



Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee

Established by the Department of Natural Resources to improve and maintain fishery resources of Lake Huron through better communication and partnership.

Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee Hybrid Meeting Minutes
In-person/Online Zoom Sea Grant Assisted Meeting
Tuesday April 26, 2022
10:30 am - 3:00 pm
Approved

Attendees: Frank Krist, Randy Claramunt, David Fielder, Jason Gostiaux, Jeff Jolley, Meaghan Gass, Laura Ogar, Brandon Schroeder, Tom Frontjes, Julie Shafto, Tom Peterson, Tom Baird, David Cozad, Dana Serafin, April Simmons, Gene Kirvan, Dan Manyen, Tom Keerl, Greg Gumbrecht, Jim De Clerck, Ed Blissick, Mike Kelly, Ed Beckley, Mike Veine, Dick Zook, Donna Wesander, Christian LeSage, Ed Roseman, Nick Torsky, Tim O'Brien, Lawrence Atkin, Todd Grischke, Fred Sterns, Lakon Williams, Kevin Postma, Randy Terrian, Craig Milkowski, Patrick Hartsig, Seth Herbst, Todd Wills, Tom Heritier, Tess Nelkie, Chris Schelb, Paul Stowe, Ed Retherford, Jeff Moss, Bob Hobkirk, Roger Bergstedt, Tom Andris, Steve Griffin, Jim Johnson, Marty Jones, Andrew Briggs, Jim Dexter, Judy Ogden, David Borgeson, Damon Brown, Steve Lenart, Eric Andersen, Tim Cwalinski, Richard Haslett, Dan Sampson, Blaise Pewinski, Ed Eisch, Emily Aisthorpe, Drew Bias, Seth Roy, Bryan Darland, Gary Decker, Denise Purvis and Amber Frye.

Welcome and Introductions (Frank Krist, and Randy Claramunt, DNR Lake Huron Basin Coordinator).

Frank thanked Jay's Sporting Goods for allowing the Committee to meet in their excellent meeting room and having all the tables setup and arranged. Frank also thanked Amber Frye from the Southern Lake Huron Management Unit for recording the minutes. Before the meeting began, he mentioned that the audio of the meeting would be recorded to assist in preparing the minutes.

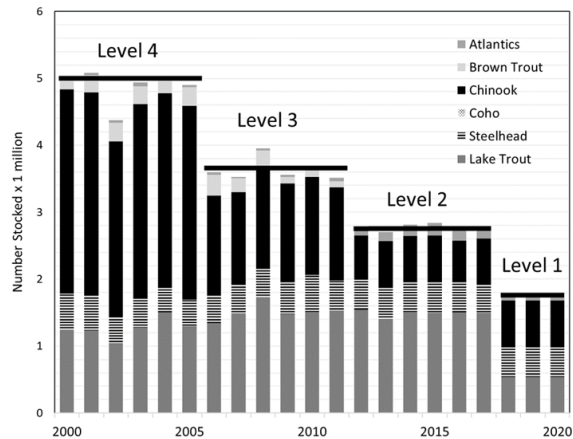
With lake trout stocking increases in southern and central Lake Huron on hold, is there potential of increasing stocking of other species such as Atlantic Salmon or Coho Salmon? (Randy Claramunt; Dr. Jeff Jolley, Southern Lake Huron Unit Supervisor; Jason Gostiaux, DNR Fishery Biologist; April Simmons DNR Fishery Biologist; Tim Cwalinski, Senior Fishery Biologist, and others).

Randy Claramunt: Ken Merckel was working with the Great Lakes Fishery Commission to obtain approval for reinstating stocking of lake trout in southern Lake Huron since the recruitment of young fish is not keeping up with the harvest of older fish. I have been communicating with representatives from Ontario and they are receptive to exploring the idea of stocking species other than lake trout. In 2018, lake trout stocking was cut by 66%, which is nearly a million less fish and those cuts have been perceived as having detrimental effects to the fishery in Lake Huron. In the past, the lake trout that were stocked in the Great Lakes were reared both in the Marquette State Fish Hatchery and in US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) hatcheries. Over time, the DNR has shifted to producing only 100,000 lake trout which are stocked in inland waters only. Since the DNR no longer stocks lake trout in the Great Lakes we had to work through the Great Lakes Fishery Commission to obtain permission from USFWS to stock lake trout. The USFWS wanted endorsement from all parties that manage Lake Huron, including Ontario and the tribes. As we have reported several times, we have encountered resistance to stocking more lake trout.

The DNR needed to pivot into a new proposal which would move into Level 2 of the Salmon and Trout Management Plan as shown on the slide below.

