WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

LAKE SUPERIOR CHARTER FISHING REPORT 2025

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METHODS

In the 2025 fishing season, 32 active licensed charter captains operated in the Wisconsin waters of Lake Superior. We collected effort and harvest information for guided charters from mandatory monthly reports, which were initiated in 1973. Information on the number of anglers, hours fished, location (grid) and number of various species harvested was reported in an online reporting system. Charter reports from October and November were not used in this report due to the standard closure of the lake trout sport fishing season during this period. We separated charter data by management unit for this report: WI-1 or the Western Arm region (west of the line running north-south from Bark Point; 46 deg. 53.21 min. N, 91 deg. 11.16 min. W) and WI-2 or the Apostle Islands region (east of the Bark Point line; Figure 1).

Please note that the charter fishing data alone may not fully illustrate the status of the entire recreational fishery each year. Please refer to the Lake Superior Creel Report 2025 for more detailed numbers for harvest estimates from the total recreational fishery. All analyses were conducted in Program R, and the report was formatted using RMarkdown.

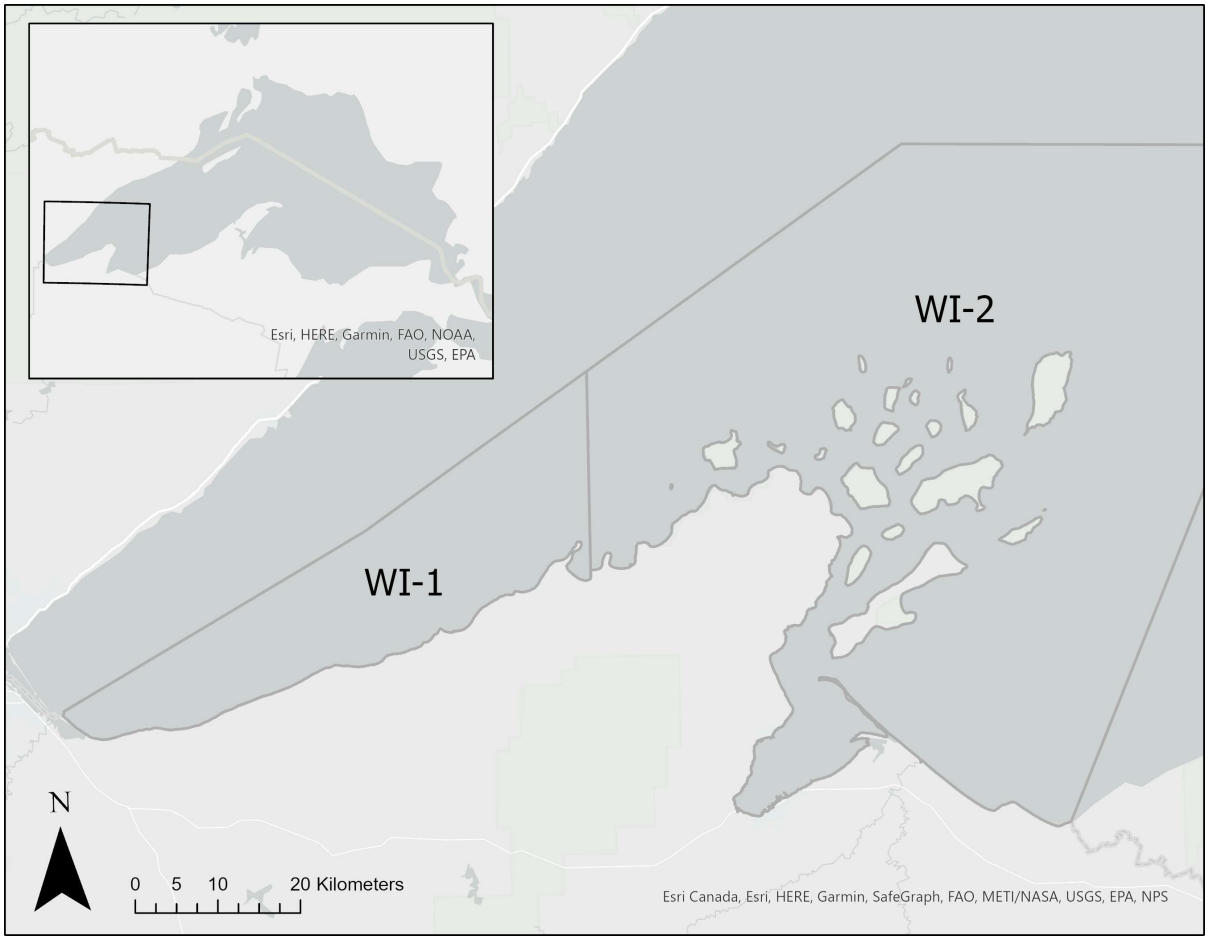

Figure 1. Wisconsin waters of Lake Superior and management units WI-1 and WI-2.

Results

WI-1

Overall, the 2025 charter fishing season in WI-1 was characterized by very low participation and effort, a low lake trout harvest rate and the lowest lake trout harvest in over 30 years.

