Lake Michigan Fisheries Forum

Rough Draft Notes, Spring Meeting, April 6, 2013
Lakeshore Technical College, Wells Fargo Room

Meeting called to order by Chairman Phil Moy @0900
58 total attendees

Phil starts with a "thank you" to all attending because of the excellent showing and good diversity of attendees.

Discussion of pending legislation to use unspent Salmon Stamp funds: Moy mentions there was no official opinion of the Forum presented to Senator Cowles office. Comments were provided that clarified implications of the Senator's desire to use unspent Great Lakes Trout and Salmon Stamp funds for lamprey control though. Discussion of whether this bill will provide temporary or continuous funding to address lamprey concerns? **We are not sure of the answer to this question.**

Original Intent:
The Great Lakes Trout and Salmon Stamp account has a 2013 opening balance of $3,184,700 and typical revenues over the past 4 years have been between $1.68 and $1.83 million with expenditures in the same period ranging from $1.64 to 1.75 million. The total amount for the sea lamprey management bill would be $364,500 in onetime costs for the two barriers and tributary assessments and an *ongoing* appropriation of $200,000.

Final Analysis by the Legislative Reference Bureau
Under current law, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) administers programs to control certain invasive species in this state. This bill authorizes DNR to spend up to a certain amount each fiscal year for sea lamprey control activities. This bill requires DNR to give priority to spending certain amounts to match federal funding obtained for specific sea lamprey control activities, including constructing or improving sea lamprey barriers and conducting surveys of sea lamprey larvae. Under current law, DNR must spend 50 percent of the amounts it receives from the sale of resident and nonresident two−day sports fishing licenses and all moneys it receives from the sale of Great Lakes trout and salmon stamps to fund the trout and salmon rearing and stocking program for outlying waters and to administer the issuance of Great Lakes trout and salmon stamps. This bill requires DNR to use these funds for sea lamprey control activities as well.

Member Question: What is the take of the Fish and Wildlife Service on using Wisconsin Great Lakes Trout and Salmon stamps for sea lamprey control?

Answer by Mark Holey(USFWS):
FWS is the administrator of the program to control lampreys in the United States. Managing lamprey barriers is a significant task and any help would be appreciated. St. Mary's and the Manistique Rivers are known to be the most significant lamprey sources for Lake Michigan contamination. A problem with a leaking dam allowing lamprey passage on the Manistique River will be taken care of.

Randy Schumacher clarifies that the Great Lakes Trout and Salmon Stamp funding reserve intended to be taped by Cowles' legislation was for hatchery construction or refurbishing. WDNR is seeking to locate a new or refurbish an existing hatchery near to Lake Michigan.

In ensuing discussion about exotics, including sea lamprey, member concern expressed about removing dams on the Milwaukee River allowing AIS like lamprey access to spawning habitat. **Moy suggests lamprey issues be placed on the agenda for the next meeting**. One forum member Suggested there could be a tax check-off type of donation for funding additional lamprey controls.

Presentation: A New Paradigm in the Lake Michigan Fishery? By John Janssen. John went through the history of trout and salmon stocking in the Great Lakes dating back to the late 1960's. Today, exotic Quagga mussels are lowering the base of primary productivity and clearing the water. There is a relationship between seasonal larval zooplankton growth and the ability of larval alewife to feed on certain sizes of zooplankton. Larval whitefish are better suited than alewife to utilize large zooplankton in Lake Michigan on a normal year. John hypothesizes significant rain storms in 2008 resulted in a shot of excess nutrients fostering a significant alewife hatch that provided better adult alewife abundance in 2010. Larval yellow perch are competing with exotic gobies for food and habitat and not doing well. Alewives may also eat larval yellow perch – there is a negative correlation between alewife abundance and yellow perch recruitment. We need a diverse forage base in order to support a robust fishery. Recent surveys indicate there may be significant natural reproduction of lake trout occurring across the entire lake from the north into even Illinois waters. About 20% of the young year class are wild fish; in Illinois about 50% of spawning fish are wild. Wisconsin does not have the degree of watershed protection in terms of forested watersheds that the State of Michigan has. This is one factor in the lower quality of our streams. Chinook and Coho are now naturalized in Lake Michigan. Natural reproduction is an issue. We need to get control of the AIS in Lake Michigan, until then nothing wil change.

