

Lake Trout Commercial Harvest Stakeholder Group Meeting #3
April 18, 2023

Agenda

- 6:00 pm Welcome, Roll call of Lake Trout Stakeholder Group
- 6:05 Brief summary from March 20 meeting – Lake trout Mass Marking – Brad Eggold - DNR
- 6:15 Lake trout Population Models – Laura Schmidt – DNR
- 6:35 Lake Trout spawner-recruit model – Rick Clark – Quantitative Fisheries Center – Michigan State University
- 7:00 Lake Trout Total Allowable Catch – Laura Schmidt - DNR
- 7:10 Break (if needed)
- 7:15 Questions / Comments
- 7:55 Wrap up and next meeting

In person stakeholder group members

Bob Wincek
Jamie LeClair
Dale Maas
Dennis Hickey
Jerry Fetterer
Lee Haasch
Todd Stuth
Arnie Arredondo
Charlie Henriksen

Online stakeholder group members

Titus Seilheimer
Sharon Moen

Additional Zoom Participants

Albert Washko
Andre Jacque
Angelo Trentadue
Bill Luer
Bill Smith
Brian Haydin
Bryce O'Connor
Charles Bronte
Chuck Elliot
Dan Pawlitzke
Dan Welsch
Daniel Krivenko
Ed Blissick-GLSI
Eugene Altwies
Frank Grider Jr
Fritz Peterson
Gregg Peters
Jay Wesley
Jeremy Maslowski

John Janssen
Jon Hemb
Jory Jonas
Kyle Deavers
Mark Sandahl
Matthew Kornis
Richard Jones
Richard Mathews
Rick Clark
Robert Elliott
Roger Vander Logt
Steve Grose
Steven Roach
Susan Wells
Tom Burzynski
Tom Couston
Troy Mattson
Jerry Fetterer (also attending in person?)
920-559-3xxx

Meetings 1 & 2 recap – recordings online

<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Fishing/lakemichigan/LakeMichiganLakeTroutManagement>

Laura Schmidt and Rick Clark presentations

Questions/Comments

Dale Maas – How old is a 7.9-pound lake trout? What size lake trout would be kept by commercial fishers? Are you looking to sell lake trout before they are mature and reproducing?

- Laura – There is a lot of length-at-age overlap with lake trout. A 7-pound lake trout could be up to 15 years old, but some are younger.
- Charlie – Our gill nets catch whitefish from 2 pounds to 7-8 pounds. The intent is to harvest what we catch and not waste the lake trout. The lake trout would be caught incidentally in our whitefish fishery.

Dennis Hickey – Would we start with a 17-inch size limit on the lake trout? The size limit for the Tribal fishery in Michigan is 17 inches.

- Charlie Henriksen – I've never heard this discussed for lake trout, but 17 inches is our whitefish size limit.

Charlie Henriksen – I'm blown away that we've lost 34,000 harvestable fish. The DNR has used the 82,000 number in recent years when discussing increasing the sport bag limit for lake trout. We were told this number would be over 100,000 fish as recently as a year or two ago.

- Arnie Arredondo – This number wasn't addressed when the lake trout rules sunset.
- Laura Schmidt – In 2018 Rick Clark, Mark Ebner, and Jim Bence started developing the new lake trout population models. The models went through several years of development and a review process; we have just now been able to update those models and use them to develop the new Total Allowable Catch (TAC). As a reminder, in the 1980s we were stocking far more lake trout than we are now.

Charlie Henriksen – Who developed the model that came up with the TAC?

- Laura Schmidt – This is the same calculation spreadsheet that Steve Lenart in the State of Michigan uses for Treaty waters. It was modified for WI345.

Dan Pawlitzke via Zoom chat - If alewife increase what affect does it have on salmon? If Lake Michigan waters increase [water levels], like several years ago, would it be reasonable to assume biomass also increases for Alewife? We are managing the lake for alewife – as the population changes, it impacts the fishery. Some species benefit with higher alewife populations, but other species don't.

- Rick Clark – There are factors that are not in our control when it comes to managing the numbers of alewives. We can adjust the number of predators we are stocking, but there are other interactions that are hard to predict and manage.

Bob Wincek – The USGS forage study done by Chuck Madenjian and Dave Warner has been done for over 25-30 years. For the last 20 years the forage base has been mostly status quo with no big increases. There have been some ups and downs, but overall the forage level remains low.