We observed a total charter fishery effort of 962 angler-hours in management unit WI-1 in 2025, which is well below the long-term average since 1991 (Figure 2). This effort yielded a total of 291 harvested fish, including 144 lake trout, 15 Chinook salmon, 74 coho salmon, 50 walleye, 2 brown trout and 2 rainbow trout (Figure 3). Overall harvest was well below average since 1991 (Figure 3 and 4). Lake trout harvest was was the lowest in this time series since 1991 (Figures 3 and 4). The lake trout harvest rate in the 2025 charter fishing season was 0.1497 fish per angler-hour, which was the lowest rate since 1997 (Figure 5). Lastly, the lake trout harvest in WI-1 was below average in all months (Figure 6), and the lake trout harvest rate was lower than average in all months except for September in 2025 (Figure 7).

WI-2

Overall, the 2025 charter fishing season in WI-2 was characterized by very high participation and effort, overall high harvest totals and a low lake trout harvest rate.

We observed a total charter fishery effort of 12,012 angler-hours in management unit WI-2 in 2025, the second-highest annual effort in the past 30 years (Figure 2). Charter effort in WI-2 increased each year from 2017-2024 but decreased slightly in 2025. This effort yielded a total of 3,889 fish including 2,205 lake trout, 1,114 coho salmon, 458 brown trout, 57 splake, 32 Chinook salmon and 2 rainbow trout (Figure 3). The overall harvest was the second-highest on record going back to 1991, and both the coho salmon and brown trout harvest were well above average (Figures 3 and 4). However, lake trout harvest in 2025 was near average (Figure 3 and 4). The lake trout harvest rate in the 2025 charter fishing season was 0.1836 fish per angler-hour, which was well below average and the lowest observed since 1995 (not including 2015 when the bag limit was one lake trout; Figure 5). The lake trout charter harvest was near or above average in all months except for September in WI-2 in 2025 (Figure 6). However, the lake trout harvest rate in the 2025 charter fishery was below average in all months (Figure 7).

