

Lake Trout Commercial Harvest Stakeholder Group Meeting #2
March 20, 2023

Agenda


- 6:00 pm Welcome, Roll call of Lake Trout Stakeholder Group
- 6:05 Brief summary from February 21 meeting – Lake trout population status and metrics – Brad Eggold
- 6:20 Lake trout Mass Marking – Matt Kornis - USWFS
- 7:00 Break (if needed)
- 7:10 Questions / Comments
- 7:55 Wrap up and next meeting
- 8:00 Adjourn

Stakeholder group members

Titus Seilheimer
Dan Pawlitzke via Zoom for Charlie Henriksen
Todd Stuth via Zoom
Lee Haasch – not present
Jamie LeClair
Jerry Fetterer
Bob Wincek
Dale Maas
Sharon Moen via Zoom
Jason Woda for Arnie Arredondo
Dennis Hickey
John Anderson
Michelle Lawrie via Zoom

Additional Zoom Participants

Henry Anderson

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|--|------------------|--|-------------------|
|  AW | Albert Washko |  JH | Justine Hasz |
|  AB | Allen Blizel |  ME | Mark Ebener |
|  AT | Angelo Trentadue |  MP | Meredith Penthorn |
|  BS | Bill Smith |  ML | Michelle Lawrie |
|  BW | Brandon Wambach |  NL | Nick Legler |
|  DP | Dan Pawlitzke |  SM | Sharon Moen |
|  EM | Edward Michael |  SH | Steve Hogler |
|  EM | Edward Michael |  TR | Tami Ryan |
|  JM | Jason M |  TS | Todd Stuth |
|  JV | Jay Virlee |  TB | Tom Burzynski |
|  JD | Jerome Donohoe |  TC | Tom Couston |
|  JJ | Jory Jonas |  TM | Troy Mattson |

Meeting 1 recap – full recording online. Implementation strategy for lake trout rehabilitation, summary of metrics, sport harvest data.

Matt Kornis presentation

Bob Wincek – Regarding diet data, how much of it is from MI waters vs WI waters?

- About 50/50 split. There are some regional diet patterns – i.e., more goby in trout diets in MI; more alewife in WI.

Dale Maas – Is there a difference in lake trout maturity in hatchery vs wild? Are the fish leaving offshore sites because of maturity, or are they chasing food?

- Generally, hatchery and wild lake trout mature about the same time, however, there is a difference in maturing depending on where they live. Offshore fish tend to be slower growing and mature later, roughly 7-8 years old; nearshore fish, especially in northern Lake Michigan, can mature faster, as young as 5 or 6 years.
- Leaving the Northern Refuge and Julian's Reef seems to be more related to age/maturity. For the younger lake trout there is less of a spring/summer/fall movement difference.

Dennis Hickey – What is the average number of fish in each assessment?

- Regarding mass marking data: from the sport fishery in southern Lake Michigan we average 50-200 fish per management unit; data from Milwaukee/Racine is roughly 400-500. From Northern Lake Michigan, we look at districts where we see at least 20 fish, typically 40-400 fish in 2-3 of the 5 northern districts.
- WDNR assessments in spring on the Southern Refuge average 800-1,000 lake trout in 4 days. For fall assessments nearshore Milwaukee we handle about 200-300 lake trout, and fall offshore about 500-800.

Sharon Moen – What is the competition for spawning sites and food with salmon, and for wild vs stocked.

- For spawning sites there is very little competition between lake trout and other salmonids. Lake trout are offshore while other salmonids are in tributaries.
- Lake trout diets are more diverse. Lake trout eat larger alewife, and other salmonids tend to eat smaller alewife. There is likely some competition, but there is some difference in the size of what they consume.

Back in the 1990s, there was no sign of natural reproduction on Horseshoe Reef in Green Bay. Where are the lake trout spawning from Cleveland north through Door County? Should there be refuge areas in the north?