Major Components of the Plan

- ▶ Stocking levels 1-4 defined by total number of fish and associated consumption demand (CD) based on predator equivalent
- ▶ Agreement at the time of the plan development that Level 1 was in balance with overall prey fish production
- ▶ Adjustment to stocking levels would be set in concert with State of the Lake (SOL) process which is one a five-year rotation
- ▶ Within a level, species compositions could vary within predator equivalency ratios (PERs).



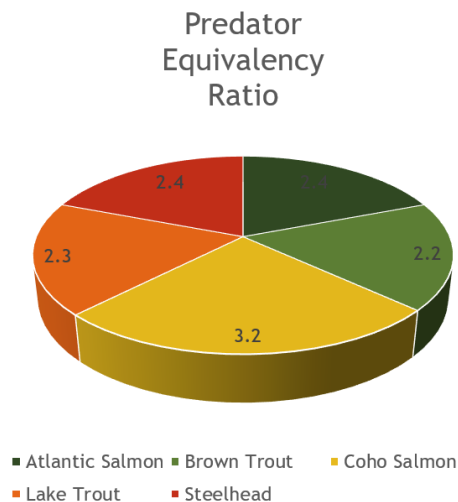
Using Level 2, a proposal of increased stocking was presented to the Great Lakes Fishery Commission Lake Huron Committee (LHC) that would utilize non-lake trout salmonids. This proposal went to the LHC in March, and it received approval to move forward. The various Levels are based on historic stocking strategies. Without stocking lake trout in Southern Lake Huron, we are at Level 1. This coming field season there will be an intensive effort to assess the lower trophic levels and prey fish abundance by two reviews: the lake wide assessment through the EPA and the State of the Lake through the Great Lakes Fishery Commission. If the results are favorable, then non-lake trout salmonid stocking can be increased otherwise a reevaluation of the proposal will be made.

Chinook is the only species that eggs are collected in the fall to stock in the spring. Other species are usually raised in the hatchery for approximately 18 months, so we need to begin discussing a strategy now to establish a fish production plan for this proposal in order to stock fish in 2023. We are definitely looking for input.

What is the consumption demand at level 2? We calculate a consumption demand with a Chinook salmon equivalent. A Chinook is the largest consumer of prey fish compared to the other trout and salmon species. A Chinook stocked in the spring will live 2-3 years (average) and can grow to 20-25 pounds. Diet information is used to estimate the amount of prey one Chinook salmon consumes in its lifetime and calculations are made with the other trout and salmon species to estimate the amount of fish they eat in comparison to Chinook. Since a Chinook eats the most during its lifetime on average, it has a Predator Equivalency Ratio of 1 and the other species have

a higher ration. For example, in the slide below, Coho have a Predator Ration Equivalency of 3.2 which means that 3.2 Coho eat as much prey as 1 Chinook during their lifetime.

Species, predator equivalency ratios (PER), and factors considered in the stocking strategy for Lake Huron.



► Considerations for Species

- Catchability
- Cost-effectiveness
- Feeding ecology
- Movement-straying
- Wild recruitment
- Social-economic benefits



The slide below in the left column shows that during 2018-2022, the stocking strategy at Level 1 is 1.25 million salmonids made up of: 180,000 Atlantic Salmon, 700,000 Chinook, 100,000 Coho, 540,000 lake trout, 550,000 rainbow trout/steelhead

Numbers of fish stocked and associated Consumption Demand Levels (CDLs) in millions.

► Approximate CD Levels:

- 1=1.27
- 2=1.52
- 3=2.44
- 4=3.92

► Predator composition can vary

► In 2018, our CD was:

- 0.08 ATS (180,000 fish)
- 0.70 CHS (700,000 fish)
- 0.03 Coho (100,000 fish)
- 0.23 LAT (540,000 fish)
- 0.23 RBT (550,000 fish)

► Proposed 2023 CD Level 2 of 1.40

► Predator increase mainly for Coho

► Approximate composition:

- 0.08 ATS (180,000 fish)
- 0.75 CHS (750,000 fish)
- 0.11 Coho (350,000 fish)
- 0.23 LAT (540,000 fish)
- 0.23 RBT (550,000 fish)



We are proposing going to Consumption Demand Level 2 of 1.5 million by adding additional predators at this ratio as shown in the right column of the slide above. If we added lake trout, we would be at the 1.5 million/second level, but because we are not able to add additional lake trout, while managing at Level 2 with these predator equivalents, other trout and salmon may be substituted.

With the approach of using predator equivalents, the amount of prey that will be consumed by the various species during their lifetime is used to ensure that the available prey is not exceeded. Assessing the outcome with lake trout is difficult because calculating the amount of prey consumed during their lifetime at the time of stocking is difficult because they can survive 7 years to 27 years or more. With Coho, the outcome is more reliable since they have a short life span, which provides more flexibility to adjust quickly if stocking changes are needed.