His presentation generates discussion on the allocation of available forage resources in Lake Michigan.

On-line presentation by Dave Werner of the USFWS on the status of the forage base in Lake Michigan:

This presentation is available on line at the website of the Great Lakes Fishery Commission. The audience listened to a time-series presentation of FWS acoustic and bottom trawl data documenting the significant decline in overall forage base including alewives. An additional issue in forage base management is that, not only are there fewer alewives overall, but there are very few year classes of alewife in the population. The 2010 alewife year class is dominant, comprising 84-88% of the population. This occurred in Lake Huron just before the population collapsed.

The bloater population continues to decline as do smelt. In lake Superior there is a native Coregonine forage base. In Lake Huron it is now bloater and smelt. In lake Michigan it is smelt and alewife.

Three is about 15 kilotonnes of forage – 60% alewife and 21% goby. Quagga mussels which have increased since 2005, have a biomass of about 30 kilotonnes.

Summary – the alewife population consists of essentially a single year class – 2010. There is poor survival overall and the population is not maturing at a smaller size.

Native species are at an all-time low in the bottom trawls. The fish may be moving to deeper waters. They will add 3 tows next year at depths >128M.

Key native fish are still absent – kiyi, cisco, emerald shiners. They see no fish on the acoustic survey that display diel migrations. The fish community objective is 500-800 kt; we are at 15-31kt.

Lots of interesting discussion on nutrient transport and availability in Lake Michigan's Quagga mussel-driven, lake bottom-based nutrient-limited environment. Concerning cladophora (a filamentous algae), it appears water currents transport nutrient-laden bottom waters into the shallows to foster the blooms of this nuisance algae inshore. Brown trout are taking advantage of the goby-driven inshore fish forage base and are the only salmoid doing very well—even producing world records. Kevin Naze underscores we need to be careful to not "write-off" the Lake Michigan trout and salmon fishery because there is still excellent fishing available. A charter boat captain mentions catch rates on Chinook salmon were excellent last year. Another mentions the current status of Chinook and brown trout in Lake Ontario where the Chinooks are lower in abundance but reach larger size; anglers there seek out brown trout for abundance and Chinooks for quality. He notes that in 2011 the average size of Chinook caught was larger than in 2012; but 2012 had higher harvest. Another Charter captain agrees most anglers do not care about what fish they catch as long as they catch fish and, importantly, they need the opportunity to catch a trophy fish. Some even bring up the possibility of artificially adding nutrients/fertility to the Lake. Others say that would be a dangerous precedent that may not work.

<u>Salmon Stocking Allocation Model</u>:

Brad Eggold goes through the metrics incorporated into the past model WDNR used for stocking that dates back to 1986. There were economic factors considered in that model in the form of moored fishing boats and amount of public fishing areas, piers and breakwalls. The model allocated fish by fishing zone It did not allocate as far down as county or individual port. For 2013, we will reduce Chinook stocking 31.4% overall and proportionately at 34.49% except at Strawberry Creek where stocking will be cutless. What strategy do we want to use? Possibilities discussed include: 1) Maximize stocking to benefit the open lake harvest of chinook salmon? 2) Maximize fall fishing in selected streams? 3) Provide a fall fishery at all stocking locations? Observation: Chinook

exhibit a high fidelity to their stocking site; even if that stocking is in a harbor with a relatively small stream entering the harbor. The audience is asked about their expectations for a fall Chinook fishery and there is consensus we should try to provide a fall fishery at all ports; with the observation a lot of businesses depend on the fall Chinook fishery for tourism. An angler notes the open water fishery and the harvest that occurs then is what really drives the system. The group accepts the premise Chinook are "nomadic" during the open water fishery and, in term of providing an open water fishery, it does not mean that much where they are stocked. We note the present coded wire tag (CWT) study may show us if stocking at any one port provides better survival compared to other ports.