- Much of the lake trout reproduction is occurring in the south – i.e., Julian's Reef, Waukegan, Southern Refuge. There could be wild migrants moving north. There are multiple factors that affect recruitment like alewife impacts. There is some recruitment in the north, but we don't have as many older, mature fish in the north that would support natural reproduction.
- Using astroturf egg mats, a spawning population was re-established in Lake Superior on Devils Island Shoal. The number of eggs used varied from 250,000 to 1.5 million, and an evaluation

showed the most wild recruits in Lake Superior came from the sweet spot of 500,000 eggs. The Lake Michigan egg mats were deployed before the Lake Superior study was published, and in Lake Michigan 6 million eggs were used, which wasn't successful.

Regarding the diet analysis, who is eating bloater chubs?

- We don't see a lot of bloater in diets overall. Lake trout do eat them, and there were some bloater in Chinook one year in the fall.

Dennis Hickey – How much time will you spend assessing lake trout in Door County, Clay Banks to Washington Island. Those are the traditional spawning grounds and should be within reach of the lake trout planted on the Northern Refuge. We see naturally reproduced lake trout in our commercial nets. Suggest sampling Cardys Reef and Jacksonport Deep Reef.

- We are seeing some wild fish in our gill nets. USFWS samples in spring and fall on Clay Banks and Washington Island. USFWS is evaluating fishing in different depths.

Michigan is not considered recovered, correct? With pressure from multiple states at the Federal level, how do you plan to manage changes in the state of MI, i.e., the Consent Decree gill netting? Seemingly staff from other agencies weren't aware WI was considering a commercial fishery.

- Susan Wells – USFWS – Across the entire lake (tribal, commercial, sport), across all agencies, we look at this as one system, as one lake. We work with all of the agencies together to make sure lake trout get to a sustainable level. The states and/or tribal agencies determine the mechanism for which the fish are taken/removed from the system. At the end of the day, USFWS primary concern is whether the level of take (mortality) is within the level that still allows an achievable self-sustaining fishable population.
- Justine Hasz – WI DNR – The request from commercial fishers was discussed at a high level at a meeting last fall of the Great Lakes Fish Commission agency advisors. They were made aware that this request was proposed to Wisconsin.

Titus Seilheimer – There is a bucket full of lake trout for Lake Michigan for WI waters; if part of that bucket is still available, how do we allocate within the safe level?

Dennis Hickey – What is the amount of lake trout harvested in MI?

- Susan Wells – that report is available online, and Susan will share that.

Jerry Fetterer – How long do you fish your gill nets? Do you catch bycatch?

- Set overnight – typically 24 hours or less. Typically not a lot of bycatch, sometimes burbot, suckers, walleye (location dependent).

Jerry Fetterer – Is USFWS doing a study on latent mortality of fish that are released?

- No, not out of the Green Bay office. There are a couple of studies on Lakes Superior and Huron on sport released fish. There was another study on commercially gill netted fish in the 1990s in the Apostle Islands of Lake Superior. Those results are all published and we can forward the information.

Dan Lindal – The lake trout that commercial fishermen are seeking is a non-target fishery. Not asking for any restricted areas, gear type changes, etc. We are only asking to keep bycatch in regular fishing practice. There will not be an increase in effort on the part of the commercial fishers.

I wasn't at the last meeting, where is the sport fisherman's representation on this stakeholder group?

How many sport vs commercial representatives?

- Raise of hands of those in the room plus discussion of group members on Zoom showed that there are numerous sport anglers on the stakeholder group.

This commercial fishery could double the harvest of lake trout in Wisconsin.

- The current ask of the commercial fishers is for 40,000 lake trout (individual fish, not pounds of fish) in addition to the 40,000 harvested by the sport fishery a couple of years ago. Average sport harvest over the last 10 years is 29,000 annually.
- In the 1980s sport harvest was over 100,000 lake trout annually. Modeling work was done at that time, and it was requested that WI lower mortality at that time. To lower the harvest, the bag limit was reduced and the sport fishing season was shortened. The modeling from decades ago showed a safe harvest limit of 82,000. New models with updated data will be discussed at the April meeting.

