



# 2022 SPRING FISHERIES SURVEY SUMMARY

## LAKE LAC COURTE OREILLES, SAWYER COUNTY

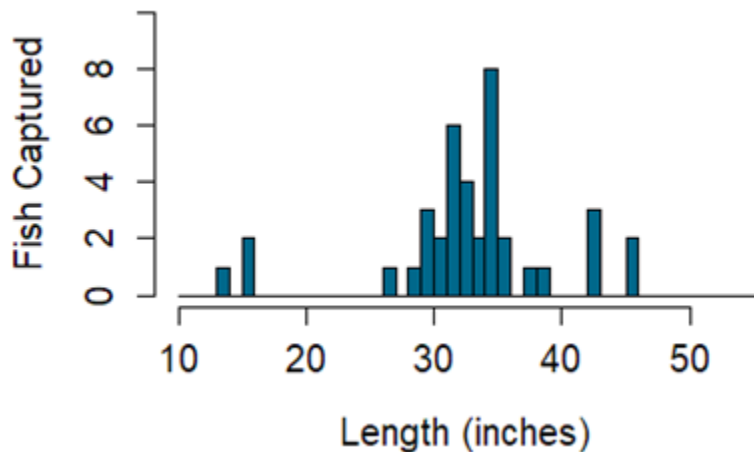
Report by Max Wolter

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Hayward Fisheries Management Team conducted a fyke netting survey on Lake Lac Courte Oreilles (LCO) from April 15-20, 2022. The primary species targeted were Muskellunge, Northern Pike and Walleye, but useful data were also gathered on Black Crappies. Up to ten nets were set overnight for five nights, which resulted in 46 total net-nights of effort (several nets were compromised by wind). 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



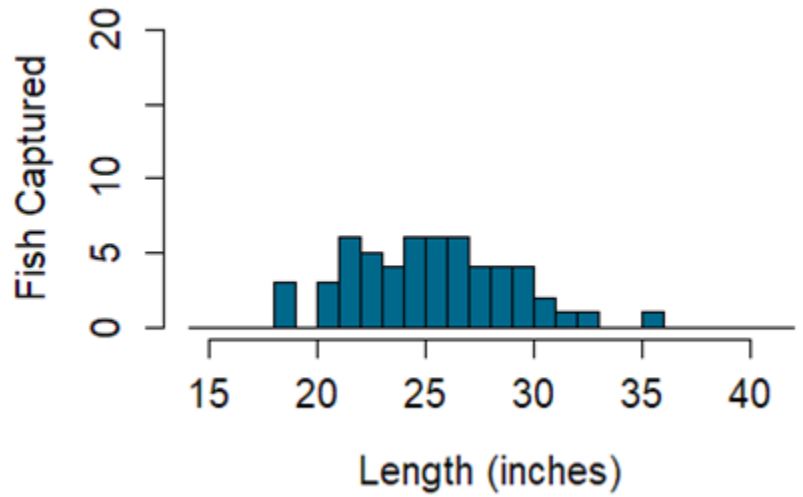
Captured 0.9 per net-night $\geq 20$ inches	
Quality Size $\geq 30$ "	55%
Memorable Size $\geq 42$ "	19%



### NORTHERN PIKE



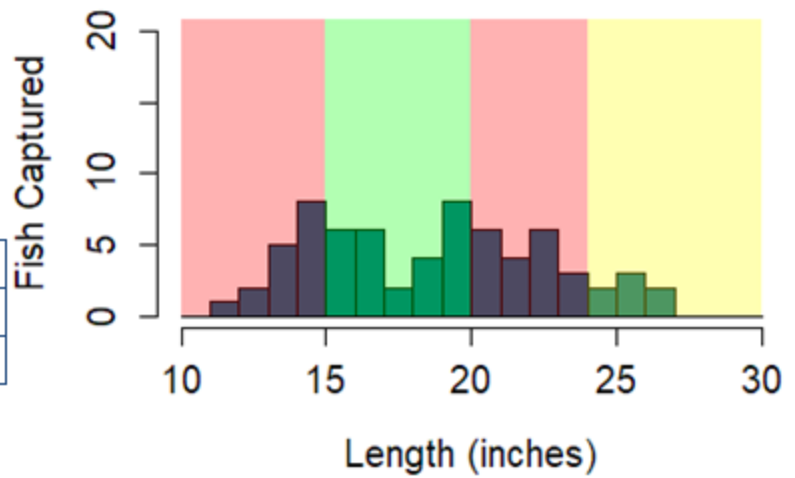
<b>Captured 1.2 per net-night <math>\geq</math> 14 inches</b>	
<b>Quality Size <math>\geq</math> 21"</b>	<b>89%</b>
<b>Preferred Size <math>\geq</math> 28"</b>	<b>23%</b>



