

Lake Superior Fisheries Management Plan – Advisory Panel Meeting
Monday, December 18, 2017, 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. (CDT)
WITC – Ashland, WI

Panel Members Present

Organization

Advisor to the Great Lakes Fishery Commission
Advisor to the Great Lakes Fishery Commission
Apostle Islands Sportfishing Association
Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
Bodin Fisheries
Brule River Sportsmen's Club, Wisconsin Wildlife Federation
Brule River Sportsmen's Club
Charter Captain
Clean Wisconsin
GLIFWC
Isaak Walton League/Duluth Chapter (W.J. McCabe Chapter)
Lake Superior National Estuarine Research Reserve
Lake Superior Steelhead Association
Northland College
Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
Superior Rivers Watershed Association
Western Lake Superior Trollers Association
Wild Rivers Chapter Trout Unlimited
Wisconsin DNR - Office of Great Waters
Wisconsin Sea Grant

Participant

Al House
Bruce Prentice
Rob Jones
Lorrie Salawater
Beta Bodin
Ken Lundberg
Dennis Pratt
Darryl Fenner
Susan Hedman
Bill Mattes
John Carr, Glenn Merrick
Hannah Ramage
Mike Pitan
Randy Lehr
Chad Abel
Tony Janisch
Jim VanLandschoot
Luke Kavajecz
Michele Wheeler
Titus Seilheimer

Panel Members Absent

Organization

Ashland Area Chamber of Commerce
Bayfield County Land and Water Conservation Department
Chequamegon Food Cooperative
Douglas County Fish & Game League
Douglas County Land and Water Conservation Department
Lake Superior Commercial Fishing Board
Northwest Rod & Gun

Participant

Mary McPhedridge
Ben Dufford
Steve Sandstrom
Tom Johnson
Christine Ostern
Craig Hoopman
Dave Sorenson

DNR Fisheries Management and Law Enforcement Staff Present

Name

Lynna Gurnoe
Willie Fetzner
Brad Ray
Paul Piszczek

Title

Conservation Warden
Great Lakes Fisheries Specialist
Lake Superior Biologist
Lake Superior Tributaries Biologist

Purpose: Develop draft objectives for Goal 3.

Summary

Paul Piszczek called the meeting to order and asked Panel members to introduce themselves. Paul also asked the members if any major omissions or errors occurred in the November 15, 2017 meeting notes that were previously emailed to the Panel. He acknowledged Ken Lundberg's post hoc request for clarification about Paul's beaver dam and Brook Trout comment in the November meeting notes, particularly if it implied a change to the current beaver control program (beaver and dam removal) on the tributaries. Paul replied that his comment did not imply a change, but only to recognize that deep pools afford good growth opportunities for Brook Trout, based on his observations of large Brook Trout in deep pools. No other comments were made, and Paul described the meeting agenda. Dennis Pratt suggested adding the [Wisconsin Lake Superior Basin] Brook Trout Plan and [Lower] St. Louis River Habitat to the list of plans available on the website. He also noted that fish refuges exist in the tributaries.

Willie Fetzer and Brad Ray facilitated the Goal 3 objectives discussion using the Goal statement shown on the PowerPoint slides. Willie read through the five objectives and made real-time changes/notes in slides as comments and suggestions were voiced. Dennis Pratt considered the Goal's language too complex and confusing because both "sustainability" and "viability" were included. Brad replied that both terms were retained based on discussions in previous meetings to address the concern that "sustainability" may not allow for harvest. Dennis added that both "subsistence" and "tribal" may not be necessary, yet some panel members noted that not all subsistence is tribal and both terms should therefore be retained. Al House suggested incorporating protection of the overall food web of the fishery in Objective 4, and Willie replied that the panel needs to determine the context of the objective (e.g., overall community or individual species). Brad directed the conversation toward the individual objectives.

Objective 1: Restore/maintain self-sustaining lean and siscowet lake trout populations to levels that support sport, commercial, and subsistence fisheries.