Currently, Coho appear to be the most reasonable option to increase stocking. This spring they have produced an exceptionally good fishery at the southern ports with limit catches and waiting lines at boat lunches. This is happening despite the relatively small number that is stocked in Lake Huron. The slide below summarizes the proposal of moving to Level 2 and increasing Coho stocking

Proposal for CD Level 2 Stocking - 2023

- ▶ Increase Coho Salmon stocking of yearling (preferred) or fall fingerling
- ▶ Agreement reached at the LHC but would still need to be vetted internally
- ▶ Limited by hatchery production (preliminary estimate of increased production is 100,000 yearlings and 150,000 fall fingerlings)
- ▶ Stocking locations could be discussed
- ▶ Benefits of Coho Salmon Option
 - ▶ Returns of our current stocking very strong support capacity for increased stocking
 - ▶ Limited capacity in the hatchery system
 - ▶ The consumptive demand is low
 - ▶ Catchability is high
 - ▶ Based on their short life span, any impacts could be reversed quickly with changes in stocking

2019  2023

Lake Huron Salmon and Trout Management Process



Questions and Answers

Question: Why are walleye not used in the calculations to determine the number of fish to stock?

Answer: Walleye and other non-trout and salmon species are not considered because the Salmon and Trout Management Plan typically focuses on the Main Basin, not the inner Saginaw Bay where the majority walleye spend most of their time. In addition, since walleye are not stocked, they are not considered in the calculations.

Question: What is the percentage of wild Cohos?

Answer: We do not have the ability to answer that because we are not marking the Coho. The preference and outcome would be to mark all salmonids for stocking in Lake Huron. The consideration of stocking Coho initially was that there was natural reproduction taking place due to what was showing up in Southern Lake Huron, but not enough to build a fishery. A guess would be that 10% in the 10,000 to 30,000 fish range are naturally reproduced. Even stocking efforts at 100,000 Coho would probably not establish a fishery because much spawning habitat in Lake Huron would not be colonized. Fisheries Division is advocating for marking all stocked salmon and trout in the Great Lakes so hopefully that will happen soon.

Question: Will yearling or fall fingerling Coho be stocked?

Answer: We prefer yearlings, but if fall fingerlings are available, we would take them also depending on limitations from Platte Hatchery and with Coho production. An agreement has been reached so we can move forward. The goal is to have an additional 100,000 yearlings and 150,000 fall fingerlings available each year depending on production levels and egg takes. Even though the consumptive demands at Level 2 would allow more fish to be stocked, a total of 350,000 Coho being stocked in Lake Huron would produce an incredible opportunity.

Question: In 2018, lake trout stocking in the Michigan waters of Lake Huron was reduced by nearly 1 million fish. This reduction in lake trout predation pressure should leave significant prey space available to stock other species so it would seem that if there was room in the hatcheries more than 350,000 Coho could be safely stocked in Lake Huron.

Answer: Stocking even more fish is a possibility that could be discussed but it appears currently that the only other species that could be considered because of limited hatchery space is Chinook. Atlantic salmon and steelhead are at capacity. When considering stocking Chinook for 1 year in 2020 when steelhead were not available, the Advisors were concerned and did support the proposal since it could possibly impact the recovering smelt population.

Question: Chinook would put a lot of pressure on mid-level pelagic prey, which appears to be recovering. If it wasn't a limitation in the hatchery, do you think more of these general feeders could possibly have room in the food web?

Answer: The Atlantic Salmon presentation will show that their size and growth in Lake Huron indicate they are finding plenty of food. Both the Atlantic Salmon and steelhead are generalist feeders that put less stress on pelagic prey fish. If it wasn't a limitation in the hatchery, we could consider stocking more of them. The feeding ecology behind the steelhead and Atlantic Salmon is very similar. We need to be cautious with changing stocking levels of steelhead since the ongoing mass marking program will continue for another 2 years and hopefully much data will be obtained that will help in making decisions.

Question: Lake Michigan would take all the Kings they could get from Lake Huron. Could we trade for maybe 400,000 Coho from Platte Bay and give them Chinook equivalents from Lake Huron?

Answer: The number of Coho going into Platte Bay is actually 700,000 fish not 1.4 million and this plant is critical because it is the sole egg take source. Trading fish across the lakes is a tricky situation. It is better to analyze what the prey fish situation is like in Lake Michigan and what can be sustained and review the goals we are trying to meet with the predator-prey dynamic in Lake Huron. A significant benefit of the Coho fishery, as shown with the St. Clair River, is it provides more accessibility for shore and small boat anglers.

Question: In the past few years on Lake Michigan, the brown trout returns for fishermen is nonexistent. Should brown trout stocking be eliminated, and Coho increased?