Charlie Henriksen – Rick Clark and Mark Ebner presented to the Lake Michigan Commercial Fishing Board about a year ago. Then you predicted at 30% mortality in 2023 with the alewife biomass at 100 metric tons, the commercial harvest could be 22,000 fish. At an alewife biomass of 150 metric tons, it showed a harvest of 20,960 fish. What has changed since you presented the last time?

- Rick Clark – We were using an earlier version of this model. What I was presenting today was more conservative so that we would maintain self-sustaining natural reproduction. The lake trout stocking number under the scenario presented to the LMCFB a year ago was higher than what is actually being stocked in the southern part of the lake. Laura’s TAC calculation is different in that it uses spawning stock biomass per recruit vs this model trying to predict self-sustaining natural reproduction.

Lee Haasch – Are commercials looking for a number or for incidental catch? If you subtract the average sport harvest from the TAC, we are still looking at approximately 20,000 fish. I’d rather see commercially caught fish that will not survive upon release brought to market instead of wasted.

- Charlie Henriksen – Until we actually fish and produce data, we don’t know how many fish we are going to catch. When we said 40,000, we were hoping for 20,000. Now we are looking at a max of 20,000 and no one is going to let us push that number right to the edge.

Bob Wincek – Originally a quota was asked for to harvest lake trout commercially, but now you are only talking about harvesting bycatch. We need to know exactly what is being considered to have the scope statement conversation. Is it a lake trout quota, or is it bycatch?

- Todd Stuth – Brad can confirm, but we were told that if there is any type of lake trout harvest it would never be called an incidental harvest, rather it would have to be called a quota fishery.
- Brad Eggold – Whether it is a targeted or bycatch fishery, we still need to have tag the lake trout and have a certain number of fish.
- Isaac Hackett – There currently is no commercial fishery where you could tag and keep something that is caught incidentally.
- Dan Pawlitzke via Zoom chat – Rough fish can be taken from the waters, like invasive fish.
- Brad Eggold – They need a rough fish contract.
- Charlie Henriksen – Lake trout are generally talked about by numbers, not in pounds. Our electronic reporting system would allow us to report the number of lake trout we catch/keep before we get to shore.

Matthew Kornis via Zoom chat - Rick - nice talk. The model is sensitive to alewife and mortality. Could you please speak to the uncertainty around our alewife biomass estimates?

- Rick Clark – The alewife biomass estimates have uncertainty, but we do our best to estimate the amount of uncertainty and can show managers error bars or confidence limits so they are aware of the amount of uncertainty. There are ways to measure the uncertainty, and we are trying to do that.

Gregg Peters via Zoom chat - Why would alewife abundance not be included in the model used for creating a Lake Trout TAC? Seems like it is pretty well understood the alewife abundance has an impact on successful spawning and recruitment.

- Laura Schmidt – To clarify, the TAC isn’t really a model, but rather a projection calculation spreadsheet based on inputs from the model. Rick’s spawner recruitment model does different things in that it projects further out. There is no line in the TAC that says alewife abundance, but it is accounted for in the population models through the natural mortality rate.

- Rick Clark – Alewife abundance is being accounted for in the TAC calculation in that 30% total mortality is being used instead of 40%. The 30% number still allows for potentially reaching self-sustainability. If you increase mortality and harvest more fish now, it will delay the goal of getting self-sustaining reproduction of lake trout.

Ed Blissick-GLSI via Zoom chat - If the models indicate there is a larger available TAC for lake trout, why wouldn't you liberalize sport harvest regs to take more lake trout and in conjunction drive a more significant economic benefit to WI and its small business/port communities than commercial fisheries do?

Dan Welsch via Zoom chat - Are the dnr charter captain reports down on lake trout harvest north of Milwaukee? We catch way less lake trout than in the 90s. I understand south end has lake trout but 2/3 of the lake sure seem down on lake trout population since the late 90s...

- Laura Schmidt – Generally less lake trout are caught north of Milwaukee.
- Brad Eggold – The link to creel/charter/moored boat sport fishing harvest is found online – https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/sites/default/files/topic/Fishing/LM_CreelHarvestTables1994-2021ver2.pdf.pdf

Titus Seilheimer via Zoom chat – Burbot are a native species.

Tom Couston via Zoom chat – I was under the impression that the commercial stakeholders just want to keep/sell the lakery that are netted fishing for whitefish. The problem is determining that number of lakery?

- Yes
- John Hemb via Zoom chat - no this is about a total separate harvest for LT specifically

Fritz Peterson via Zoom chat - I think any Commercial catch should be put off a few years in view of the uncertainty of the models. Once you give the Commercial People a quota they will want to keep it with both hands.

