

Whitefish Stakeholder Engagement Zoom Meeting
September 22, 2020

- 600 – Welcome – Eggold
- 605 – Administrative items
- 610 – Electronic Fish Harvest Reporting System (EFHRS) – Eggold
- 630 – Model Discussion – Hansen
- 700 – Guide Reporting – Meronek
- 710 – Safe harvest breakdown in the bay – Masterson
- 720 – Commercial Fishing statistics – Hrabak
- 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 Question/Comment session [Responses in brackets.]

- Charlie – We’ve talked about a 50/50 split, and I don’t have a problem with that. In the perch fishery, the commercial harvest was restricted because the sport anglers weren’t catching enough fish. Now we have a limited commercial fishery and a wide-open sport fishery. The commercial harvest is going to exceed sport harvest since sport is based on some limiting factors.
- Dale – Commercial market dictates size of their fish, but sport anglers are less selective. How can we use the resource to the best of our ability?
 - [Charlie – there is a 17-inch commercial size limit; sport fishers do not have a size limit. Commercials release a lot of fish less than 17 inches, and some legal fish that are less than 2 lbs. Maybe we need a policy ahead of time, but maybe the formal 50/50 allocation isn’t necessary at this point.]
 - [Brad – Quota for commercials and bag limits for sport can be adjusted to stay within safe harvest limits in the Lake and the Bay.]
- Titus via chat – With a 17” size limit on the commercial fishery and no size limit on sport, a numbers based split makes sense.
- John – do we need a size limit on the sport fishery?
 - [Brad – I don’t know if that is warranted at this point, but it is something that could be looked at and discussed.]
- Charlie – We used to run the models regularly for perch. This change in where the fish are located is causing us to establish quotas differently. Regarding the size limit, that might cause sport anglers to release more fish to get to their limit of 10. The 17” limit used to be based on an age 3 fish that would have been allowed to spawn once.
- RF – Are the guides going to be represented in the process?
 - [Brad – They were invited to these stakeholder meetings. The guide reporting is a separate process, and they will be engaged in that process.]

- JJ – I've been a sportfishing guide for 10 years. From a guide's perspective, many of us keep track of what our clients are catching. We are looking for a sustainable fishery for years to come. The increase in commercial harvest should work into the sport harvest.
 - [Scott – the intent is to revisit the population models every couple of years.]
- Bob – Do we have any biological data from the trap nets set off of Milwaukee this year?
 - [Brad – no]
 - [Charlie – At the Lake Michigan Commercial Fishing Board meeting on October 1 we hope to hear more about the effort off Milwaukee this year.]
- Bob – Guides are similar to charter captains and should be held to the same reporting standards.
- Keith – Are the fish in Lake Michigan eating the same food as those in the Bay?
 - [Scott – Growth is affected by numbers of fish (competition) and the amount and quality of food they have. They feed on gobies in both the lake and bay. Younger whitefish feed on aquatic insects and lake fly larvae. Green Bay has ample food for the younger year classes while it is suspected that Lake Michigan may not have enough to sustain higher populations. In Lake Michigan, the Dreissenid mussels have wiped out Diporeia, the primary historical food source for most like history stages of whitefish.]
 - [Titus – the Bay is more productive, especially the lower Bay. There is a lot of nutrients coming in from the Fox River.]
- Martin via chat – For the bay of GB how does the 17" size relate to age of the fish? It was mentioned they are approx. 3 yrs old? Does that hold true and is a 3 yr old breeding age?
 - [Scott – Now a 17-inch fish is as young as 5-6 years, mostly 7 years, and up to 8 years old. They are maturing at 5-7 years of age.]
- Keith – Guides pay less in fees but it seems like we are missing a large data set there if they aren't required to report their catch.
 - [Brad – We are working through a scope statement for guide reporting for the Great Lakes in general, not just for Green Bay, and not just for whitefish.]
 - [JJ – The current guide reporting is modeled after the charter captains. It is an easy way to get data from the guides. Participation has dropped.]
 - [Scott – it is tough to determine what percentage of guides are actually reporting currently. In the first year of mandatory reporting, it started out around 75%, but it is hard to say how it is now. The current rule for mandatory reporting is not very enforceable as is.]
- Kyle via chat - I caught the 75% however if we don't know how many guys are guiding out there 75% of what. Is there a specific number?
 - [Scott – there were 27 reporting in the first year, now we are down to 17 guiding units.]
- Chino via chat – Is there any thought toward changing daily bag or other rules for sport fishermen this year?
 - [Brad – not at this time. There is a separate process we would need to undergo to make changes to sport fishing rules.]
- Bob – Can we add a column in the graphs in the commercial fishing data presentation to include sport fishing? It would be nice to be able to look at those in the same way.
 - [Brad – Scott has sport harvest data, but it is in a different unit and not directly comparable to the data Taylor presented. In the future, we may be able to figure out a way to present both pieces of information.]

- Charlie – The Lake Michigan Commercial Fishing Board has an October 1 meeting scheduled. They will be working on their list of priority issues for DNR.
- Chino via chat – I find it interesting the point about the spikes in recruitment in green bay every 6 years, is there a theory on why that might be?
 - [Brad – In general weather and productivity can be factors. It is hard to predict. Some years there are regionally good year classes of fish produced – for example 1998 was really good year for perch and walleye in many of the Great Lakes.]
- Tom – If the NRB approves the preliminary hearing request, we will hold a preliminary public hearing on October 5 regarding the guide reporting Scope Statement. The hearing will be announced in the same manner as these whitefish stakeholder meetings.

Participants (~36-38 during presentations, including DNR and staff from other agencies/universities)

WDNR

Brad Eggold
 Scott Hansen
 Tom Meronek
 Jacob Steckmesser
 Cheryl Masterson

Other Agencies/Universities

Titus Seilheimer – UW Sea Grant
 Susan Wells – USFWS
 Ted Treska – USFWS
 Chuck Bronte – USFWS
 Taylor Hrabak – UWGB
 Jim Dexter – MI DNR
 Dave Caroffino – MI DNR
 Steve Lenart – MI DNR
 Nick Torsky – MI DNR

Participants

John
 Martin
 Amy
 Bob
 Bill
 Jacob
 Lauren
 Mark
 Austin
 Dale
 Bill
 Charlie
 Chino

Owner

David

Steve

Keith

P S

Keith

RFJ

Marcy

Nathan

Seth

JJ

Kyle

Dakota

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