Answer: Diversity is key in promoting stability in the overall fishery. Currently, an evaluation of the remaining brown trout stocking sites in Lake Michigan is being undertaken and a decision will be made whether those plants will continue. In the end, reintroducing Coho and measuring their performance is a better strategy in Lake Huron than moving forward on brown trout having seen the poor returns in Lake Michigan and with similar results in a previous Lake Huron study. Keeping and promoting a diverse fishery in Lake Huron is a sound strategy. **Note:** see the brown trout discussion at the bottom of this page.

Question: Are we going to do anything with the spring steelhead limit? I am seeing an uptick in people from the west side coming over here to the east side because they can keep more fish.

Answer: Currently, there are no plans for regulation changes on Lake Huron streams for steelhead bag limits. The Committee could discuss a regulatory change but perhaps wait until the results of the mass marking data are obtained and analyzed.

Question: In Lake Michigan, the majority of Coho migrate and are caught by other states. One concept would be to put a Coho plant in Swan Creek for a backup egg take location along with the resulting fish movement being more beneficial for more anglers on the Michigan side.

Answer: We have considered using the Swan as a backup egg source. Some of the issues is the weir structure which is mostly designed for Chinook and because of the location in treaty waters it would require additional approval for changes in the salmonid stocking. We have our sole egg sources and have considered backup egg take strategies like mobile egg take for Atlantic Salmon at Lexington. These are options that have been considered.

Question: Why don't Coho get stocked in Cheboygan, as they traditionally move southward early in the season and move northerly throughout the summer providing fishing opportunities along the entire shoreline?

Answer: The goal is to investigate Coho stocking and the Committee will provide recommendations on stocking locations.

Brown Trout Discussion:

Comment: A lot of brown trout are being caught near Tawas, north of Au Gres. They are not stocked in the area, but anglers are catching them despite not targeting them and they appear to be wild brown trout. Increasing brown trout stocking in that area might be successful.

Comment: Jim Johnson mentioned that hatchery raised brown trout have pectoral fin injury and as they grow back the fins are not straight. Jim has reviewed many photos of the brown and they have no apparent pectoral fin damage and appear to be wild fish. Normally when brown trout are stocked, they spend extended periods near their stocking sites where they are extremely vulnerable to predation. Perhaps since the brown trout could be reproducing and growing far upstream, possibly predation is not a serious issue. Another factor might be that wild fish gradually migrate to Lake Huron and attract much fewer predators than a stocking event resulting in increase overall survival.

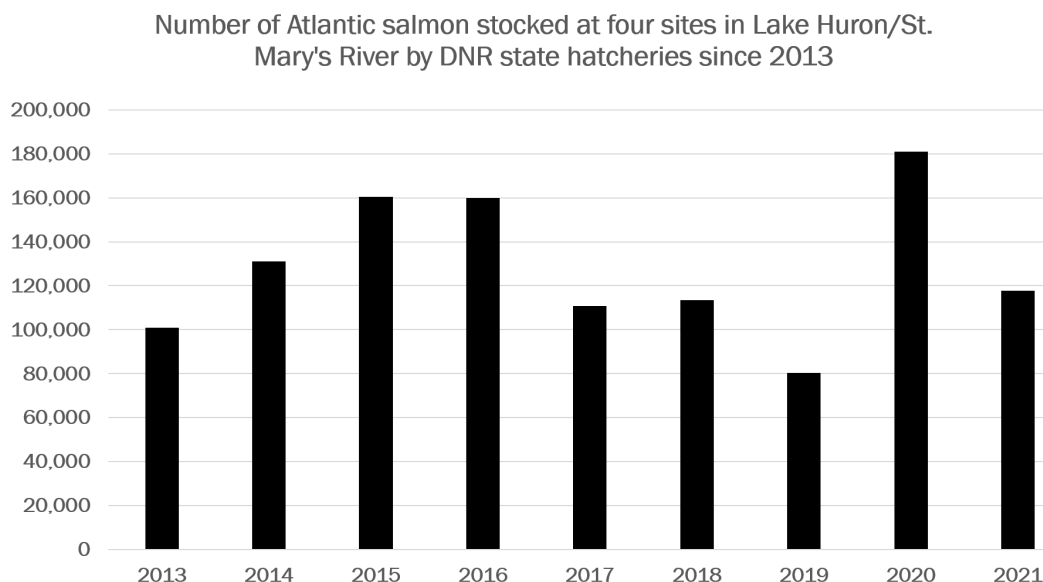
Comment: Stocking of Brown Trout for East Br Au Gres River was moved upstream to Carpenter Rd. This might provide justification for a brown trout stocking strategy of having them marked to determine if and how they are contributing to the fishery.

Polling the group for support of the stocking of Coho.

Frank asked if there was any opposition to pursuing stocking additional Coho in Lake Huron and there was no voiced opposition. The members support exploring additional Coho stocking in Lake Huron with the numbers and ports to be discussed at upcoming meetings. Fish production staff needs to know the number requested prior to fall egg take for stocking of fingerlings in the fall of 2023 and yearlings in the spring of 2024.