Darryl Fenner suggested considering lower harvest levels as opposed to the current harvest, which would provide a margin of safety toward self-sustaining populations. Other panel members concurred. Brad Ray replied that harvest is negotiated through the Lake Superior Fishery Agreement. Bill Mattes added that although the population is currently set at maximum harvest/mortality, the maximum already accounts for long-term sustainability. Willie Fetzer drafted a tactic for this objective based on the conversation. Bruce Prentice noted the need to clarify how stakeholder input is incorporated into decision-making, negotiations, etc. Brad asked for any other tactics, and Al House suggested developing and enhancing assessment techniques and modeling, providing harvest scenarios, and continued stakeholder engagement with the regulations.

Randy Lehr asked what the Lake Trout morphotypes are, and Brad replied Humpert, Redfin, Siscowet, and Lean. Darryl wondered if the Lake Trout population skewed by harvest of other fishes. Brad discounted the likelihood, based on examples of siscowet generally occupying different habitats and

herring nets containing little bycatch. Further, higher fishing pressure on leans is not expected to increase the siscowet population.

Regarding “restore/maintain,” Beta Bodin asked what is the level with which we would be satisfied. Brad replied that WI-2 is already considered restored, as natural reproduction is sufficient. Contrastingly, although WI-1 is close to being self-sustaining, it is not. Brad added that this could be addressed as a tactic. Also, stocking is continually debated for WI-2, despite the area’s status as restored. Jim VanLandschoot noted a conflicting message in that the fish population is restored, yet closures still exist to protect the population. Brad acknowledged that recreational fishing is tough to gage; however, the harvest quota lends protection.

Michele Wheeler inquired whether this objective should consider hooking mortality, primarily associated with barotrauma. Brad noted that a 2010-2013 study found up to 38% mortality; water temperature was relatively warm. The State addressed this by creating a catch window that was vetted with stakeholder input and review. Darryl felt that more work is needed, based on the relatively small sample size. Brad explained that the sampling included 2,300 fish; the study will be posted to the LSFMP website.

Susan Hedman suggested that modelling and assessment should include a sensitivity analysis toward the effects of changing water temperatures (i.e., climate change). Brad noted the Statistical Catch-at-Age models currently being used may not accept climate/water temperature data. A model for this could, however, be added as a tactic. Bill Mattes stated that thermal tagging could be done and included in the model, and Michele added that the Lake Superior hydrodynamic model also has temperature data that could be useful in the model.

Objective 2: Maintain self-sustaining lake whitefish population to levels that support sport, commercial, and subsistence fisheries.

Brad Ray solicited comments from the group. Willie Fetzer and Bill Mattes suggested a stock-assessment model, and Darryl Fenner recommended a comparison of commercial harvest vs. protected areas (e.g., examine differences in community/population size structure). Dennis Pratt commented that whitefish was dominant in Chequamegon Bay in 1870, and the intense pound net fishing seemed to correlate with a decreased whitefish population. He added that the St. Louis River had a spawning population that likely declined with dam construction on the river, and perhaps a restoration opportunity exists, particularly as it is referenced in the Lower St. Louis River Habitat Plan. Luke Kavajecz perceived an increasing summer whitefish fishery, as public awareness of it is probably low. A member of the panel noted the need for more equity between the sport and commercial interests. Al House suggested evaluating the impacts of factors not related to harvest, such as sediment, on whitefish, and Titus Seilheimer added the need to understand early life history.

Susan Hedman noted the importance of tracking whitefish consumption/contaminants as a public information issue, given its popularity as a food fish. Brad replied that DNR tracks some species on a

rotational schedule. Beta Bodin asked about the specific tissues sampled for contaminants. This depends on the objective of the analysis, for example fillets area used when studying suitability for human consumption.

Bruce Prentice suggested evaluating whitefish geographic distribution in Chequamegon Bay, Long Island area, and elsewhere to address specific questions as whether whitefish are transient at certain times of the year and their preferred migration periods. Further, will this coincide with when more fishers might be in the area? He added that real-time information would be helpful. Bill Mattes noted that some protection is offered through overlapping use of extant refuges. Darryl asked if any proactive management exists, and Brad replied that the State manages whitefish by managing Lake Trout through overlapping catches and net footage restrictions. This has been the practice for over 30 years and the population has not perceptibly declined. Dennis Pratt noted that the whitefish assessment and pound net fishing records could improve our understanding. Darryl inquired about current commercial, tribal, and recreational harvest. Bill cited the most recent State of the Lake Report: one million pounds total harvest (60% state, 40% tribal); herring harvest is approximately 1.3 million pounds. Bill suggested including lamprey control, and Brad replied that it is included in the invasives section/discussion.

