

Lake Michigan Fisheries Forum
Lakeshore Technical College, Wells Fargo Room (L261)
Cleveland, WI
Oct 3, 2015

NOTES

8:45 Whitefish rules package (Hansen – DNR)

Overview of current rules and management of whitefish in Lake Michigan. Issues with aging whitefish, scales were underestimating the age, so use otoliths (ear bones). Revisiting past data/models with corrected age data. This statistical catch at age (SCAA) model is not working well but we still have a variety of parameters that we are looking at including catch-per-unit-effort (CPE), age/size structure and recruitment. Whitefish are growing more slowly than in the past. Green Bay fisheries and tributary spawning populations appear to be doing well. However, young adult fish are not showing up in the fall Lake Michigan (not Green Bay) commercial fishery catches and spawner surveys in eastern Door County (fish are getting older). YOY whitefish showing up in unexpected places such as Sturgeon Bay, seining by US Fish and Wildlife Service and DNR finding young whitefish nearshore. Several ideas have been developed to address the Lake Michigan whitefish population including reducing the number of fishing days, reduce effort, change zone/quota system. These will all be part of ongoing discussions with stakeholders.

9:25 Lake Michigan steelhead (Boyarski – DNR)

Overview of Steelhead program in Lake Michigan. Major components of the program include strains (Skamania, Chambers Creek and Ganarska), stocking locations (rivers vs lake) and stream size (large vs small) and stocking numbers. Skamania no longer stocked in Wisconsin because adults from lake need to be brought into the hatchery for a couple months. Risk of VHS has stopped this practice. Future hatchery upgrades and construction of quarantine facility would allow for use of Skamania strain again. Stocking in both large and small river systems for a variety of angler experiences. Funding for restoration of Kettle Moraine Springs hatchery has been approved in past two state budgets. DNR is currently working on test wells to determine quantity and quality of water at Kettle Moraine Springs.

10:15 Green Bay fish management (Donofrio – DNR)

Walleye stocking in the Fox River and Green Bay until 1984, helped to build the current fishery. Stocking has stopped so the focus is now on habitat improvement. Several rock reefs have been built over the last 10 years which has helped walleye to successfully spawn. Overview of the management was presented. Age structure and year class data. Good YOY walleye in 1993, 2003 and 2013.

Musky fishery in Green Bay is built on 3 basic phases. Phase I involved getting Great Lakes spotted Musky eggs from other sources, raise them in DNR hatcheries and stock them. Phase II involves stocking 3 inland lakes with these fish to build up brood stock for use in the future. Phase III is looking at detecting natural reproduction in the Fox River, Green Bay and other tributaries.. Not currently able to stock recommended number of musky per year (30,000), only about 2-5,000 stocked per year because hatchery space is limited and we do not have mature fish yet in the brood stock lakes.

10:45 Predator / Prey model (Eggold – DNR)

Review of the development of predatory/prey ratio. Uses models of Chinook salmon biomass (included lake trout) and alewife biomass for Lake Michigan to develop a ratio between the two. A ratio at or about 0.10 indicates that too many predators are in the system while a ratio closer to 0.05 indicates a system more in balance. In addition we can use auxiliary indicators to assist us in evaluating the predator/prey ratio. Weight of 3+ Female Chinook at Strawberry Creek is one method that has been used in the past to determine the size of returning spawners. Alewife are at very low levels (USGS surveys), but size of returning salmon can also give some idea of # of alewife in the lake. 2016 stocking numbers will be the same overall, but some very small changes between counties (+/- a few hundred fish). Acoustic forage assessment update via USGS show that 2015 alewife YOY look to be higher than 2013 and 2014 but will not know for sure until all the analysis are complete. In addition, the survey also detected some YOY bloater chub and yellow perch.

Questions from the LMFF members on this topic centered on how well does the USGS survey sample the alewife and bloater chub populations.

11:15—Aquatic Invasive Species (Campbell – UW-Extension/DNR, recorded)

Due to time constraints and other discussions, this presentation was not shown. The update from Tim can be found here <https://youtu.be/kAixkXk99KQ>. Invasive species have been discussed in the past but remain a major factor in shaping the Lake Michigan food web. New species, like Asian carp and other species, have the potential to cause future changes as well.

9:05 11:45 Whitefish trawl study update (Seilheimer – WI Sea Grant)

This project is assessing the bycatch (i.e., non-target species) associated with commercial whitefish trawling. Depth, season, and other environmental factors are being quantified as factors in determining the movement and location of whitefish and bycatch species. Between 02/2015 and 07/2015 there have been 319 individual trawl drags over 41 days in the Manitowoc and Two Rivers area. Bycatch has been mainly Lake Trout, Burbot, and small/non-marketable whitefish. Lake Trout have been tagged to estimate survival. Recaptured Lake Trout have been recorded in the catch area, as well as in Michigan and Lake Huron.

1:00 Lake Michigan Fisheries Updates

Lake Michigan Integrated Fisheries Management Plan

Final draft has been completed. Fisheries Management Board will likely be available working with the Division to determine next steps. Hopefully this version will go through one final 30 day review and then become final. Once it is posted for public review, we will let LMFF members aware of the comment later this year and approved in 2016 period deadline along with other stakeholders.

Lake Michigan Yellow Perch

Brad showed the members the current status of the yellow perch fishery in Lake Michigan. Overall, YP numbers are down and no significant year-classes have been produced since 2012. YOY sampling from this year show that a year-class was produced but we will have to see how they survive over this winter. Both biomass and numbers of YP have dropped significantly from the late 1980s and even have dropped the past 10 years. Past numbers from assessments. Population and biomass estimates remain low.

Bloater chub rule

About current rule change recently passed by the Natural Resources Board, commercial fishery and USGS estimates.

New proposed quota is automated and based on USGS assessments. Questions about the assessment.

Green Bay Yellow Perch

Status of commercial and sport fishery and overview of management. Decent year class in 2015.

2:00 Discussion (All)

Guide Reporting – Charter captains are required to report catch, why not guides? Multiple groups have shown interest in this issue in the past. Forum sent letter to DNR on requiring harvest reports from guides in GB for Whitefish. LMFF chair will report back on past efforts in this area and draft a letter to the DNR about guide reporting.

2:30 **Adjourn**

Future topics and issues

- Avian predation in the lakes.
- Fish propagation. Kettle Moraine upgrades (history and times). Andy Hron, DNR.
- Economics of the Green Bay fishery.
- Forage assessment by USGS. Is it still adequate?
- Tammie Paoli's logbook program.
- Nutrients in Lake Michigan. Would more be helpful?
- Cage aquaculture in the Great Lakes.

Meeting Attendance

Titus Seilheimer

Brad Eggold

Dave Boyarski

Mike Donofrio

Scott Hansen

Mark Maricque

Dennis Hickey

Chuck Weir

John Janssen

Glenn Seger

Gary Seger

Shawn Seger

Scott Haberman

Charlie Henricksen

Lee Haasch

Tom Gulash

John Hansen

Russ Kleinert

Tom Kocourek

Tom Lager

Jerry Fetterer

Russell Gahagan

Eric Geisthardt

Mike LeClair

Adam Cochart

Jake Gajewski