

Whitefish Stakeholder Engagement Zoom Meeting
October 20th, 2020

600 – Welcome/Administrative items – Eggold
605 – Large Mesh Gill Net RFB process – Meronek
615 – Sport fishery in the Bay – Hansen
630 – Historical perspective of limited entry and ITQ system – Harvey
645 – By-Catch information – Hrabak
700 – Future engagement timeline and opportunities – Eggold
730 – Questions/Comments – All
755 – 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 questions on presentations [responses in brackets].

Meronek – Large Mesh Gill Net RFP process

- Bob – Are we going to talk about bycatch? From a sport fisher's viewpoint, there is a request on behalf of constituents to Congress that they want to raise the Great Lakes Salmon Stamp, and we do not want to give away any sport fish that are paid for by the salmon stamp.
 - [Tom – All Commercial fishing rules apply, so you cannot take any fish besides whitefish in the contract. We never got to the point of writing a contract to hammer out other specific details.]

Hansen – Sport fishery in the Bay

- Chuck – Question for Scott. The slow growth of these fish – do you think that it is related to their density? There are reports of slow growing whitefish in Lake Superior that never got much bigger than what Scott is reporting; I've seen some stock estimates of whitefish in the Bay and they seem very high. The condition of these fish, I assume, are good?
 - [Scott – Condition has been improving over the last few years in Green Bay. Commercial fishers can support that fact. Catch rates in the Green Bay commercial fishery have been good and holding steady or improving. Is this density dependence or food source related? Commercial catch rates and catch at age model abundance estimates suggest improved growth may not be density dependent. We don't have a good index of fish returning to the rivers, but the runs do seem to have declined somewhat over the last decade. However, those earlier runs had lower exploitation rates. There are researchers doing invertebrate sampling, etc., to give us an idea of food sources, etc., but we don't have a good handle on long term changes in available forage at this time. The next couple years of the catch-at-age model population estimates and things changing in terms of safe harvest in Green Bay should shed some light on this.]

Harvey – Historical perspective of limited entry and ITQ system

- Charlie – My comment is that when this system was established, one of the things we thought was going to happen was we would have a stable fishery, because we'd have quotas and under those quotas fish would stabilize and remain viable, and we have not had that. Chubs have

disappeared and perch have disappeared. People hold large percentages for those fish across the whole state and this has happened in the whitefish fishery. People have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars buying or renting quota. It hasn't worked out like we thought but the investment and permanent nature of these allocations and transfers is locked in in the minds of everyone in the commercial fishery. On the license application we designated transferee so we inherit these quota shares. So, this is a big deal that has to be taken into account as we move forward with the quota change. Under whitefish population modeling we are talking about a quota for the Lake Michigan and Green Bay. Zone 2 is a part of both of these water bodies and that's where we have fishers in the lake whitefish fishery that have significant quota holdings but they are not using them. This is something that the LMCFB is making some effort to address and figure out how to reach the safe harvest limits that the model suggests without completely invalidating the quota system.

Hrabak – By-Catch Information

- Bob – We spent a lot of time in the last several years discussing trawling for whitefish – will this be part of Taylor's study?
 - [Brad – No, trawling is limited to trawling grids off Two Rivers. There is no trawling in Green Bay for whitefish. Cameras are on board for trawling.]
- Charlie – We have always thought the preferred method to handle whitefish is with trap nets. The ability to release them is accepted as something that can be done. What we are seeing with some of the temperature studies is that whitefish are in waters that we never thought they would go in, even with warm bottom temperatures. Whitefish have changed their pattern and diet (gobies, alewives). Condition seems to be improving as we are seeing bigger fish. LMCFB made a motion in August that they believe an increase in the commercial quota for Zone 1 of 200,000 lbs is warranted. And using a bit of the tremendous harvestable surplus fish would aid next year's study by providing real time information while Taylor (graduate student) and LTEs are part of the data collection process. This would be for Zone 1 in Green Bay.

Notes from Questions/Comment session

- Charlie - There has been a great decline in gillnetting over past 5 years. Some of the perch fishermen in lower Bay who occasionally gillnet for whitefish. We didn't get them on board last year for monitoring, we didn't have monitor in place for April and May for this year but there was no market for fish due to COVID-19. Usually there is tremendous demand in spring with Easter, etc., but very little demand this spring. So, this year is going to show a real decline in gillnetting, so it's not like we aren't monitoring something that happened. Fishermen are savvy about how, when, where they use gillnets and they are using them less and less. Everyone has concerns about gill netting but I would expect you will see some monitoring next year and I don't think it's quite the potential for disaster that some of sport fishery might believe it's going to be.
- JJ – I've talked to a couple of sport anglers and one question they are stuck on is – trying to get all of the guide community on record to get a better handle on what the whitefish harvest is each year. Guide reporting compliance is an important component into the sport harvest number.
 - [Brad – We are working on that. It was a presentation during the last meeting – there is a separate process looking at guide reporting and it is going to the Natural Resources Board next week to approve the scope statement. In the scope statement we talk about making it more mandatory than it currently is – the same rules and restrictions that charter captains use to report their harvest would apply to guides on the Great Lakes,

which would give us the ability to seek timely reports. The scope statement will hopefully be approved next week and then we can begin to work on that.]

- [JJ – What is the timeline of the scope statement?]
- [Brad – It's going to be a fairly long process – likely 1 or 2 meetings and discussions, gathering comments, and then moving on to the draft rule language. But it would not be in place for the 2021 ice fishery, maybe would be ready for 2022. Also, this is based on when the legislature is in session, because it would take changes to our rules and the legislature would have to look at it.]
- David via chat: Scott, Using a log or semi-log scale on the trawl graph might visually help on your first graph. having values of 500, 1000, 2000.... Just an idea.
- Keith via chat: How many guides and commercial fishers do we have in Zone 1?

Brad asked the group: Do we need another meeting? A big topic would be discussing regulations, quotas, etc. Likely date would be November 17th.

There were a couple of virtual thumbs up from meeting participants. So the next meeting will be November 17th, and that will likely be the final meeting for a couple of months.

Meeting adjourned at 7:35PM

Participants (~31-33 during presentations, including DNR and staff from other agencies/universities)

WDNR

Brad Eggold
Scott Hansen
Laura Schmidt
Tom Meronek
Tammie Paoli
Chandra Harvey
Dave Boyarski
Al Blizel

Other Agencies/Universities

Taylor Hrabak – UWGB
Susan Wells - USFWS
Ted Treska - USFWS
Titus Seilheimer – UW Sea Grant
Patrick Forsythe - UWGB
Chuck Bronte - USFWS
Nick Torsky – MI DNR

Participants

Amy
Bill
Bill
Bob
Charles
Dave

David
Jack
Kyle
Nick
Owner
P S
RFJ
Steve
Steven
Tim
Titus
NB