Oxytetracyclelene (OTC) samples between 2006-2010 of one-year-old Chinooks indicate that on average, 55% of the 1+ Chinooks caught are wild fish. The fall harvest of Chinook salmon is miniscule compared to the harvest in the open lake. But, some say there is no significant fall Chinook run anymore; at least since the mid-1990's. Sheboygan was mentioned as an example of a fall Chinook run that is poor compared to its historic status. One angler says there are now a lot more anglers that fish salmon in the lake's open waters compared to years ago when they did not have a boat and had to fish from shore. The group also observed that pier fishing has changed because of clear water--- now, if you're fishing on a pier you have to start to fish in the dark and quit by daybreak. One angler observed that in Milwaukee Chinook are coming back to their stream of stocking later in the year; and, when returning, they are too dark to be of good table fare. A Milwaukee sport angler noted his club, last year, had a hard time catching a Chinook heavier than 19 pounds. One feels charter boat numbers need to be considered in the formula (they are). Also mentioned since stocking numbers are going to continue to go down, why not stock near streams where there will be some natural reproduction? Option 1) 10 are in favor, 2) none like this option, 3) most are in favor. The majority of those attending this meeting want to keep some degree of fall salmon return at each port. This is the option to provide a fall fishery at all stocking locations (Number 3). Eggold notes that the previous stocking rationale we used reflected trying to provide a fall fishery all along the lakeshore. So, the main objective of our stocking rationale has not changed that much.

Eggold presents different types of strategies that could be used in the future to distribute chinook salmon in Wisconsin. These options are 1) develop a true economic based model, 2) develop a new complex model 3) use past stocking allocation model with updated information 4) develop a simpler allocation strategy spreadsheet and 5) use status quo and continue stocking based on the 1990 model run. After much discussion, the LMFF agreed that the best approach would be to create a simpler allocation strategy to stock chinook salmon in Wisconsin (Option 4).

Eggold went through a strategy that the Department created based on public input during this chinook salmon reduction process and comments recorded a the Dec 1 LMFF meeting. He went through the 4 steps of the strategy including economic factors used in a new proposed strategy. In general, people like his approach and are pleased with the factors considered. There is conversation about how much we should weigh charter boats

at each port and whether the catch rate of the charter boat fleet should be incorporated into the model. Two anglers caution against weighing in favor of charter boats to the detriment of raw angler numbers at each port.

Consensus: We will email the new strategy to each person on the list of those that attended this meeting. <u>The time frame for us receiving review back from those provided with the strategy will be June 3, 2013.</u> We need to have a strategy to base 2014 stocking on by early fall of 2013.

One member reminds the audience that April 20, 2013, at the Sheboygan Outboard Club, is the next meeting of the Great Lakes Sports Fishing Federation.

Lake Michigan Integrated Fisheries Management Plan---draft. Bill Horns. WDNR staff went through the "old" ten year plan and determined whether each objective in that 03-13 plan was met or not. Now, we are establishing a new 10-year plan. As an introduction to the plan, Bill mentions that, for example, as little as 10-years ago, Quagga mussels were NOT considered a factor in Lake management. That is how fast the Lake Michigan environment can change! As with the old plan our new plan is adopted pursuant to the Strategic Great Lakes Fisheries Management Plan (SGLFMP) which is a formal agreement between all states and provinces on the Great Lakes.

There are four goals in the SGLFMP---

- Healthy, diverse ecosystem
- Diverse multi-species sport fishery
- Science based management
- Economically viable and stable commercial fishery

These goals transcend each individual state's planning efforts; so, without approval of our state and international partners, we cannot change them. Bill brought with him 100 hard copies of the edited old plan so there is at least one copy available for each attendee to take with them. We hope to have the final new plan done by the end of calendar year 2013. This plan will need approval of the Wisconsin Natural Resources Board.

Meeting adjourned at 3:00PM

Next meeting to be October 12, 2013, also at Lakeshore Technical College