Randy Claramunt presented Tim Cwalinski's Atlantic Salmon returned presentation

Randy Claramunt: The Atlantic Salmon were coded wire tagged which is providing much information from fish harvested by anglers. In 2020 we reached our target of 180,000 fish for the first time, see slide below:

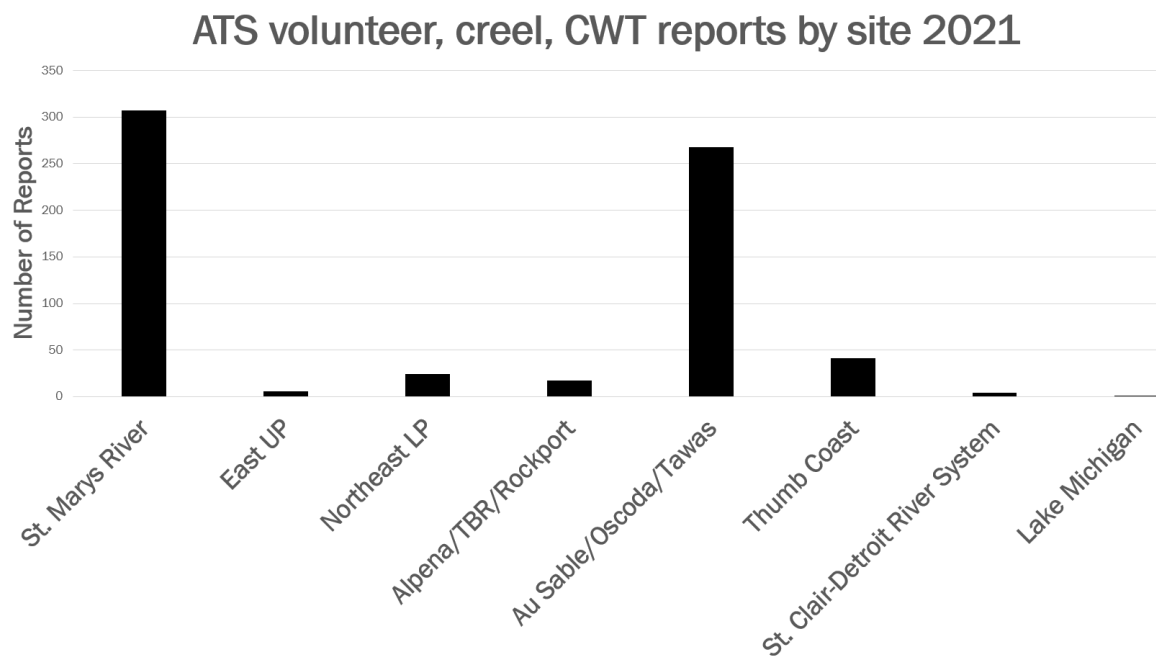


When we talk about stocking in 2020, we are talking about fish in the 2019 year class so when we talk about coded wire tags this is in reference to the age of the fish or year class, not the year it was stocked. Also, in 2020 the pandemic hit when we were about halfway through marking, including those that were stocked by Lake Superior State University. So, during 2020, 210,000 total Atlantic Salmon were stocked but about 90,000 were not clipped. The Atlantic Salmon

stocked in the Au Sable River and the Thunder Bay River were not clipped while the fish stocked by the state in the St Marys River and Lexington were AD clipped. In addition, about ½ of the Atlantic Salmon stocked in the St Marys River by Lake Superior State University were fin clipped by hand. This poses some challenges when we look at the returns when only about half of stocked Atlantic salmon for Lake Huron were clipped. Additionally, we did not have creel clerks gathering bio-data so there were estimates of harvest but no bio-data taken. Despite the adversities from the impacts from Covid, the catch return rates were still high.

Suggestion: Having updated fin clip posters placed at fish cleaning stations and the launch sites would encourage more anglers to provide data.

