

Whitefish Stakeholder Engagement Zoom Meeting
November 17, 2020

600 – Welcome/Administrative Items – Eggold
605 – Lake Whitefish Quotas – Green Bay and Lake Michigan – Eggold
620 – Questions/Comments/Discussion
700 – Poll Questions – All
730 – Questions/Comments – All
745 – Group discussion on future meeting topics
800 – Wrap up

Presentations were recorded and will be available on DNR website.

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

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

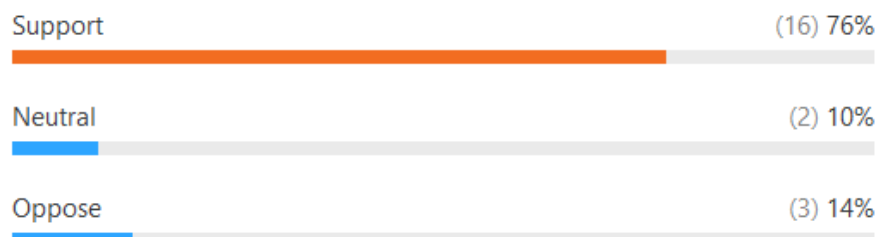
- Bob – Regarding Zone 3 quota, what happens if sport fishers start to catch whitefish in the harbors? There is no quota for them. Can the Lake be split between sport and commercial like the Bay? [Brad – that could be explored in the future if that fishery develops and it is needed. The sport fishery is currently regulated by the daily bag limit of 10. Seasonal regulations and/or size limits could also be explored.]
- Charlie – Some Zone 3 commercial fishers thought we haven't accounted for any whitefish in the southern end of the lake. If there is a robust population of whitefish in Racine, Milwaukee, Port Washington, etc., then that population likely hasn't been factored in for the safe harvest limit. It is impossible to work every situation into the harvestable surplus.
- Keith – Is there a balance of fish beyond the harvestable surplus that isn't surplus? [Brad – the model suggests that we can maintain the fishery at that current level of harvest. It may change over time. In earlier presentations, Scott has shown that the model calculates a given number of pounds of fish in the fishery, and we can harvest a certain percentage of that.] [Scott – The model shows about 35 million pounds of total biomass, with a harvestable surplus of 2.3 million pounds in the Bay.]
- Glenn – During the recent LMCFB meeting, Scott showed pie charts with recovered tags. We feel that the tag recoveries don't represent Zone 3. If the same commercial effort is applied in Zone 3 as is used in Zones 1 and 2, the numbers would look different. No gill nets allowed in Zone 3 is a major obstacle. [Brad – Are you saying we need to standardize the effort across the areas to get a true picture of the tag returns? To interpret tag recovery data there will have to be other factors accounted for such as the amount of effort in different zones. We will continue to gain new information from tagged whitefish over the next several years.]
- Keith via chat – Did I miss how much quota was increased? [Brad – The quota has not been changed yet, and no decisions have been made at this point. The current quotas are Zone 1 - 362,185; Zone 2 - 2,166,329; and Zone 3 - 351,487.]
- Bob via chat – Talking about it now. Quite an increase in Zone 1 and 3!

Notes from Poll Questions session [Responses in brackets.]

Question 1 comments

- Glenn – Not in favor of EFHRS – does not want expense of another phone and is not computer savvy. None of the 7 license holders in his area are in favor of this. It is like wearing a monitoring bracelet for law enforcement to track whereabouts and locations. Jim Benson is a commercial fisher in GB, he also does not have the skills or ability to operate the system. [Brad – This system will in no way track anyone’s location.] [Bob Stroess – there is no access to individual’s personal phones and the geolocation information on those phones.]
- Charlie – we have been working on electronic reporting for over 20 years. Many of us have used it successfully for 3 years. The DNR has been very helpful when issues arise. The LMCFB has endorsed EFHRS.
- Bob – Funding is a sore spot; anything we can do to keep funding down is good. [Brad – We are looking for a grant to build a companion app for EFHRS. We have applied for money from NOAA for this effort, in addition, we also get some money from NOAA to work on the commercial fisheries of the Great Lakes, and we use some of that money to continue to improve the EFHRS program.]
- Shawn – Making EFHRS mandatory will put many older fishers out of business. Don’t get rid of the regular paper system.
- Bob – If COVID continues and we can’t use creel clerks, the sport anglers should have a similar electronic reporting system.
- Glenn – In person meetings need to happen. Commercial fishers without computers are underrepresented.