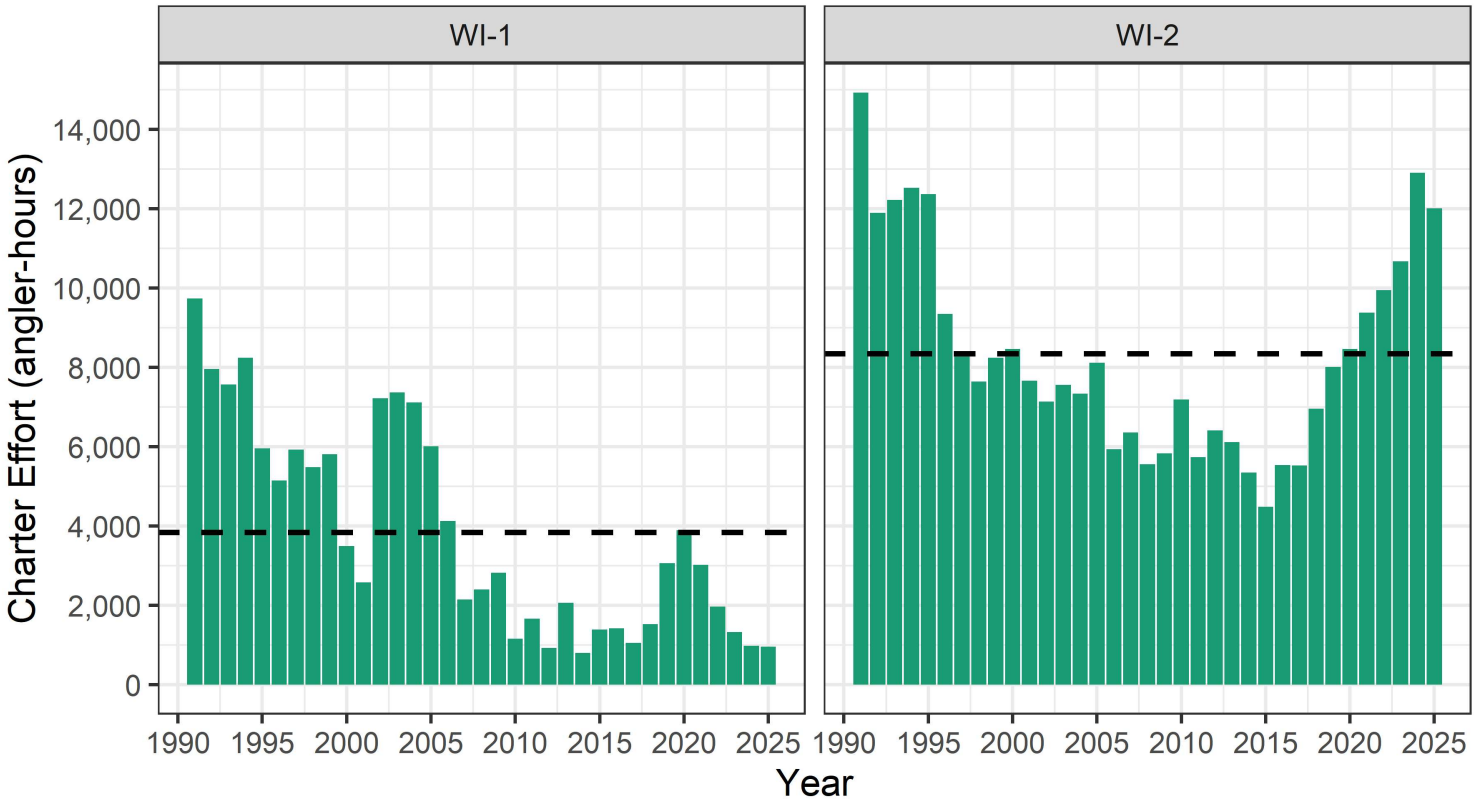

Figure 2. Charter angler effort (angler hours) annually from 1991 to 2025 in management unit WI-1 (left) and WI-2 (right). Dashed lines represent mean annual effort for each management unit throughout the time series.