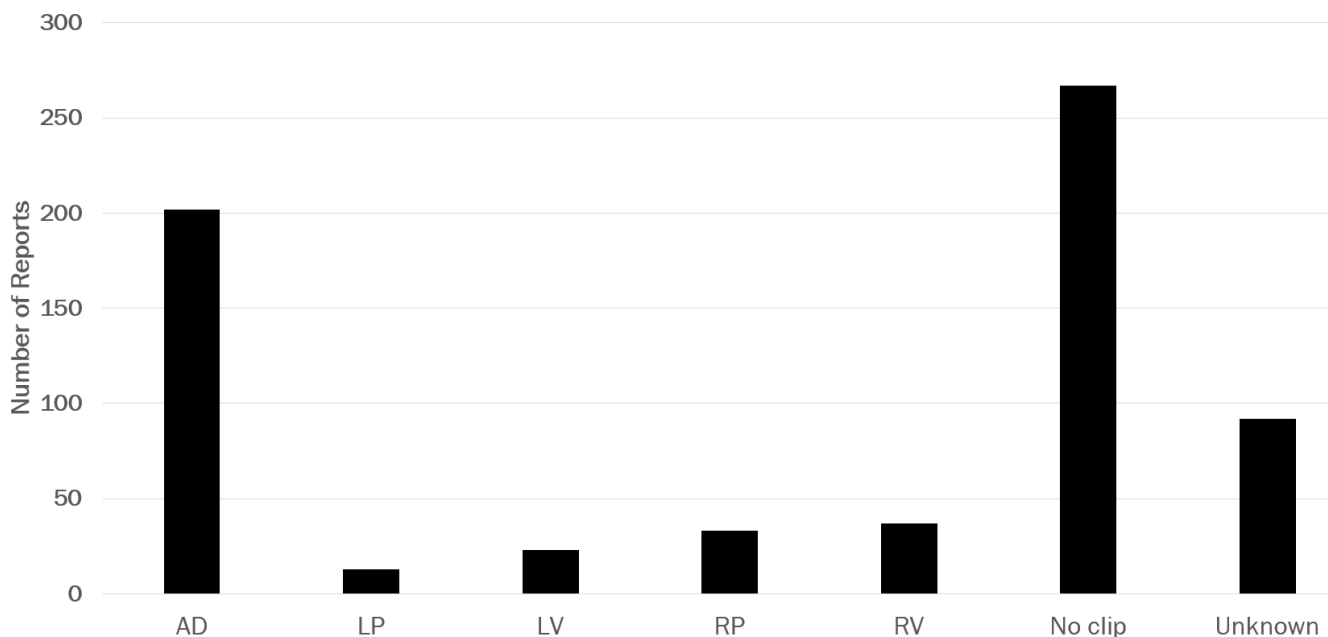
There were many Atlantic Salmon reported caught during 2021 by volunteer information, creel surveys and Code Wire Tag reports as shown on the slide below:



Captures of non-clipped fish were quite high across many of the ports. Potentially, survival was higher for the non-clipped Atlantic salmon and may be a result of less stressful handling of the fish. Fish that are hand-clipped are put under more physical stress and as a result may have higher mortality. This could be circumvented by the use of mass-marking trailers that minimize handling the fish. The reason for the high return reports from the Au Sable River area is because of the intense work of Randy Terrian and there is a dedicated group of charter captains and guides that provide much information from the St. Marys River. Even though the catch rates appear down at the other ports, caution must be used since there are not as many volunteers involved with reporting data at these other sites. Some anglers are not as energized to collect samples since they have been doing it for several years. The reward program for turning in Coded Wire Tagged fish heads provided by the Great Lakes Salmon Initiative is very helpful and appreciated.

The slide below shows that the return of the non-clipped Atlantic Salmon was very high.