Dan Pawlitzke via Zoom 7:35 PM

The DNR safe harvest for Lake Trout is 80,000 fish. Sports catch 29,000. The commercial fishers harvest 40,000 Lake Trout which when combined is less than the DNR safe harvest.

- The Lake trout TAC established prior to 1990 was 82,000 fish and is an outdated number that needs to be revised as part of this process.

Dennis Hickey – Commercial fishers are required to report a lot of data, i.e., electronic reporting by grid, count of every species, lat/long of nets, estimated weight before getting to shore, finished weight at the end of the day. A commercial lake trout fishery would add another assessment.

Jamie LeClair – When was the sport bag increased back to 5? The safe harvest limit is 82,000 – giving fish to commercial fishers won't hurt the lake trout population overall. What kinds of meetings were held when the bag limit was changed?

- Bag limit adjustments were made in 2017-2018. The 82,000 safe harvest number is from the 1980s. It is outdated and will be discussed more in depth at the next meeting of this group.
- Public meetings were held when the bag limit adjustments were made. An analysis was done on the impact of a 5-bag limit, and most sport anglers didn't catch a limit of lake trout when the bag limit was 2. The bag limit change was about the opportunity to catch more lake trout. The engagement process was similarly announced through DNR press releases, website, calendar etc.

Dale Maas – Bag limit was 5 initially, aggregate with other trout and salmon species. Then it was changed to a 5 bag but no more than 2 lake trout. Sport anglers and charters in the south depend heavily on lake trout. The fishery starts earlier in the year to the south, as you get further north, the sport anglers depend less on lake trout. They are typically incidentally caught rather than targeted.

Wisconsin Conservation Congress as an organization took a position with the decline in alewife populations; increasing the bag limit on lake trout was a way to allow anglers who want more lake trout to have more lake trout.

Justine Hasz via Zoom on behalf of Mark Ebner – Commercial fishers are currently catching lake trout but are required to release them, dead or alive. Giving commercial fishers a quota means they can keep what they catch already; no additional lake trout would be killed.

What is the projected planting of lake trout in WI next year? If the lake trout aren't reproducing in the northern part of the lake, and we aren't stocking more to replenish what are commercially taken, they will fish them out in about 10 years since they don't migrate from the Michigan side.

- 45,000 stocked by USFWS on the Southern Refuge in 2023, 0 in nearshore waters.
- We are working with stakeholders on stocking levels for salmon and trout for 2024 and beyond. We hope to have a decision by fall of 2023.

This is a pay to play fishery; WDNR Great Lakes stamp provides millions of dollars to the fishery. Anglers supported salmon cuts in 2012, and more chinook have been stocked in recent years. There is 50-60% natural reproduction of Chinooks and they go back to MI in late July or early August. We are devoid of salmon after that time. If we don't have some level of fishery we can rely on locally, we will not be able to fish more than 4-5 weeks per year; maybe mid-June to mid-August? This year salmon fishing didn't pick up until July. We rely on lake trout at times of the year.

Why did WDNR cut lake trout stocking? Was there more pressure for the other species of "silver fish?"

- Through discussions with stakeholders prior to 2016, the decision was made to reduce lake trout stocking to accommodate the other species of fish. Stocked 45,000 lake trout starting in 2021.

Dan Pawlitzke via Zoom to Everyone 7:49 PM

The DNR drastically reduced planting from several hundred thousand 5 years ago to 45,000 Lake Trout now.

Angelo Trentadue via Zoom 7:50 PM

What is the projected cost to manage this new commercial Lake Trout fishery and where will this funding come from.

- The cost is currently unknown; we won't know until a fishery is implemented. There are varying funding sources we use, and the majority of money to manage the commercial fisheries on Lakes Michigan and Superior comes from segregated funds (hunting and fishing license dollars).

Todd Stuth via Zoom 7:56 PM

Its "not" a new fishery, its already managed from the whitefish fishery side of things.

Next meeting Tuesday, April 18 at 6PM at LTC and via Zoom.