1. Our Electronic Fish Harvest Reporting (EFHRS) system is capable of gathering electronic information on commercial fisher harvest information. Do you support or oppose the mandatory use of the EFHRS web-based harvest reporting system by Great Lakes Commer

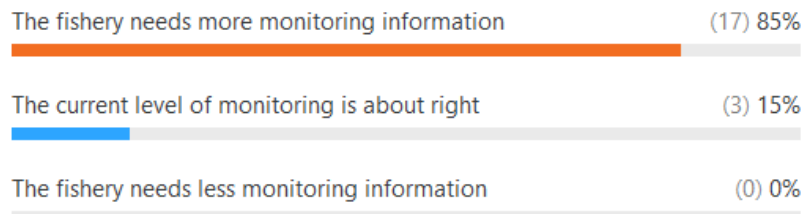


(Plus 1 opposed for Glenn without computer access)

Question 2 comments

- Charlie – The last two years we had problems getting a monitor. Taylor (the UWGB grad student) started in May, but the pandemic shut down fishing, and there was no gill netting in the bay.
- Shawn – Preston Cole said DNR Fisheries has enough money to do the Zone 3 gill net study. Why haven't you done that yet? [Brad – Will have to check with Todd Kalish about this.]

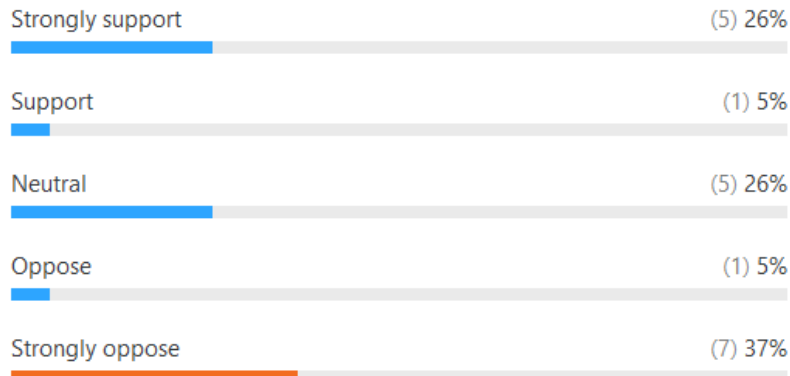
1. Current monitoring of the commercial lake whitefish fishery for large mesh gill nets contains information from 9 lifts (through June/July 2020). What is your opinion on the level of information from the large mesh gill net fishery?



Question 3 comments

- Charlie – This question is difficult to answer when we have no information. We will need to revisit it when we have more info.
- Shawn – Restrictions are out of the question. While gill nets have been used, the walleye population has grown off the charts so gill nets have not impacted the walleye fishery.

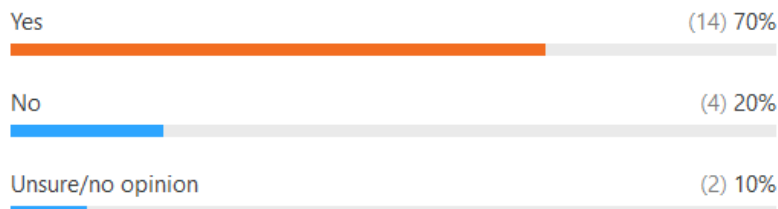
1. To what extent do you support or oppose the DNR in pursuing additional restrictions for large mesh gill nets in Green Bay. These restrictions could include effort, depth, season or time constraints.



Question 4 comments

- Charlie – The current catch composition study is scheduled to go through next year, and it could be extended for an additional 2 years if grant money is obtained.

1. Should current onboard monitoring of the commercial lake whitefish fishery in the Bay continue through the 2021 fishing season before and after rules and regulations have been finalized ?