### WALLEYE



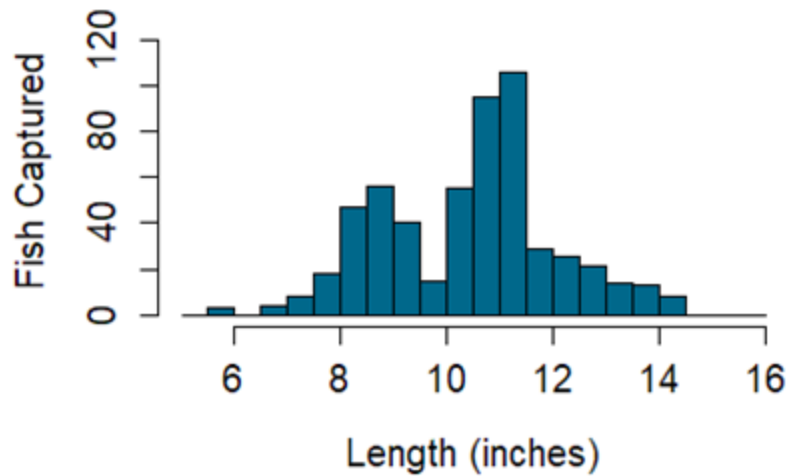
<b>Captured 1.5 per net-night <math>\geq</math> 10 inches</b>	
<b>Quality Size <math>\geq</math> 15"</b>	<b>76%</b>
<b>Preferred Size <math>\geq</math> 20"</b>	<b>38%</b>



### BLACK CRAPPIE



<b>Captured 12 per net-night <math>\geq</math> 5 inches</b>	
<b>Quality Size <math>\geq</math> 8"</b>	<b>94%</b>
<b>Preferred Size <math>\geq</math> 10"</b>	<b>66%</b>



## SUMMARY OF RESULTS

This netting survey was well-timed for Muskellunge and Black Crappie. We are presenting results for Walleye and Northern Pike with the caveat that the water temperature during the survey was not ideal for these two species. Nets were set as water temperature warmed into the mid-50°F range, though temperatures varied considerably throughout the system. Net locations were chosen to cover a variety of habitat types but were primarily selected to target spawning Muskellunge. LCO is a “Two-Story” lake, based on the DNR Fisheries lake class system. This name refers to the lake’s ability to provide coldwater habitat for Cisco, which often occupy deeper reaches of the lake (a “second story” of the fishery) during summer. This report will compare catch rates from LCO in 2022 to other lakes of this same type and past surveys.

### MUSKELLUNGE

This survey primarily targeted Muskellunge and was designed to help evaluate management efforts to increase the abundance of this species. Muskellunge capture rates in this survey (0.9 per net night) were higher than other recent surveys (e.g., 0.1 per net night in 2016) and were greater than the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile for this lake class. The bulk of the Muskellunge captured in 2022 were from a year class stocked in 2017. These can be seen in the size histogram above in the 29-36 inch range. We know most of these are stocked fish because they are carrying a tag that was implanted as they left the hatchery. The apparent success of this stocked year class is a major driving factor in the higher catch rate for Muskellunge in this survey. Stocked Muskellunge from the 2014 and 2021 year classes were also captured but at lower abundance. The 2021 year class is still very young, less than 20 inches in length, and not easily captured in netting surveys yet. There is a 50-inch minimum length limit for Muskellunge and a 1-fish daily bag limit in LCO.

### NORTHERN PIKE

Northern Pike have been a species of interest in LCO and have received considerable management attention in recent years. A pike removal was conducted in 2017 and 2018 with the goal of reducing pike abundance and improving size. While not perfectly timed for pike, this survey provided some data on the population. The pike catch rate remained low and size was excellent, with nearly one in four pike found to be over 28 inches. Anglers are encouraged to harvest pike, particularly smaller ones, to maintain this low-abundance/high-size structure population. There is no minimum length limit for Northern Pike, and anglers may harvest up to five per day.

## WALLEYE

This survey was not ideally timed for Walleye either, yet enough were captured to characterize the size structure of the population. A high percentage of the Walleye captured were over 20 inches. This reflects the low-density nature of the population and expected faster growth. This population has been supported primarily through stocking efforts by DNR and the Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Ojibwe, with the goal of increasing abundance and restoring natural reproduction. The Walleye regulation on LCO is a 15-inch minimum length limit, a 20-24-inch protected slot with only one fish over 24 inches, and a three fish daily bag limit.



DNR fisheries technician, Evan Sniadajewski, with a Greater Redhorse from Lac Courte Oreilles, one of 14 different species captured in this survey, and one few anglers encounter. Photo courtesy of Max Wolter

## BLACK CRAPPIE

Black Crappie were a true surprise and standout species in this survey. Black Crappie catch rates were higher than in past surveys of LCO (e.g., 1.6 per net night in 2016) and were greater than the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile for lakes in this class. Their size was excellent, despite higher-than-expected abundance. Most Black Crappie surveyed were over 10 inches, with many over 12 inches and even a handful over 14 inches captured. Black Crappie in LCO may be difficult for anglers to locate during different times of the year in the expansive basins of LCO. The daily bag limit for panfish on LCO is 25 (for all panfish species combined).

## OTHER SPECIES

Other species captured at low rates include Yellow Perch, Golden Redhorse, Greater Redhorse, Largemouth Bass, Smallmouth Bass and Longnose Gar. Some of these species are fairly abundant in LCO but are not very susceptible to netting gear. Considerable numbers of White Sucker and Bluegill were captured, but details on those species are not included in this report.

Survey Crew: Max Wolter, Scott Braden and Evan Sniadajewski, with volunteers Mike Persson and Dan Richards.

*Reviewed and approved by Aaron Cole*