

Lake Superior Fisheries Management Plan – Advisory Panel Meeting
Tuesday, February 6, 2018, 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. (CDT)
WITC – Ashland, WI

Panel Members Present

Organization

Apostle Islands Sportfishing Association
Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
Bodin Fisheries
Brule River Sportsmen's Club
Brule River Sportsmen's Club, Wisconsin Wildlife Federation
Charter Captain
Chequamegon Food Cooperative
Clean Wisconsin
GLIFWC
Isaak Walton League/Duluth Chapter (W.J. McCabe Chapter)
Lake Superior Commercial Fishing Board
Lake Superior National Estuarine Research Reserve
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

Rob Jones
Lorrie Salawater
Beta Bodin
Dennis Pratt
Ken Lundberg
Darryl Fenner
Steve Sandstrom
Susan Hedman
Bill Mattes
John Carr
Craig Hoopman
Hannah Ramage
Chad Abel
Tony Janisch
Jim Vanlandschoot
Luke Kavajecz
Michele Wheeler
Titus Seilheimer

Panel Members Absent

Organization

Advisor to the Great Lakes Fishery Commission
Advisor to the Great Lakes Fishery Commission
Ashland Area Chamber of Commerce
Bayfield County Land and Water Conservation Department
Douglas County Fish & Game League
Douglas County Land and Water Conservation Department
Lake Superior Steelhead Association
Northland College
Northwest Rod & Gun

Participant

Bruce Prentice
Al House
Mary McPhedridge
Ben Dufford
Tom Johnson
Christine Ostern
Mike Pitan
Randy Lehr
Dave Sorenson

DNR Fisheries Management and Law Enforcement Staff Present

Name

Lynna Gurnoe
Brad Eggold
Willie Fetzner
Brad Ray
Paul Piszczek

Title

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

Purpose: Continue discussing Objectives 4 and 5 of Goal 2.

Summary

Paul Piszczek called the meeting to order and asked Panel members to introduce themselves. Paul also acknowledged Matt Cooper and Derek Ogle from Northland College, along with the students of Derek's fisheries management class who were also present. Paul mentioned the December 18, 2017 meeting notes only needed minor edits, and he also reviewed this evening's meeting agenda. Willie Fetzer reviewed Objectives 1 through 3 for Goal 2:

Goal 2: Work with stakeholders to identify and implement strategies that protect, support, and enhance the diversity, sustainability, and viability of state and tribal sport, commercial, and subsistence fishing.

- a. Objective 1: Restore/maintain self-sustaining lean and siscowet lake trout populations to levels that support sport, commercial, and subsistence fisheries and maintain ecosystem function/balanced ecosystem.*
- b. Objective 2: Maintain self-sustaining lake whitefish population to levels that support sport, commercial, and subsistence fisheries.*
- c. Objective 3: Maintain self-sustaining lake herring populations to levels that support predator populations and commercial (add sport) fisheries.*

Willie then initiated discussion on Objectives 4 and 5.

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

Brad Ray and Willie Fetzer asked for input regarding Esocids, and Craig Hoopman inquired about available data. Brad noted that Muskellunge data are being collected in the St. Louis River and Northern Pike data are collected from Chequamegon Bay. Ken Lundberg asked about any intent to expand Muskellunge to Chequamegon Bay, and Willie and Brad replied it was a question for the advisory panel. Darryl Fenner expressed concern that any expansion could affect restoration of Brook Trout or other species. Dennis Pratt noted that Muskellunge in Chequamegon Bay are likely strays from the St. Louis River and that a Northern Pike spawning population estimate was done in the 1980s. Chad Abel added that Northern Pike are often encountered in tribal nearshore fish surveys. Following Darryl's comment about the existing fishing regulations for Muskellunge and Northern Pike are probably performing well, Brad concluded the conversation by noting that we can retain the status quo for these species.

