on the redds.
- Brian Gunderman reiterated that these regulation changes are not expected to increase natural recruitment. The purpose of the regulation change is to help the Division get enough adults to meet egg take goals.
- Jim Dexter stated that with the 1 fish daily possession limit, it may be possible to eliminate the current January-March closure on the Little Manistee River.
- Steve Hutchins asked when the Division would be able to start marking all stocked steelhead. It would helpful to discriminate between steelhead and Eagle Lake strain rainbow trout in the Muskegon River.
- Jay Wesley replied that funding is not available to mark all steelhead. Mass marking of Chinook salmon cost about $300,000 last year.
- Jim Dexter said that it might be possible to clip the Eagle Lake strain fish for the Muskegon River if we could get a group of volunteers to assist with fin clipping.
- Jay Wesley mentioned that the Division also may need volunteers to assist with fin clipping of Skamania strain steelhead for the Manistee River. This fin clipping occurs in the fall.
- Kristin Thomas indicated that Trout Unlimited could provide some volunteers to assist with clipping of Skamania strain steelhead. ***(Update: Scott Heintzelman from the Harrietta Field Station is setting up the fin clipping operation this year. Scott will contact Kristin if volunteers are needed.)***
- Don Wright asked "What is the benefit in knowing if a fish is wild or stocked since all of our steelhead come from wild parents?"
- Jim Bedford pointed out that the eggs for our hatchery program are collected at the weir, so steelhead are less domesticated than fish that come from captive broodstocks. On the other hand, many anglers have the perception that wild fish are better and would like to be able to differentiate between wild steelhead and stocked steelhead.
- Dave Borgeson asked if the Division had a management plan for steelhead.
- Jim Dexter replied that no management plan has been written. The Division would like to develop a steelhead management plan, but that probably will not happen soon due to current workloads and staffing limitations.

Trout Fishing Seasons [PowerPoint presentation]

Brian Gunderman provided information on the history of trout seasons in Michigan, current seasons in other states, and the potential biological and social consequences associated with changing fishing seasons. The primary species of interest during this discussion were brook trout and brown trout.

- Trout seasons were first established in Michigan in 1873
- The existing season opener (last Saturday in April) was established in the 1930s.
- The existing end date for the trout season (September 30) was established in 1969.

- Brook trout and brown trout spawn during mid October-December. Fry emergence occurs from mid January through early May for brook trout and mid March through mid May for brown trout.
- Trout seasons from eight other states in the Midwest and New England were presented. Most states do not allow fishing during the spawning season. Most states allow fishing on some streams during the winter or early spring. This early season typically is catch-and-release only and gear restrictions (e.g., artificials only) are common.
- We could not establish an "artificials only" season in Michigan, because the legislature has limited us to 212 miles of gear restricted waters. Thus, all tackle types would have to be allowed for any statewide or regional catch-and-release season.
- Trout congregate during the spawning season and are more vulnerable to capture by anglers. Allowing fishing during spawning season likely would lead to increased harvest (possession season) and increased hooking mortality (possession or catch-and-release season). Fishing also could disrupt spawning activity.
- Fishing during the incubation period could result in mortality of eggs and pre-emergent fry. A laboratory study by Roberts and White (1992) revealed that a single wading event could kill up to 43% of eggs and 19% of pre-emergent fry. Multiple wading events caused much higher mortality of eggs and fry.
- The population level effects of wading on trout are more difficult to predict. Research conducted in Yellowstone National Park and multiple Wisconsin streams suggested that wading during the incubation period did not lead to decreases in trout abundance.
- The effects of extended season fishing on trout populations depend on several factors including the primary means of recruitment (wild v. stocked), the abundance and distribution of spawning habitat, and fishing pressure.
- Social considerations associated with changing trout seasons include the tradition of opening day, the perceived ethics of fishing for trout during spawning season (banned in Michigan since 1873), and law enforcement concerns.
- Changing the statewide trout seasons (e.g., on all Type 1 streams) would be very controversial.
- Catch-and-release fishing for brook trout and brown trout currently is allowed on Type 4 streams during October 1-Friday before the last Saturday in April. Type 4 regulations primarily have been used to expand fishing opportunities for steelhead, but there may be opportunities to move additional streams into this type. Some brown trout streams in southwest Michigan have Type 4 regulations. Fishing pressure is light during the catch-and-release season.
- The best candidate streams (i.e., lowest biological risk) for moving into Type 4 are medium to large streams with trout populations supported primarily by stocking.
- Other candidate streams (medium biological risk) would be streams with large areas of suitable spawning habitat and streams where much of the spawning occurs in water that is too deep to wade.

Jim Bedford stated that he was content with the current extended season fishing opportunities in Michigan. Multiple Committee members discussed the high fishing pressure on the Pere Marquette River and the apparent lack of effect on steelhead reproduction. Brian Gunderman indicated that the Pere Marquette River would fit into the "medium risk" category due to its size and abundance of spawning habitat. Dave Borgeson stated that trout often spawn in places where anglers never wade (e.g., under log jams). Dave Borgeson also said that people lost interest in trout fishing in California when streams were opened to year-round fishing because people missed the tradition of opening day. ***In general, the Committee members indicated that they were content with the current trout seasons and that there is no need for a statewide effort to open more waters to extended season fishing. Local biologists will continue to look for opportunities to move waters into Type 4 when the perceived benefits (increased fishing opportunities) are high and biological risks are relatively low.***

Topics for Future Meetings
Several topics were suggested for future meetings, including

- Brook trout daily possession limit review
- Pere Marquette River creel survey results
- More comprehensive analysis of campground survey results
- Anti-snagging education and regulations
- Relationship between riparian vegetative cover types and trout abundance
- Mass marking updates

Fisheries Division staff will keep these topics in mind as they prepare for future Committee meetings. Dennis Eade asked about the effects of fracking on streams. Jay Wesley indicated that there are a wide variety of environmental considerations associated with fracking that need to be discussed at the Department (DNR and DEQ) level. This issue is beyond the scope of the Committee.

Kids' Fishing Pond Regulations [Handout]
Several local units of government and other organizations have established kids' fishing ponds. They have established suggested regulations on these ponds, but they are not enforceable. The Division is developing a suite of regulations that could be adopted for these ponds. These regulations would limit fishing to targeted user groups (e.g., children under 17 years of age and individuals with disabilities) and probably would include low daily possession limits. The objective of these efforts is to provide easily accessible fishing locations with high catch rates to get more kids and parents interested in fishing. Christian LeSage distributed an issue statement regarding this regulation review process. All comments regarding this issue should be directed to Todd Kalish (517-373-1282; KalishT@michigan.gov).

Next Meeting Date and Location
The next meeting will be at the Grayling DNR office on August 6th at 10:00 am.