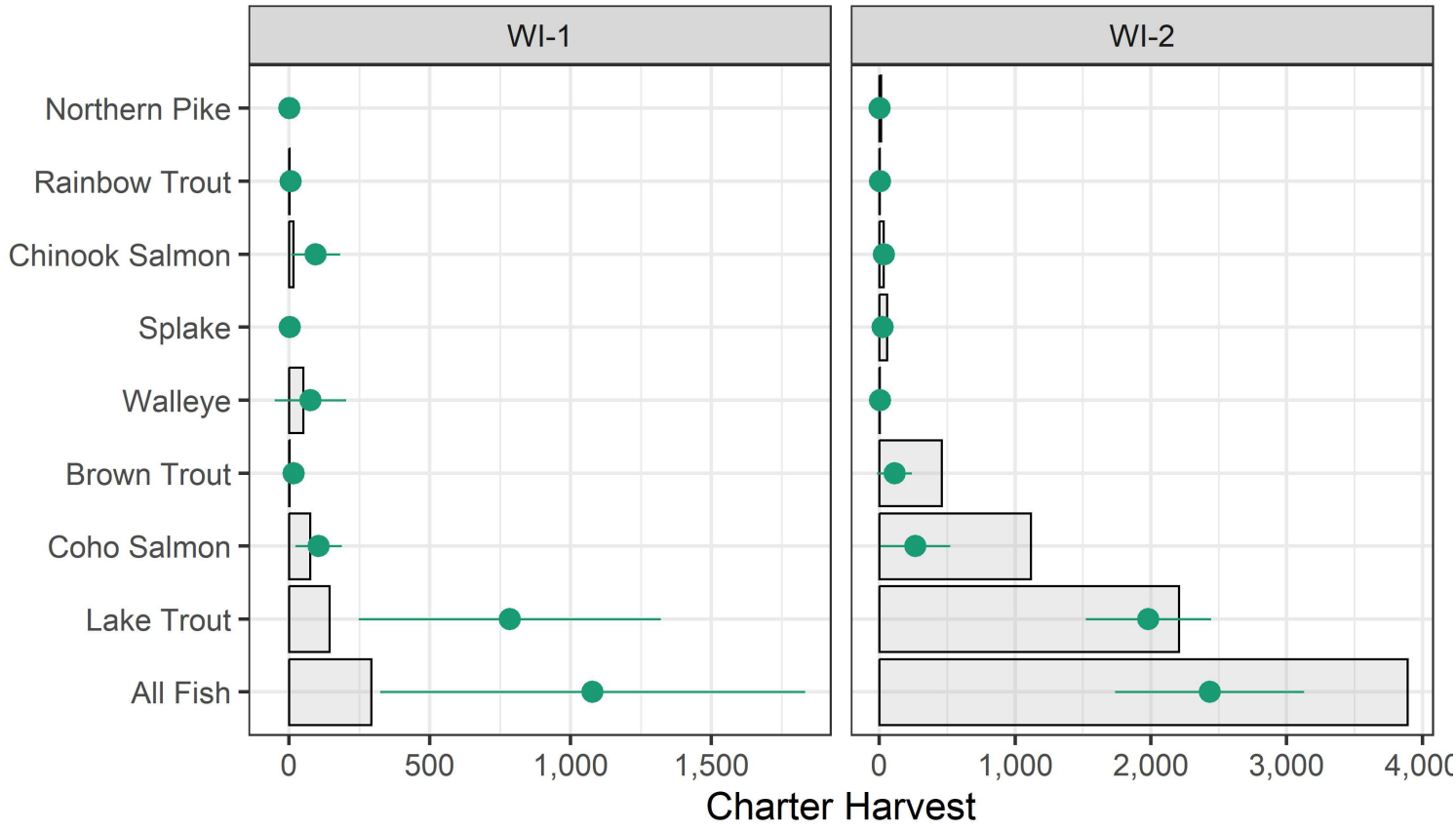

Figure 3. Charter harvest by species during the 2025 charter fishing season by management unit (WI-1 and WI-2). Green points and lines represent the annual mean since 1991 (+/- one standard deviation) and grey bars represent harvest from 2025.

