



Lake Michigan Lake Trout Commercial Harvest Stakeholder Group Charter

Background:

Commercial fishing for lake trout in Wisconsin Waters of Lake Michigan dates to at least the late 1880's. Commercial fishers enjoyed a stable lake trout fishery from 1915 – 1945, after 1945 there was a substantial decline in harvest and commercial fishing in Wisconsin Waters of Lake Michigan. Since 1963 there has been a minimal tribal commercial fishery in Lake Michigan but not in Wisconsin waters.

Sport fishing for lake trout remains an important component of the salmon and trout fishery of Lake Michigan. Between 1995 and 2016 the sport fish regulation for lake trout was two fish per day and a season of March 1 to October 31. Since 2017 to present the sport fish regulation is five per day with no closed season. The average annual harvest between 1969 – 2021 was 49,227 lake trout. The current Lake Michigan lake trout safe harvest estimate for Wisconsin (82,000 lake trout) was developed over thirty years ago. An updated lake trout forecasting model is in the final stages of development and will allow fisheries managers to better understand the impacts of various management actions.

The Lake Trout population collapse has been attributed to a combination of factors with the invasion of the non-native parasitic predator sea lamprey being the leading cause. Huge efforts across the United States and Canada have been undertaken since the early 1960's to rehabilitate lake trout in Lake Michigan. Lake trout rehabilitation in Lake Michigan is primarily achieved through cooperation and collaboration of numerous governmental, tribal, and academic entities organized through [A Joint Strategic Plan for Management of Great Lakes Fisheries](#) which is a non-binding agreement through which fishery agencies commit to cooperation, consensus, strategic planning, and ecosystem-based management. Wisconsin is a signatory to the Joint Strategic Plan and actively participates in multi-jurisdictional collaboratives to protect and enhance Lake Michigan resources. Cooperation and collaboration among all the Great Lakes states and Canadian provinces to implement the Strategic Plan is facilitated by the Great Lakes Fishery Commission. Rehabilitation efforts are ongoing and the goal of a self-sustaining population in Lake Michigan has remained elusive. Several of the key metrics for assessing the rehabilitation efforts are trending in a positive direction.

There are two main activities actively being implemented in Lake Michigan for lake trout rehabilitation efforts, these are sea lamprey control and lake trout stocking programs. Currently, Lake Michigan is stocked with 2.25 million lake trout annually across the entire lake including all bordering states and provinces. In 2022, 45,000 lake trout were stocked in Wisconsin waters. Prior to 2016 over 300,000 lake trout were stocked annually into Wisconsin Waters of Lake Michigan. The decrease in lake trout stocking in Wisconsin waters began in 2016 to accommodate an increase in stocking of chinook, coho and steelhead. These stocking level changes were derived from a series of stakeholder input meetings during 2016-2017 to seek to meet/address sport fisher interests.

The Department received a formal request from the Lake Michigan Commercial Fishing Board on September 30, 2022, to pursue a scope statement to engage in the rule making process to establish a commercial fishery for lake trout in Wisconsin waters of Lake Michigan.

Group Charge:

- Review current and historical Lake Trout Population levels
- Provide different viewpoints and perspectives
- Actively engage with Department staff, invited speakers, and other work group members to discuss information and review the potential creation of a commercial lake trout fishery in Lake Michigan.
- Provide input which the department leadership will consider in development of recommendations and final decisions on pursuing a scope statement for commercial harvest of lake trout.

Roles and Responsibilities

- All members are expected to actively participate in the group by attending all work group meetings, be prepared for meetings, participate in discussions, gather feedback.
- All members of the Group are expected to disseminate information to their respective organization/affiliate members to gather their input to inform and contribute to work group discussions.
- Members will serve throughout the process; however, members can change if the organization requests a change in representation

Members

Will consist of organizations and individuals that represent the breadth of interest in this topic. Specific member names will be sought through a request to the identified organizations for representation. Membership should be no larger than 15-20 people.

- Lake Michigan Commercial Fishing Board members
 - Charlie Henriksen
 - Dennis Hickey (GLFC Advisor)
 - Todd Stuth
- Lake Michigan Wholesale Fish Dealer
 - Jamie LeClair
- Restaurant that sells Lake Michigan commercially harvested fish
 - Mike Holmes (Wickman House, Ellison Bay)
- Fishing for hire (sport trollers and guides)
 - WI Lakeshore Business Association
 - Lee Haasch (GLFC Advisor)
- General angler
 - WI Federation of Great Lakes Sport Fishing Clubs
 - Algoma-Kewaunee GLSF
 - Kenosha Sportfishing and Conservation Association
 - Sheboygan GLSF
- Wisconsin Economic Development
 - Representation for all shoreline communities along Lake Michigan
- WI Conservation Congress

- TBD (someone from the Great Lakes Committee)
- WI Sea Grant
 - Titus Seilheimer (GLFC Advisor)
 - Sharon Fegley Moen

Group Facilitation:

TBD

Group Support /Consultants / Resource Advisors:

- WDNR
- Note taker
- USFWS
- Quantitative Fisheries Center (MSU)
- Others as needed

Deliverables:

- The Group serves to provide input which the department leadership will consider in development of recommendations and final decisions on pursuing a scope statement for commercial harvest of lake trout in Lake Michigan.

Meeting Schedule and Timeline:

- The Department expects the Group to meet at least 4 times between February 2023 and May 2023
- All meetings will be publicly noticed and open to the public. Public comment will be received during defined meeting times and through written comment that can be submitted to: dnrlakemichiganplan@wisconsin.gov or mailed in to: Brad Eggold 600 East Greenfield Avenue, Milwaukee, WI 53204-2944