2024 SPRING FISHERIES SURVEY SUMMARY

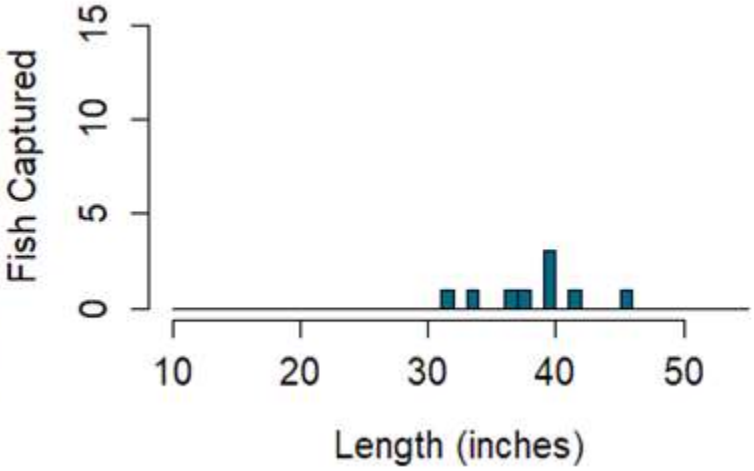
LAKE CHIPPEWA (CHIPPEWA FLOWAGE), SAWYER COUNTY

Report by Max Wolter

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Hayward Fisheries Management Team conducted a fyke netting survey on Lake Chippewa (more commonly known as The Chippewa Flowage) from April 23-25, 2024. The primary target was muskellunge and black crappie, but useful data was also gathered on walleye, northern pike and yellow perch. Up to 10 nets were set overnight for three total nights which resulted in 30 total net-nights of effort. An electrofishing survey was conducted on May 28-29, 2024 to target largemouth bass, smallmouth bass and bluegill and included 12 miles of shoreline. Quality, preferred and memorable sizes referenced in this summary are based on standard proportions of world record lengths developed for each species by the American Fisheries Society.

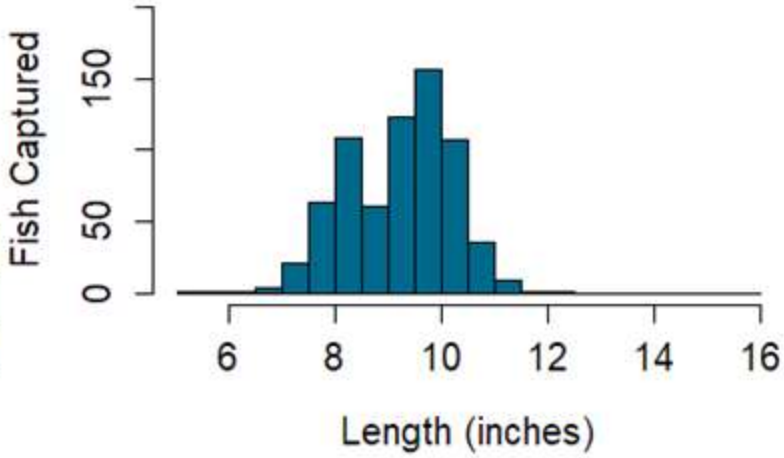
MUSKELLUNGE

Captured 0.3 per net-night ≥ 20 inches	
Quality Size ≥ 30"	78%
Memorable Size ≥ 42"	11%