Beta Bodin surmised that whitefish and Lake Trout were historically more segregated and wondered if it was a function of spawning habitat differences, changes to rock removals, etc. Has this been considered? Brad replied that species spawning times are somewhat segregated.

Objective 3: Maintain self-sustaining lake herring populations to levels that support predator populations and commercial fisheries.

Two primary suggestions were made: Ken Lundberg and Darryl Fenner offered recreational fishing and population modeling, respectively. Glenn Merrick noted the potential for interstate collaboration, particularly with Minnesota relative to its fish diet monitoring. Hannah Ramage wondered if we know what population of herring we need to maintain Lake Trout. Titus Seilheimer commented that herring is a lake-wide issue, well beyond the Wisconsin border.

Objective 4: Maintain/restore self-sustaining populations of native species that support fisheries.

Darryl Fenner objected to only looking at native species, yet noted the need to include self-sustaining Walleye populations in Chequamegon Bay in this objective. Willie Fetzer inquired about whether species should be grouped or described individually (e.g., Northern Pike, Walleye, Muskellunge, etc.). It could go either way, as tactics might overlap. Al House noted the need to recognize individual species relative to the overall community, Dennis Pratt suggested grouping by nearshore, deep water (i.e., guild), and Darryl mentioned grouping individual populations by area (Chequamegon Bay, St. Louis River). Susan Hedman recommended including sturgeon harvest and consequent population impacts, and Lorrie Salawater noted data availability through U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Brad Ray informed the panel of the forthcoming sturgeon advisory question (increase minimum length from 50 inches to 60 inches) and the timeline for this change. Willie asked for input on Smallmouth Bass, and Luke Kavajecz replied that

existing management should continue. A short discussion occurred regarding White Perch and White Bass and the need to include these species. Perhaps White Perch can be controlled through unlimited harvest, although opening to commercial fishing would open new areas to commercial fishing, which could conflict with other users.

Michele Wheeler noted the importance of connecting regional-scale management with lakewide efforts, or at least minimizing any inconsistencies with those efforts; priorities could be set based on tactics, objectives, etc. Dennis Pratt added that local concerns need to be addressed in the broad context of lakewide efforts.

The discussion moved to practical approaches to coaster Brook Trout. Brad asked if replacing Splake with Brook Trout would be ok. Darryl replied no, as only a few streams can currently support Brook Trout. Dennis Pratt noted that most streams have Brook Trout, which are limited to headwaters where watersheds are small. General conversation continued regarding Splake immigration to streams and subsequent interactions with Brook Trout. Bill Mattes noted current studies regarding progeny's genetic ancestry and that Splake-Brook Trout backcrosses have already been documented. Dennis questioned whether this has population-level implications, which is important in this discussion. Jim VanLandschoot questioned whether Brook Trout restoration is financially feasible and practical, and Brad implied that previous efforts may not have been sufficient, particularly too few Brook Trout were stocked to see a difference in the population. Dennis stated that a Wisconsin strain would be needed, as previous work with Nipigon fish was not successful. However, a few members of the panel noted that a Wisconsin strain is not available. Further, as Chad Abel noted, interspecific competition is a barrier that restricts Brook Trout to headwater reaches. Al House added that Chequamegon Bay's Brook Trout genetics differ widely due to the various strains stocked. Many thousands of dollars were spent with little return.

Objective 5: Maintain/restore self-sustaining populations of potadromous salmonids that support fisheries.

Al House understood that Splake and Brook Trout need additional discussion, yet attention is needed to maintain non-native sport fishes such as Brown Trout, Coho Salmon, and Rainbow Trout. This also includes identifying spawning areas.

Willie Fetzer concluded the meeting by tabling Objectives 4 and 5 for the next meeting, based on the detailed discussion at tonight's meeting. Willie read **Goal 3** and asked the panel to **be prepared to discuss it at the next meeting, which is scheduled for Thursday, January 11, 2018 at WITC – Ashland, 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

Notes by Paul Piszczek