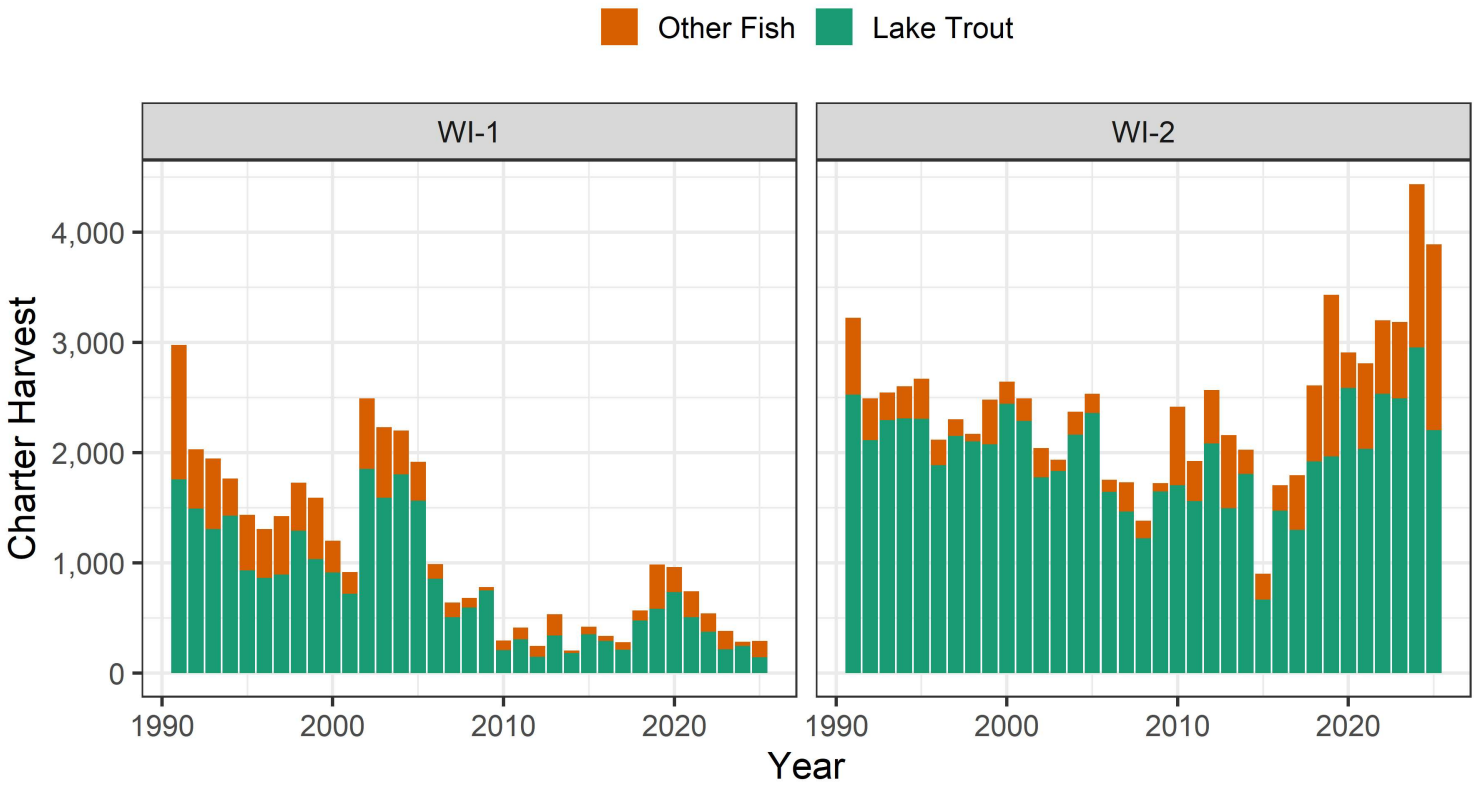

Figure 4. Annual harvest of lake trout (green) and all other fish (orange) in WI-1 (left) and WI-2 (right) during the charter fishing season from 1991 to 2025.