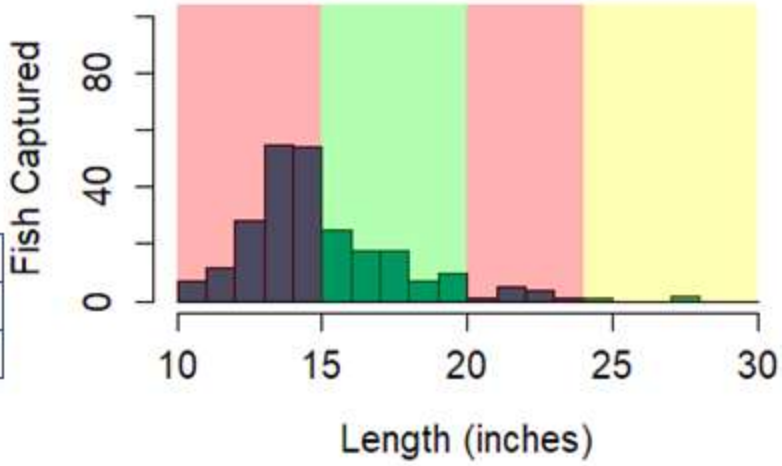
BLACK CRAPPIE

Captured 26 per net-night ≥ 5 inches	
Quality Size ≥ 8"	86%
Preferred Size ≥ 10"	22%



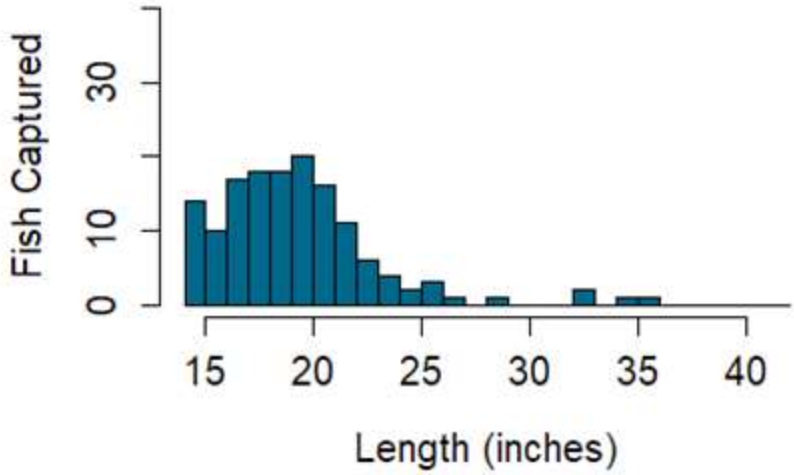
WALLEYE

Captured 8 per net-night ≥ 10 inches	
Quality Size ≥ 15"	37%
Preferred Size ≥ 20"	6%



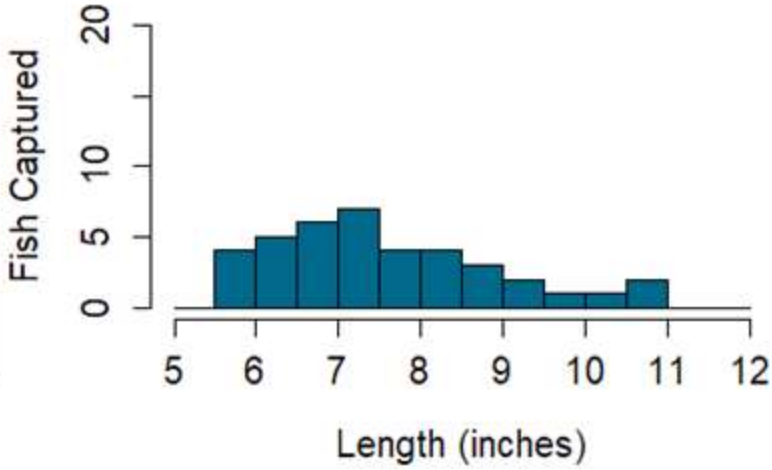
NORTHERN PIKE

Captured 5 per net-night ≥ 14 inches	
Quality Size ≥ 21"	22%
Preferred Size ≥ 28"	3%