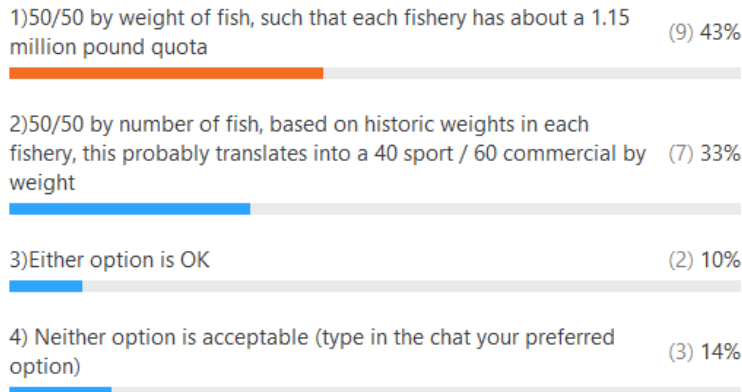


Question 5 comments

- Glenn – Is the DNR working to compute the numbers (not pounds) of whitefish consumed by other sportfish species like walleye, bass, northern pike, etc. There was a stomach analysis study done, but I haven't seen the results. [Brad – We can get those study results to you.] [Charlie – Lucas Koenig, the UWSP grad student, submitted his thesis which has diet information. UWGB has a proposal to expand on that research.]
- Glenn – Concerned with how the sport fishery is being handled. Too many immature fish are being taken out of the system. The commercial and sport fisheries should be on the same playing field with a 17-inch minimum size and a #4 hook size minimum. Whitefish are very delicate fish. Just because they swim down the hole doesn't mean

they survive. Why is sportfishing allowed in the tributaries during spawning? It should be a closed season during the spawn.

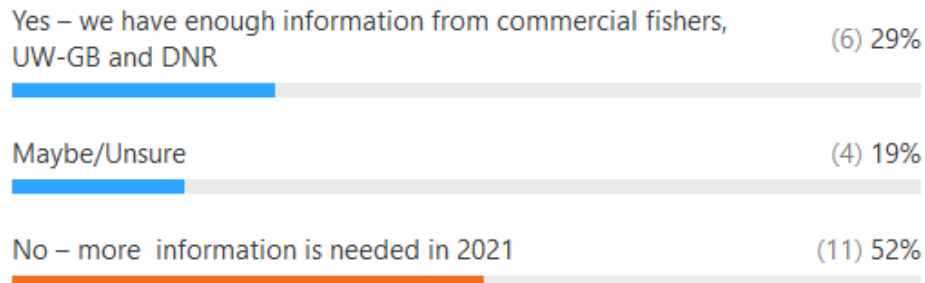
1. Harvest of fish species that are shared between sport and commercial stakeholders are general split by weight or numbers. In Green Bay, do you think the estimate quota of 2.3 million pounds of lake whitefish should be split



(No comments were entered in the chat in response to #4 above)

Question 6 – no comments

1. Based on the information provided by the DNR, commercial fishers and UW-GB, do you think we have enough by-catch information for Green Bay and Lake Michigan?

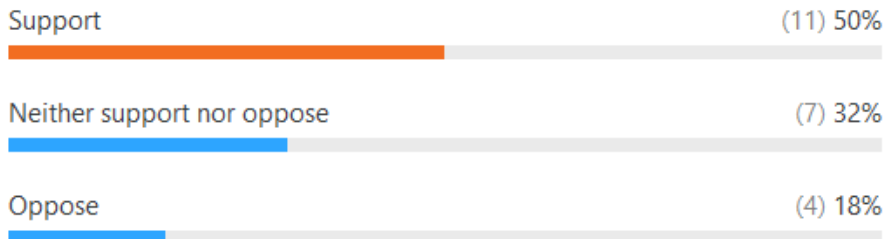


Question 7 comments

- Shawn – the DNR should not be showing photos of people holding young whitefish that haven't had a chance to spawn.
- Charlie via chat – The 200,000 # emergency increase requested for 2021 by the LMCFB will greatly increase the ability of the commercial fishery to provide fishers to participate in the catch composition study in the Bay.
- Charlie – I urge support for the 200,000-pound increase. Even with the additional 200,000 lbs. we still aren't even to one-third of the harvestable surplus.