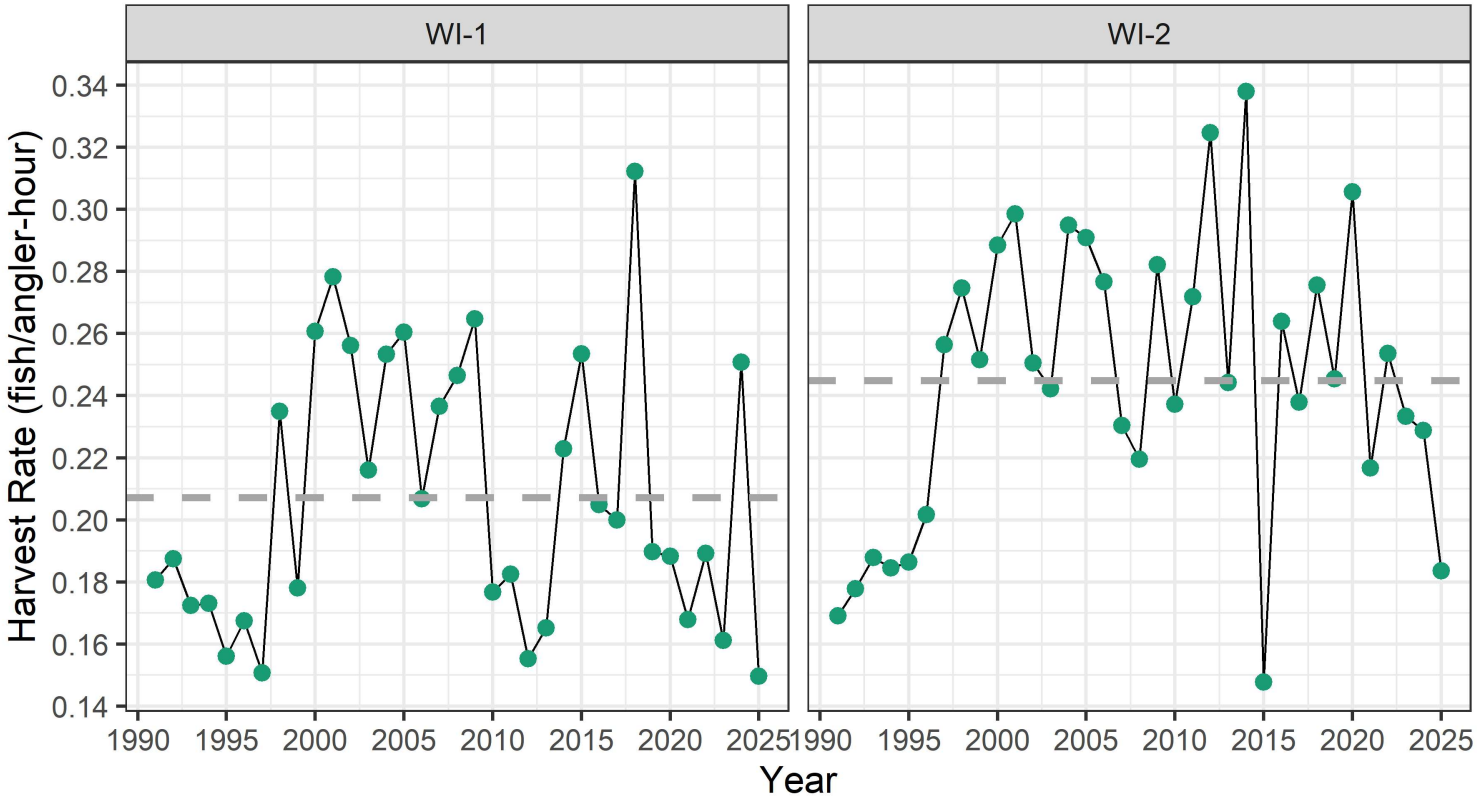

Figure 5. Annual harvest rate (fish/angler hour) of lake trout in WI-1 (left) and WI-2 (right) during the charter fishing season from 1991 to 2025. Horizontal dashed lines represent mean annual harvest rate for each management unit throughout the time series.