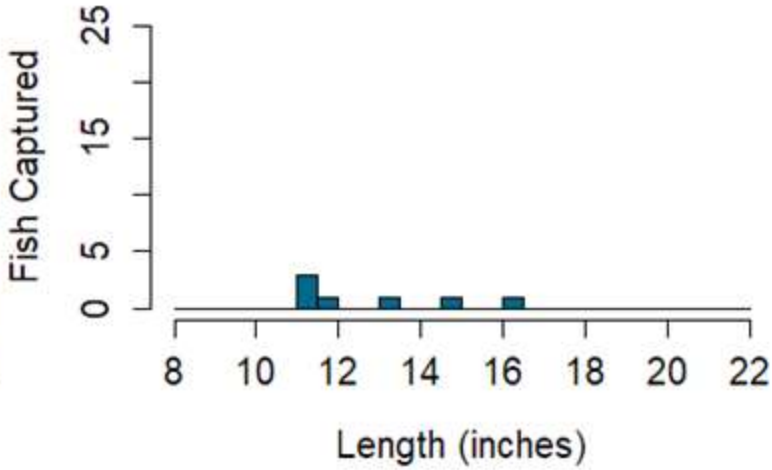
YELLOW PERCH

Captured 1.3 per net-night ≥ 5 inches	
Quality Size ≥ 8"	33%
Preferred Size ≥ 10"	8%



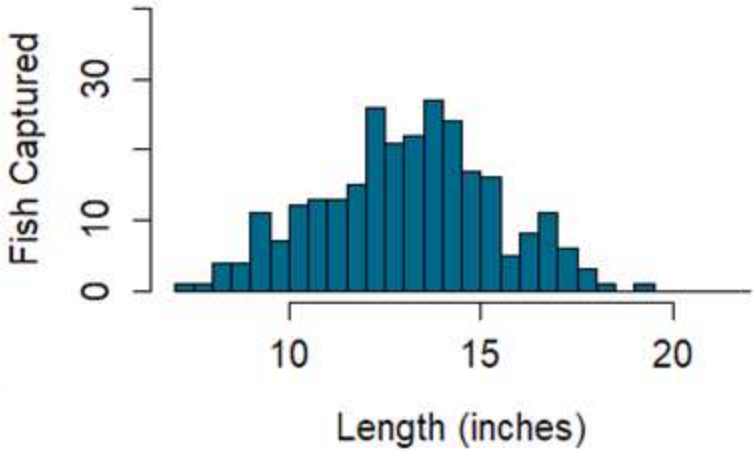
LARGEMOUTH BASS

Captured 0.6 per mile ≥ 8 inches	
Quality Size ≥ 12"	43%
Preferred Size ≥ 15"	14%



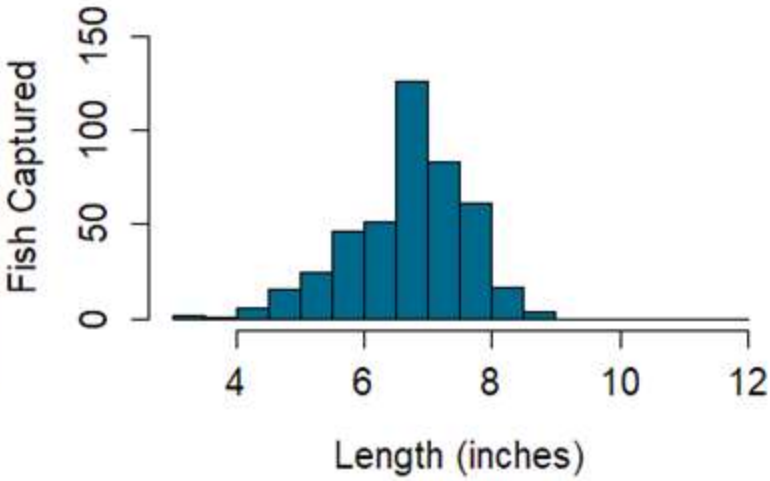
SMALLMOUTH BASS

Captured 23 per net mile ≥ 7 inches	
Quality Size ≥ 11"	80%
Preferred Size ≥ 14"	34%
Memorable Size ≥ 17"	4%



BLUEGILL

Captured 148 per mile ≥ 3 inches	
Quality Size ≥ 6”	78%
Preferred Size ≥ 8”	5%



SUMMARY OF RESULTS

This survey effort targeted the east side of the Chippewa Flowage. Timing of the netting portion of the survey was considered to be best for muskellunge and black crappie, which were moving into shallow bays at the time. Northern pike and walleye had finished spawning at this point, which likely reduced catch rates for these species. Water level was very low at the time of the netting survey, but that was not believed to impact catch of target species. The electrofishing survey was well-timed for bass and bluegill.