John Hemb via Zoom chat - FOR TITUS:::::::::: you said burbot are native species...does that mean that the commercial guys can not keep them as a "rough fish"

- Titus Seilheimer - Just clarifying that "Rough fish" are not invasive species. Rough fish can be kept with a rough fish permit. I don't have a list of what those species would be but carp, suckers, burbot, etc. Not commercial species and not a sport species.

Ed Blissick – GLSI via Zoom chat – It is not a rhetorical question, if you have a greater lake trout TAC, why not allow sport anglers the opportunity to catch more lake trout? It is a fact sport fisheries bring a far greater economic impact to port communities than commercial fisheries do.

Tom Burzynski via Zoom chat – What are the other two TAC estimates, if the one shown was considered the most conservative?

- The maximum mortality target of 30% is the least conservative of the TAC options, not the most. If we used SPR or SSBR, there would be fewer fish in the TAC.

Dean Gordon – Draft legislation has been done, which says the minimum size limit of harvestable lake trout will be 17 inches. There was a total abundance of 4.2 million pounds in 1986 when the 82,000 safe harvest number was derived, yet now the abundance is 1.2 million, which is 25% of what it was, so the TAC of 48,000 seems like it is twice as high as it should be. The TAC of 48,000 pounds is a reasonable number, maybe on the high side. If commercial fishers are already catching these fish, why haven't they recorded this data on their current commercial reports? If the majority of the harvest is coming from WM3 because this is where the commercial fishing occurs, why aren't we doing a TAC for 3?

- Jamie LeClair – Sport and commercials have argued for decades. What about the fish consumer who can't afford fishing equipment or hiring a charter? They can't have trout? That seems unfair. We are already catching the fish incidentally, so why not put them to good use?
- Dean Gordon – What about those who can't afford 40 acres of land and a rifle to hunt deer? Or those who can't afford to hunt turkeys? Should we be selling them in a butcher shop? We should be doing a commercial fishing study right now to get the incidental catch data.

Scott Gutschow – 2004-2021 shows Door Co. catches an average of 200-250 lake trout annually; Kenosha is 5,000, Milwaukee is 2,000, and Sheboygan is 4,000. You can't lump Kenosha and the higher harvest to the south with Door County. It is frustrating to find out that legislation has already been drafted to do this through state statute rather than in this room. Charlie said they don't know how many lake trout they will catch until they start fishing for them – that seems like a lake trout fishery, not incidental bycatch. The majority of commercial fishing for whitefish comes from Green Bay, and we didn't even use Green Bay in the TAC.

Greta Gutschow – 4th generation of charter fishers on the Great Lakes; I'm one of the youngest female charter captains on the lake. We fished the Sheboygan Ladies' Salmon Cup tournament last year and didn't catch any salmon; our cooler was full of beautiful lake trout. We changed techniques to target lake trout because kings weren't present in numbers. We adapted and changed the way we fished. The lake trout are essential for the charter fishing industry and the balance of the lake. The Death and the Life of the Great Lakes written by Dan Egan describes the challenges of the lakes throughout history. We have spent millions of dollars trying to restore the lake trout population that was nearly diminished by overfishing, sea lampreys, and a thiamine deficiency caused by the consumption of alewives. In the 1890s the annual harvest of lake trout was more than 8 million pounds, and it was in the millions of pounds for decades until they vanished. Complete collapse of the lake trout population was predicted by 1949. Since the 1960s the stocking program was the only thing keeping the lake trout population alive. The lake trout are now naturally reproducing, but that doesn't mean they are at a level where we should consider a commercial fishery. Lake Superior is the only lake where lake trout are considered recovered. This past season has shown the importance of lake trout to the charter industry and to the stability and fortitude of the Great Lakes.

Ed Blissick-GLSI via Zoom chat – Why can't you answer my question?

Ed Blissick-GLSI via Zoom chat - If the models indicate there is a larger available TAC for lake trout, why wouldn't you liberalize sport harvest regs to take more lake trout and in conjunction drive a more significant economic benefit to WI and its small business/port communities than commercial fisheries do?

Richard Mathews via Zoom chat - They dodged this question, which should give you every answer you need. They'll ignore the approximate 160k WI trout and salmon stamp holders to appease a handful of lobbyists. My question is who's pockets are getting lined?

- We didn't dodge the question, but we don't have someone here to speak to this today.

Angelo Trentadue via Zoom chat - How many active commercial fisherman are we talking about for this fishery.

- Charlie Henriksen - There are 48 license holders and 10 businesses that might fish lake trout.