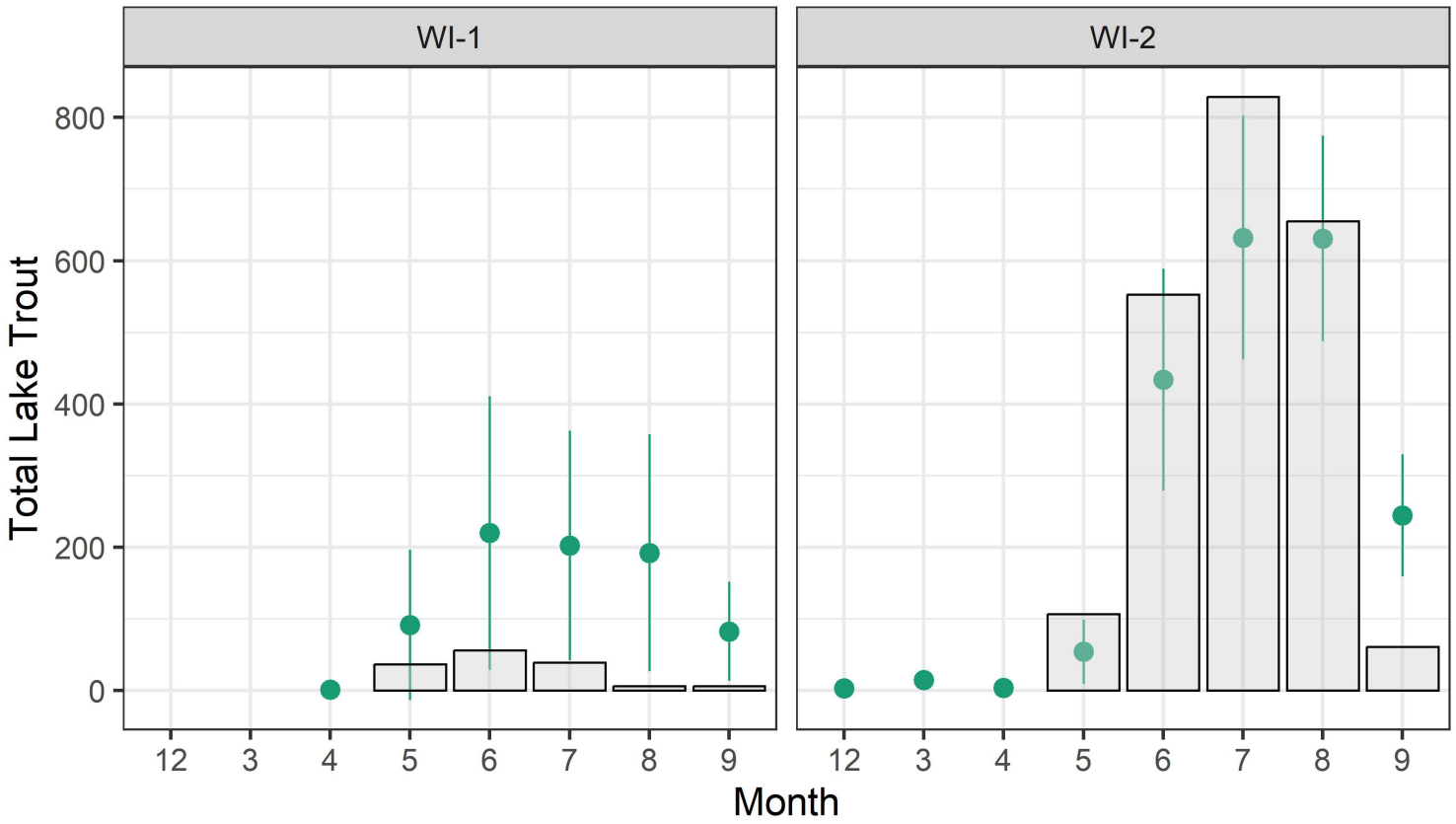

Figure 6. Lake trout harvest by month during the 2025 charter fishing season in management unit WI-1 (left) and WI-2 (right). Green points and lines represent the mean (+/- one standard deviation) lake trout harvest by month since 1991.