MUSKELLUNGE

We captured nine muskellunge in the three nights of netting, which represents a moderate catch rate. Two of the nine were over 40 inches. This was just a small snapshot of the muskellunge fishery in this massive waterbody. Captured muskies were a mix of natural born and stocked, based on tagging information retrieved from the fish. Two male muskies captured in this survey were stocked in 2016 and are now 36-37 inches in length at age-8. The biggest musky captured was a tagged female that had grown about 8 inches over the last 8 years since she was last captured. These are examples of the kind of data that we are able to get from these tags. Combined with data from other fish we are able to learn about growth, movement, and stocking survival of muskellunge in this population. The minimum length limit for muskellunge on the Chippewa Flowage is 50 inches and the daily bag limit is 1.

BLACK CRAPPIE

Black crappie were captured at a relatively high rate, indicating netting was well-timed and net locations were suitable. Of course, this also indicates an abundant population of crappie. One in five crappie were over 10 inches, but many were in the

8-10 inch range. The daily bag limit for panfish on the Chippewa Flowage is 10 per day (all species combined) and there is no minimum length limit.

WALLEYE

Walleye were not a target species, but they were captured incidentally as a part of this survey. We cannot make broad conclusions about walleye abundance based on this survey, but some tentative conclusions about size structure are possible. About a third of captured walleye were over the minimum length limit of 15 inches, and an additional 6% were over 20 inches. Size has generally been higher on the west side of the Chippewa Flowage compared to the east side (where this survey occurred) in recent years.

NORTHERN PIKE

Like walleye, northern pike had finished spawning by the time this survey was conducted and were caught incidentally. Size structure of pike collected in the survey was generally poor, with only 22% meeting the definition of “quality size” (21 inches). The daily bag limit for northern pike in the Chippewa Flowage is 10 and there is no minimum length limit. Anglers are encouraged to harvest small pike as a part of their regular harvest.

YELLOW PERCH

Yellow perch are the least common and least popularly targeted of the major panfish species in the Chippewa Flowage, based on past creel surveys. Still, they offer some opportunities to anglers and are an important link in the aquatic food web. We found perch up to 11 inches in this survey, though capture rate was generally low.

LARGEMOUTH BASS

Largemouth bass are less common on the east side of the Chippewa Flowage compared to the west side, which was reconfirmed by this survey. Capture rate for largemouth bass was low, especially in comparison to smallmouth bass. Size was modest, with a little less than half of the largemouth bass being over 12 inches. There is no minimum length limit for largemouth bass in the Chippewa Flowage, and the daily bag limit is 5 (combined with smallmouth bass).

SMALLMOUTH BASS

Smallmouth bass are the more abundant of the two bass species on the east side of the Chippewa Flowage. The electrofishing survey was well-timed to capture smallmouth bass when they were shallow. Capture rate was relatively high, compared

to past surveys and other area lakes. However, size was not exceptional, with few smallmouth over 17 inches being captured. The minimum length limit for smallmouth bass is 14 inches and the daily bag limit is 5 (combined with largemouth).

BLUEGILL

Bluegill were captured at a moderate rate that is in line with what is typically observed in this lake. Size of bluegill should have some appeal to anglers, with a high percentage of bluegill in the 6-8 inch range and 5% over 8 inches.

Survey Crew: Max Wolter, Scott Braden, Evan Sirianni and Brody Fisher
Reviewed and approved by Aaron Cole