- Keith – I echo Charlie’s comment. Our club agrees there is a high population of whitefish in the Bay. The whitefish are smaller these days. The increase in quota likely won’t impact the fishery overall.

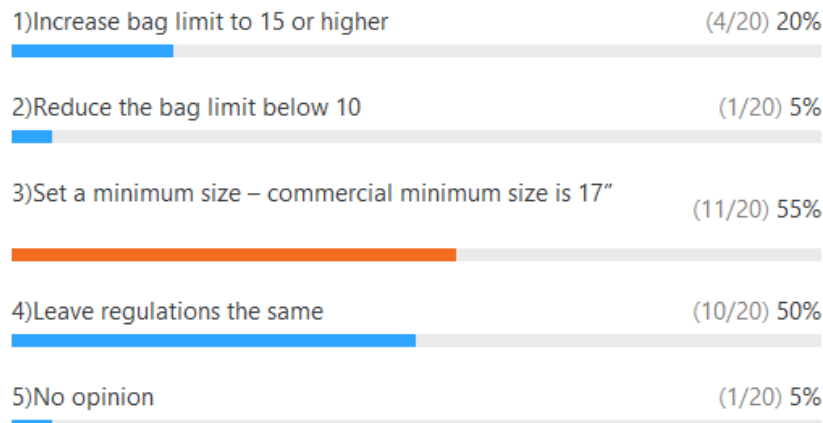
1. LMCFB approved a motion to increase GB Zone 1 lake whitefish quota from 362,185 to 562,185 (+200,000) lbs starting on 3-1-21. For this to happen, DNR would have to propose an emergency rule. What is your opinion on an em. rule to increase this quota?



Question 8 comments

- [Repeated from Q5] – Glenn – Concerned with how the sport fishery is being handled. Too many immature fish are being taken out of the system. The commercial and sport fisheries should be on the same playing field with a 17-inch minimum size and a #4 hook size minimum. Whitefish are very delicate fish. Just because they swim down the hole doesn’t mean they survive. Why is sportfishing allowed in the tributaries during spawning? It should be a closed season during the spawn.

1. During these meetings, we have not discussed any potential regulation changes related to sport fishing for whitefish (10 bag). Which of these potential changes do you most prefer? (you may choose more than one) (Multiple choice)



Additional questions/comments from meeting wrap up

- Marian via chat – Are there any protocols/taxonomic identification/SOPs in place to confirm the identification of the Coregonid species being harvested? Concern is that possible threatened species such as Lake Herring are being misidentified in the processes of commercial fishing. [Scott – There are protocols in place. The USFWS is working with DNR and commercial fishers to collect ciscos for genetic analysis.] [Glenn Seger – We have had several herring in our whitefish trap nets in the last two years. We do know what they look like. The traditional herring spawning grounds are in a restricted fishing area.]
- Keith via chat – What about guide reporting going forward being mandatory so we have better data on the sport fishery harvest on Green Bay ice fishing. Be great data rather than relying on creel.
- Glenn – Have no other meetings until January 10-12 timeframe due to the holidays and high COVID activity levels. Would prefer a regular in-person meeting before any rules/regs are written. How do you write rules with only half of the catch composition study being completed? There is limited data from the gill net fishery.
- Charlie – The LMCFB is meeting on December 10 to continue the discussion about various scenarios for Zone 2 quota since it encompasses both the Lake and the Bay.
- Todd – There are 47 commercial fishers (down from about 200), and about 7 groups that actively fish the Bay. The ones that are left are responsible stewards of the resource and fish with that in mind.

Participants (~30-32 during presentations, including DNR and staff from other agencies/universities)

WDNR

Brad Eggold
Tom Meronek
Tammie Paoli
Scott Hansen
Al Blizel
Mike Donofrio
Bob Stroess
David Boyarski
Iyob Tsehay
Aaron Schiller
Cheryl Masterson

Other Agencies/Universities

Susan Wells – USFWS
Ted Treska – USFWS
Rob Elliott – USFWS
Patrick Forsythe – UWGB
Titus Seilheimer – UW Sea Grant
Taylor Hrabak – UWGB

Participants

Bill
Bob
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Jeff
Jim
Jimmy
Jimmys
Keith
Keith
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