Whitefish Stakeholder Engagement Zoom Meeting
August 18, 2020

600 - Welcome - Eggold
605 - Administrative items – Zoom, protocol for meeting, etc. - Eggold
610 - Intro comments – Eggold
615 - Framework and timeline for the process – Eggold
620 - Whitefish Movement – Iserman
630 - Whitefish modelling results – Hansen
650 - Whitefish Comp study information – Seilheimer
705 - Questions / Comments - All
735 – Group discussion on future meetings – topic, frequency, type, location
750 – Wrap up

Presentations by Isermann, Hansen, and Seilheimer were recorded. See webpage for the presentations.
https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Fishing/lakemichigan/LakeMichiganCommercialWhitefish.html

Notes from Question/Comment session [Responses in brackets.]

• Keith – recovered $100 reward tag whitefish in March 2020. It was recaptured at the exact same length as when it was tagged in 2017.
  o [Slow growth – potentially productivity issues associated with quagga mussels and Diporeia, or potentially density issues with whitefish in the Bay]
  o [Charlie – turned in 60-70 tags, plus have 20 more from this year. Tagged fish are weighed and measured. Most tagged fish looked to be in good shape. Maybe the telemetry tags are harder for the fish to haul around, which could limit growth?]

• Jerry – 2.9 million pounds yearly?
  o [Yes]
  Is that an increase from this year?
  o [That is a safe harvest number based on inputs to the model. That number is not the quota, we still need to determine that number.]
  Who is able to harvest the additional fish in the southern part of the Bay? In other words, can the Lake Michigan commercial fishers go into the southern Bay?
  o [Fishers are required to have quota in a particular zone. They can buy, sell, or transfer quota.]
  Is there a market for an increased number of fish?
  o [Charlie – big demand for local, fresh seafood, so yes, there is a market for the fish. The markets tighten up in Spring, but June-Sept are good. We could sell 3x what we are selling now.]

• Charlie – Commercial fishers might help thin the GB population and help with the density issue by catching additional fish out of the lower Bay. The current Bay quota is 362,000, but the new harvestable surplus number is much higher – potentially 3x higher than the current quota. A slightly higher quota next year could help inform the UWGB/Sea Grant bycatch study.

• Scott – is there variation in terms of market price, and is it related to fish size, condition, etc.? Should the model incorporate fish condition as a factor?
Charlie – Market price is mainly set by supply and demand. Some holidays are also huge drivers – namely Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah – because whitefish are easily prepared Kosher. Some of the fishers are also fish processors. In July we are catching 8-9,000 pounds/week. About 7,000 pounds of that stays in WI. We will not recover from the Russian embargo of about 6 years ago.

Brad – It wouldn’t fit this model to incorporate fish condition or marketability as an input, but it could be looked at separately.

David – When a quota is set, by NR rule that quota is split 50/50 between sport and commercial.

Historically with commercial species like yellow perch, the split has been in the general ballpark of 60/40, 50/50, 40/60. The model generates a safe harvest number, then we need to look at social factors and other factors to determine the quota.

George – We have good bycatch data from trap nets, but limited data from gill nets. What is it going to take to get good gill netting data, and what the impact might be on walleye?

Titus – Taylor should be able to get better data next spring. April and May 2021 are key.

Brad – Taylor is working with Todd to monitor gill nets.

There could be a tripling of commercial effort in the lower Bay. Is there any way to predict what that would mean on the water, i.e. where will those nets be, and what will be the impact to sport anglers regarding conflict over fishing grounds?

Charlie – Used properly at the right time of the year, gill nets can be very productive. Gill net effort has been dropping in recent years, but the world class walleye fishery has co-existed with gill nets fished in the Bay. Gill netters want to avoid walleye. I don’t know that we will see triple the effort since the CPE has been increasing. We are licensed for 36 trap nets, but this year we have caught the majority of our fish with 5 nets. We never see a sportfishing boat near us.

We want to make sure there are safeguards in place to protect sport anglers from both trap nets and gill nets. What is the best way to address user conflict?

Charlie – The NRB has the opportunity to quickly correct any issues. Commercial fishers want to avoid conflicts as well.

Duane – WCSFO President and member of 3 fishing clubs – Will this info be on DNR website?

920-***-**67 – Presentations will be online?

Keith – We are seeing large numbers of whitefish on graphs, and we catch them incidentally. Our club has no problems with higher quota; we are generally a commercial-friendly club. We need nets to be well marked and would appreciate a heads up with coordinates of nets we could announce on our club Facebook page.

Topics for future meetings

None – Brad encouraged follow up calls or emails for additional thoughts
Frequency of meetings

- Charlie – Tuesday/Wednesday at 6PM is fine
- Keith – Agree with Charlie; avoid Monday and Friday. Nice that we didn’t have to drive to Cleveland
- Dave via Chat – Tues/Wed 6PM
- Brad – One month from now in Sept and again in Oct.
- George – evenings work well

Participants (32-34 during presentations, including 8 DNR and 4 staff from other agencies/universities)

**WDNR**
- Brad Eggold
- Scott Hansen
- Al Blizel
- Tom Meronek
- Iyob Tsehaye
- Brad Ray
- Jacob Steckmesser
- Cheryl Masterson

**Other Agencies/Universities**
- Dan Isermann – UWSP/USGS Coop Fish Unit
- Titus Seilheimer – UW Sea Grant
- Susan Wells – USFWS
- Taylor Hrabak – UWGB

**Participants**
- George – WI Wildlife Federation
- Charlie – Lake Michigan Commercial Fishing Board
- Keith – M&M GLSF
- David – WI Conservation Congress
- Gary
- Paul – Milw. Journal Sentinel
- Lynn – KSFCA
- Bill – Retired DNR
- Jerry – Sheboygan GLSF
- KFSUWI (left mtg. about 7:00)
- Mark
- Amy’s iPad
- Brian – Milwaukee GLSF
- Scott
- Steven (left mtg about 6:45)
- Lauren
- RF Jones
James (late arrival – after 6:30)
Bill (late arrival – 6:40)
Edward (late arrival – after 7:30)
920-***-**67
414-***-**09
920-***-**14 (late arrival – 7:30)