Darryl Fenner noted that Walleye and Yellow Perch need work in Chequamegon Bay, as reproduction seems limited; perhaps spawning habitat improvements can be explored. Michele Wheeler, Brad, and Dennis replied that some data are available along the Ashland shoreline and that a decent population exists in the Bad River. Willie suggested exploring opportunities to share information among the stakeholders (e.g., state, federal, tribal). A comment was made that the Tribe is not necessarily interested, as it has sovereignty over the Bad River. Darryl wondered if the Walleye populations are separate, and Brad affirmed with examples of the South Shore, Kakagon Slough, and others. Tony Janisch asked whether the goal is to manage for natural reproduction or continue stocking and whether

natural reproduction is feasible, particularly if spawning habitat is limited (e.g., Fish Creek). Brad stated the preference for natural reproduction, and the conversation included a comment about how enhancements at the Superfund site could create spawning areas. Dennis noted that Kakagon Slough Walleye needs to be protected, as it is the primary source of Walleye that supports the Chequamegon Bay fishery. Anecdotal information suggests that healthy Walleye are needed to maintain healthy Yellow Perch (i.e., maintain the predator-prey balance). Darryl mentioned a need for a population estimate to determine allowable harvest, and Michele commented on the potential interest in determining the limiting factors of natural reproduction in the Chequamegon Bay population. Jim Vanlandschoot noted an increase in ice fishing pressure in the St. Louis River and the need to work with Minnesota DNR on future creel surveys. Beta Bodin suggested establishing a targeted goal for commercial fishing in the western arm of Lake Superior, since a limited tribal commercial fishery already exists. Brad replied that Walleye are not currently defined as a commercial species in the State of Wisconsin and state statute would need to be changed to enable a commercial fishery for Walleye. Darryl observed the need for more equity between sport and commercial fishing communities for whitefish in Chequamegon Bay and such equity could heal the wounds between these communities. Sport anglers would like to harvest more whitefish, but are often reduced by commercial netting. Perhaps a net-free area could be established to increase sport fishing opportunities. Craig Hoopman noted, however, that whitefish are trying to compete with all other stocked species, such as Splake and Brown Trout.

The conversation turned to bass. Luke Kavajecz stated that Smallmouth Bass are self-sustained, which precludes the need to spend money on the species. The existing management strategies have allowed this fishery to exist. Steve Sandstrom commented that the Smallmouth Bass is perceived as primarily catch-and-release and therefore affects Walleye and Yellow Perch by reducing prey availability; perhaps this could be substantiated through a study. Brad replied that diet overlap is limited; Walleye likely prey on Yellow Perch. Willie concurred that little information exists regarding direct competition between Walleye and Smallmouth Bass.

Craig Hoopman asked whether any information exists regarding cormorant predation on Yellow Perch, and Willie noted that cormorants are opportunistic generalists (documented in the literature) that generally seek most abundant prey, which may not be Yellow Perch. Ken Lundberg suggested keeping cormorants on the radar and wondered if any population control programs are currently operating, such as that on Lake Michigan. Brad Eggold replied that active management (shooting) programs ceased following federal court decisions. Dennis stated that a control program may have previously occurred on Gull Island Shoal, after cormorants destroyed the pound net fishery. Stocking coldwater fish required wide distribution to reduce predation by cormorants; Brad Ray concurred that fish are currently scatter-planted.

Brad Ray asked for input regarding panfish. Ken expresses interest in whether the [Yellow] perch fishery was up or down, whether any regulation changes were needed, and whether a panfish fishery exists in Chequamegon Bay. Brad replied that the perch fishery was decent, with many 9+ inch fish and that a panfish fishery exists in the bay, yet to a much less extent than in the St. Louis River. Michele Wheeler

noted the need to promote fishing and accessibility. Brad stated the old ore dock site in Ashland as a fishing area is being evaluated by the city.

Brad turned the discussion toward other species for which management tactics might be necessary. He acknowledged coverage of Lake Sturgeon in previous meetings, yet noted that additional time will be allotted in the March meeting when the DNR Lake Sturgeon Team attends to discuss the statewide sturgeon management planning process. Brad mentioned that an April meeting will likely be scheduled to conclude discussions, from which a management plan outline could be drafted. Darryl Fenner suggested addressing the potential for a Chinook Salmon fishery, despite its value being social rather than biological. Brad surmised the low likelihood of establishing a fishery, based on competition with stocked and other non-native salmonids. Jim Vanlandschoot, however, noted charter fishing customers' interest in Chinook Salmon. Steve Sandstrom recommended a focus on native and naturalized fishes; Chinook Salmon anglers can be rough on streams during the fall season. Michele Wheeler suggested we should uphold the value of native fish and not support increasing non-native species. We could send the message that although someone may not catch a Chinook Salmon, he or she may catch a nice Lake Trout or other native species. Brad Eggold noted the need to determine what to manage for; we cannot necessarily have it all. Ken Lundberg added the need to recognize the importance of non-native fishes to the nearshore fishery.