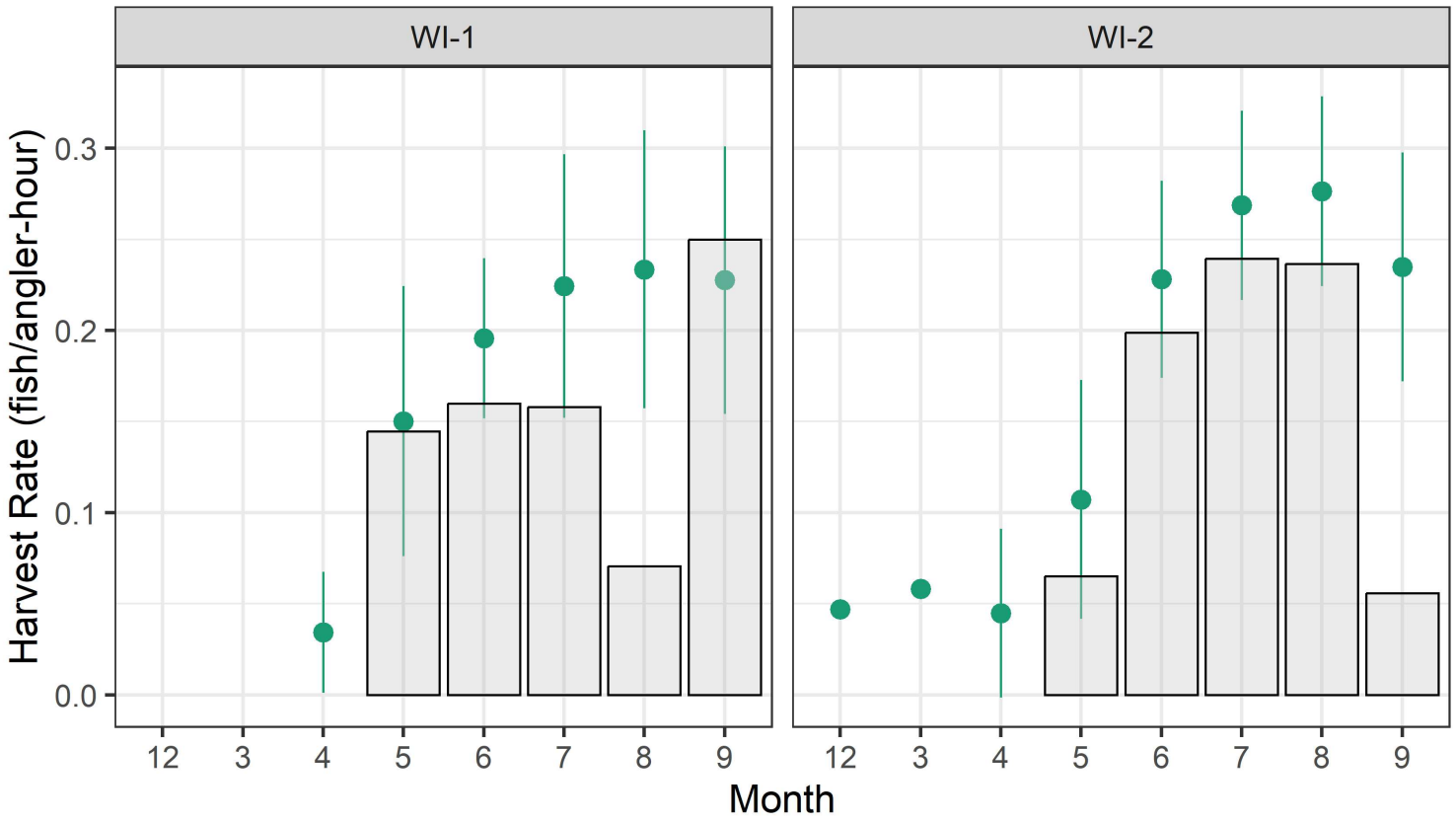

Figure 7. Lake trout harvest rate (fish per angler hour) by month during the 2025 charter fishing season in management unit WI-1 (left) and WI-2 (right). Green points and lines represent the mean (+/- one standard deviation) lake trout harvest rate by month since 1991.