Clips of ATS from volunteer angler reports, creel, and the CWT program 2021



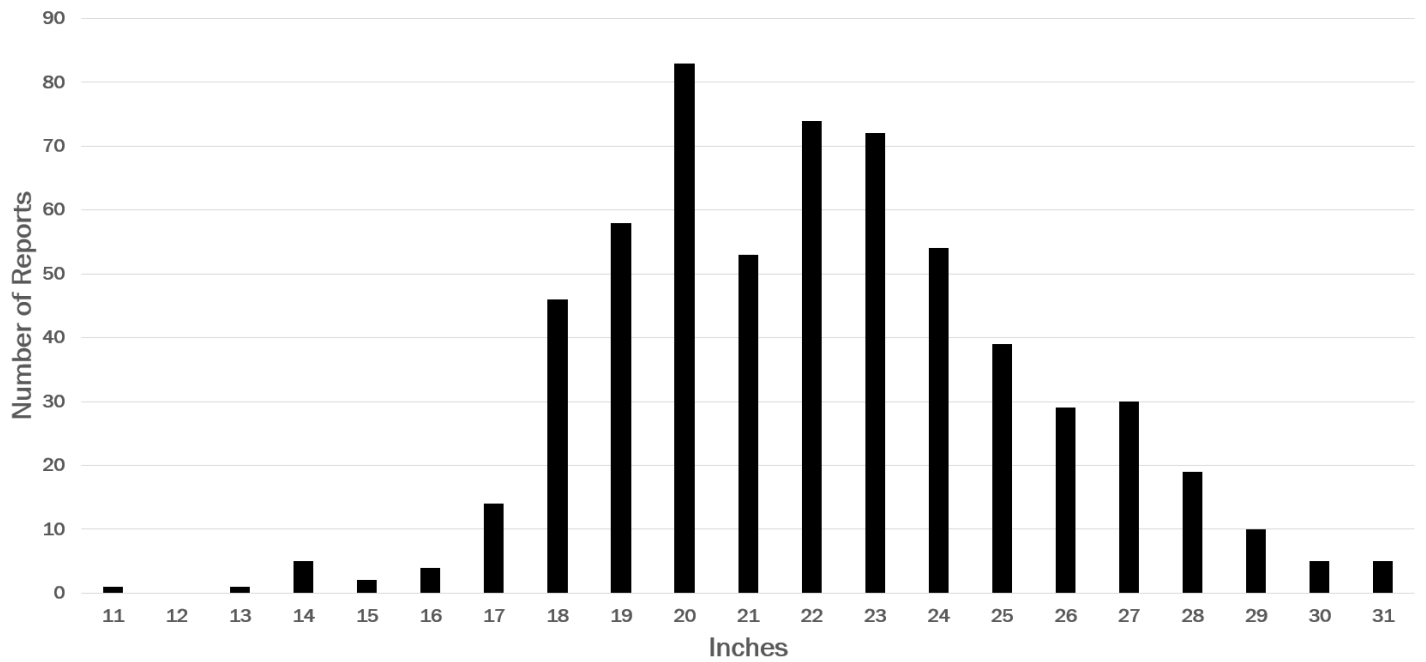
The non-clipped fish were showing up in good numbers at nearly all the ports. This included non-clipped DNR and Lake Superior State University (LSSU) Atlantic Salmon. Since marking trailers were not available to mark the Atlantic Salmon, the DNR marked fish had to be hand marked and were handled more intensely which may have reduced the survival. Even LSSU that regularly marks the fish by hand, noticed a significant increase in return from the non-clipped fish. This seems to indicate that hand marking fish might decrease survival while trailer marking with less handling of the fish might increase survival.

Marking fish is very important since Mathew Zink, who conducted the Atlantic Salmon Economic Study, indicated that the Coded Wire Tagged fish data were critical to complete the work. Matt would like to share his results with the Committee so we should invite him to provide a presentation.

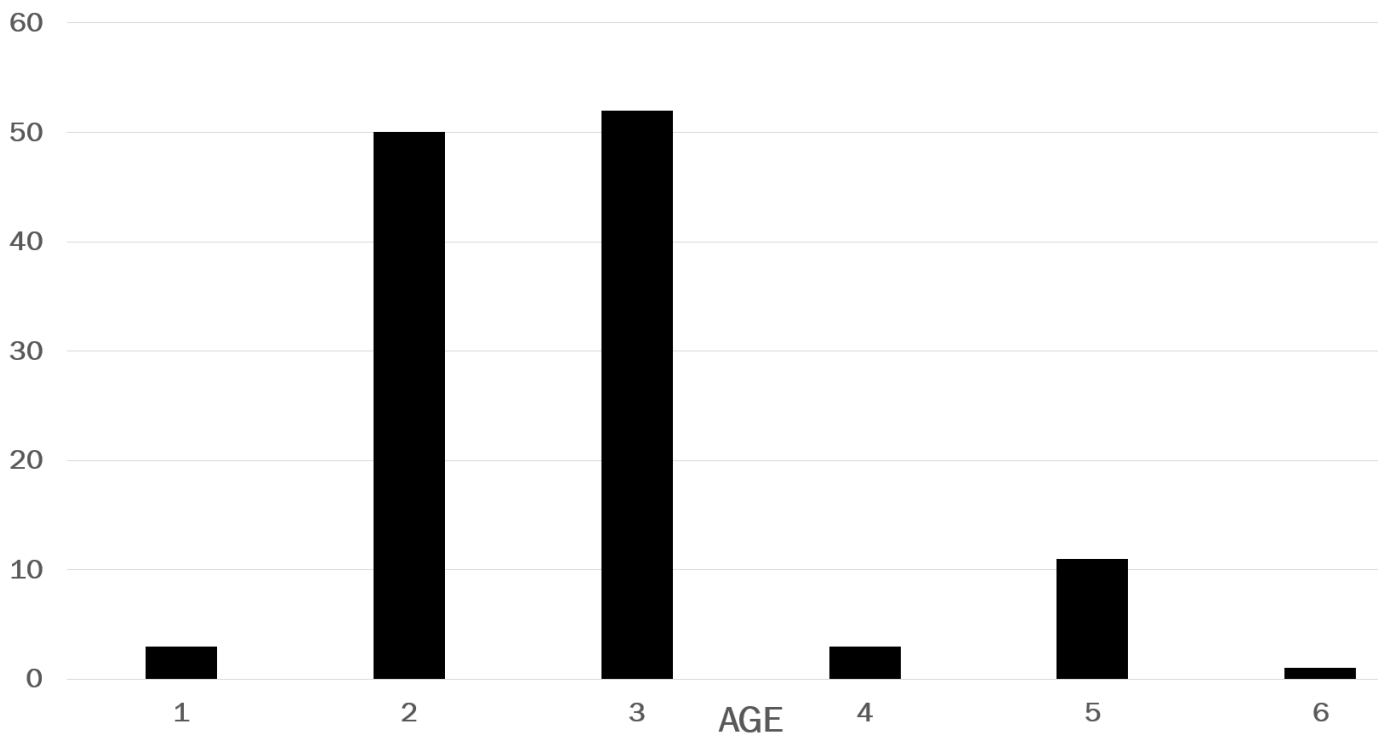
The age and growth of Atlantic Salmon are very good. Fish are still showing up from the excellent 2015 and 2016 year classes. During 2021, remarkably six year old Atlantic Salmon were showing up in the catch. This is the first time Atlantic Salmon this old have been reported from Lake Huron and possibly this is a record for the Great Lakes.