Brad introduced Objective 5, which continued the Splake conversation from the previous (December 18, 2018) meeting.

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

Brad described a few graphics on the overhead projector and noted that offshore yearling stocking contributed to increased Splake returns. However, new evidence suggests possible interference with Brook Trout and Lake Trout spawning. Trends in Brook Trout and Splake yearlings showed that the numbers of Brook Trout stocked may have been too low to give Brook Trout a chance to establish themselves. In contrast, much higher numbers of Splake were stocked, perhaps advantageous to its success. A good evaluation would be to stock Brook Trout offshore at similar rates to Splake. Dennis Pratt expressed concern that removing Splake could remove a significant angler opportunity, and since Splake are doing well as an established fishery, no need exists to switch from Splake to Brook Trout. Although an experiment could be done, the cost-benefit does not support the switch. Craig questioned whether the implication was that Splake will hamper Lake Trout success, and Brad replied that Splake could reduce Lake Trout spawning success, based on genetic integrity that can negatively influence recruitment. Craig suggested that Splake be left as-is, as he believes the current species balances will allow for world-class Lake Trout in the next few years. Steve asked if Splake stocking hampers coaster Brook Trout, and Brad affirmed the possibility. Craig noted that Brown Trout serve the place of Brook Trout in that Brown Trout provide good fight, are attractive, etc. Although Darryl Fenner recommended that Splake be stocked away from Brook Trout areas, as Splake do not move much, Bill Mattes and Chad Abel noted that Brook Trout move quite a bit.

Jim Vanlandschoot suggested maintaining the current stocking, as sport anglers just want some fish to catch. He also wondered how long a switch would take and how many years of a gap could be expected. Again, anglers just want fish to catch. Susan Hedman commented that it does not make sense to stock Splake. Willie noted that perhaps the management plan can include development of a framework to evaluate alternative stocking scenarios to maintain/sustain native fish. Chad added that today's Brook Trout stocking is far more advanced with a higher-quality product than previous efforts. Dennis recommended development of a brood stock from Red Cliff streams, instead of Isle Royale, which would eliminate genetic "washout." Ken Lundberg expressed concern about crashing Splake by thinking Brook Trout would come back. He added that this topic needs to be logically and iteratively addressed, rather than going all-out.

Goal 3: Enhanced science and monitoring to better understand ecology of Lake Superior fish populations and communities.

Brad Ray initiated the Goal 3 discussion by suggesting that we start this goal during this evening's meeting, then finish during the March meeting. We would subsequently discuss Goal 4 at the April meeting. Willie Fetzer noted the need to develop linkages across salmonid life stages in streams. Dennis Pratt was concerned over Seeforellen stocking and how it might depress existing Brown Trout genetics. Brad noted that UW Stevens Point was analyzing samples from the Sioux River. He added that Seeforellens have not currently been observed migrating in the Sioux. Luke Kavajecz noted that Seeforellens are typically caught ripe in the lake, and they run in December and January. Darryl Fenner asked if this Goal is implying removal of Coho Salmon and going with Brook Trout, and Brad replied that this is not an endpoint that is being considered. Willie turned toward the coolwater fish populations objective and noted the need to characterize the population through size structure, age structure, recruitment dynamics, etc. He noted that some species were previously addressed, and White Perch needs to be included. Comments were made regarding food web interactions in tributaries, embayments, and wetlands...who eats who and who competes with who. A need exists to integrate habitat and environment, recognize multiple life stages, and acknowledge that predators are often prey and prey are often predators; this is documented in a Lake Superior National Estuarine Research Reserve report. Willie typed additional comments on the presentation slides, as viewed by the group.

Willie concluded the meeting by asking the group to be ready to discuss additional research and monitoring needs at the next meeting. Brad added that we are pretty much through the Goal 3, although some additional discussion may be needed at the next meeting. He also noted the likelihood of a meeting in April, perhaps in the 5th through the 10th timeframe.

The next meeting is **scheduled for Monday, March 5, 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