Tom Couston via Zoom chat - I was under the impression that the commercial stakeholders just want to keep/sell the lakers that are netted fishing for whitefish. The problem is determining that number of lakers?

Jon Hemb via Zoom chat - no this is about a total separate harvest for LT specifically

Richard Mathews via Zoom chat - My question is simple - who's pockets are getting lined to even consider this? It's pretty obvious the bulk of sport fishermen (approximately 160k+ in Wisconsin alone) are against this.

Jon Hemb via Zoom chat - Thank you Greta for sharing the historical picture! Say no to commercial harvest of Lake Trout!!

Dale Maas – Charlie, do you want a targeted fishery or incidental bycatch?

- Charlie Henriksen – There is incidental catch, but we would like a set number that we are allowed to harvest. There would probably be more gill net effort for whitefish in Door County and more effort in Zone 3 for chubs if there was ability to harvest trout that are ripping up our nets along with whitefish. We don't envision or support the idea that we would go out there strictly to catch lake trout. To Dean's comments about reporting bycatch of lake trout, there is a longstanding concern from some commercials that our gill net data will be used against them.

Charlie Henriksen – Nice job to Greta on her comments. Don't forget that the lake trout collapsed also because the St. Lawrence Seaway was opened and lampreys came into the system.

Dale Maas – What is the number of lake trout the commercials requested?

- Charlie Henriksen – based on the info we had when we made our request, we asked for 40,000 lake trout.

Charlie Henriksen – A bill was introduced today. I'm going to Madison for Door/Kewaunee Legislative Days and will be meeting with a couple of legislators. Some people in the commercial fishery feel disenfranchised with the DNR process taking too long and talked to these legislators who agreed to write a bill. They said they hope this galvanized the DNR to write a scope statement. It seems to be a popularity contest with the DNR.

Jerry Fetterer – Half of the TAC is roughly 24,000 fish if splitting 50/50 between sport and commercial. If there is a quota given to the commercials that is half of the TAC, what happens to the season for everyone? Does it close? I don't understand what the commercials are asking for – can we get clarification for the next meeting? What is the blueprint for the potential scope statement and what the fishery would look like? One meeting it was said that fishing practices won't change, just keeping incidentals from trap nets, but at this meeting gill nets were discussed.

- Justine Hasz – There is no rule in place now, so that question is answered as part of the scope statement process. The May meeting will discuss the scope statement process.
- In these meetings we have been trying to provide you with background information. The lake trout stakeholder group charter document also helps provide clarification. We want to get your input through these meetings.

Tom Couston via Zoom chat - I think its time to lessen the confusion

Richard Mathews via Zoom chat - Claiming lampreys were the main culprit is a scapegoat. Could you please explain how the tribal zones in Michigan are in the worst shape in regards to recruitment while almost all other zones are in better shape? Is that lampreys too?

Angelo Trentadue via Zoom chat - How much does it cost for the DNR to put on these 4 meetings. Also the commercial fisherman are asking for 2 scope statements and it was reported that it takes 100 man hours per scope statement. Where is all this money coming from. We do not have enough money to manage all the sport programs. All of these expenses should be paid from these commercial fisherman.

Scott Gutschow – Why isn't there a Door County charter captain as a stakeholder? The majority of commercial fishing would take place in Door County. The draft of the legislation talked about today already spells out many parameters of the fishery.

- There are charter captains from multiple locations on the stakeholder group.
- Charlie Henriksen – Are you looking for input from other people? If Scott doesn't feel represented, can he submit a letter? The draft legislation was written a year ago as a result of the DNR process taking too long. This process looks like a stall tactic. This group contributes to the discussion, but we are just providing input and making a recommendation to the DNR about whether or not to write a scope statement that they may or may not use. This process does not move the ball on a commercial harvest of lake trout.

Wrap Up - Next meeting is Tuesday, May 16.

Tuesday, May 16, 2023 – Working Group Discussion and Input

- A. Present on additional data / information as identified from meetings 1-3
 - Scope statement purpose and clarification
 - Consumption advisories
 - Maps of current commercial fishing areas / restrictions / seasons
 - Public comment process
 - Cost to manage this new commercial lake trout fishery
- B. Work group members should convey opinions from their respective groups
- C. Work group members should discuss opinions on the optimal future state for the lake trout fishery
- D. Work group members should discuss benefits and challenges of pursuing a scope statement
- E. Work group members should develop input pursue or not pursue a Scope

Justine Hasz – We are discussing how to best receive feedback from everyone. We have two handouts tonight – one related to the scope statement process and one related to the administrative rule process for regulation changes. Both documents will be found on the lake trout stakeholder group web page.