The two slides below show the length and age distribution of the Atlantic Salmon caught in 2021

Lengths of ATS reported by volunteers, creel, and the CWT program
2021



Ages of ATS from CWT samples in 2021, n=120



Interviews with the public describing the impacts caused by the heavy decline of the Chinook Salmon fishery in the Rogers City Area (Cason Pritchard, Central Michigan University).

Carson Pritchard, affiliated with Central Michigan University, presented his portion of a pilot project that studied the human dimension of the Great Lake salmon fishery crash which was funded by the Great Lakes Fishery Commission. Carson's project focused on creating an oral history collection that would serve as a permanent, scholarly account of the event by interviewing community members. Carson wanted to learn what impact the fishery had on various citizens within the community including both anglers and non-anglers. For example, during a three day weekend, 1,100 anglers visited the community to fish in a tournament and caught over 1,500 salmon that weighed over 20,000 pounds. With a community of about 3,000 residents, this had a tremendous impact. It was apparent that nearly everyone in the community was affected by this major influx of visitors.

The persons being interviewed knew that their comments would be in a permanent public record and they would have an opportunity to review the interview and make clarifications if needed before interview would be added to the collection. This ensures that the data reflect the input accurately from the participants.

A normal survey taken in a community might provide average points of view but the goal was to seek unique experiences. Recording the oral history with those that were not biologists or managers provided a scholarly record from a different point of view. The discussions had a timeframe of 30-120 minutes. The 18 interviews varied in their opinions of the impacts resulting from the fishery. All of the discussions can be heard at the Michiganology website by using this link: https://michiganology.org/uncategorized/SO_61851fe2-f6fe-4039-aaa5-48f680a864f0/

The next steps are to prepare a manuscript for a book with a guide to the entire collection and present at conferences of the Great Lakes Fisheries and anthropology.

How close is the stocking schedule that is being implemented this spring for Steelhead and Atlantic Salmon approaching the goals provided in the spreadsheets established in February 2021. (Ed Eisch, Fish Production Manager, and other Hatchery Staff).

Ed Eisch provided an update on stocking efforts for steelhead and Atlantic salmon using the preferred windows previously identified and listed in the Atlantic Salmon and Steelhead stocking spreadsheets. Ed has been engaged in communication with the hatchery biologists about the identified stocking windows and inquired if there were any challenges with these dates and with hatchery operations. Overall, the stocking events have been in the preferred timeframe but there are a couple of instances where meeting the timeframe was difficult but not impossible to work through. Some of the early steelhead stocking sites have shifted to later dates and created a challenge but were still doable. Stocking Atlantic salmon in their preferred timeframe has not been problematic whatsoever. Staff continues to be flexible.

Comment: Randy Terrian stressed the excellent coordination and cooperation he has experienced with the hatchery staff and managers to successfully stock the fish during this extremely busy

time at the hatcheries. Everyone is working together to improve the survival of the newly stocked fish

Comment: Tim Cwalinski mentioned that he has had very positive discussions with the hatchery staff and volunteers like Randy Terrian to coordinate the stocking. The first year of optimizing the stocking events is working out very well.

Thompson Hatchery Update: Construction was completed with significant modifications to the cold-water facility including a new feeding system that will maximize the growth of the fish, upgrades to the electrical distribution system, and recoating the hatchery raceways for better health maintenance. A new cool water facility was completed, and it is working extremely well. 20,000 muskies were very successfully raised this year. Currently, eggs taken from Little Bay de Noc are incubating and we are excited to see how walleye production goes in the ponds.

Question: What is the status of the of the *appropriations bill* for Fish Hatchery renovation?

Answer: The hope is to fund the original proposal of \$30 million dollars. The Bills are working through the Senate and House Appropriations Committees and the amount has been varying but we are still optimistic full funding will be approved. Infrastructure is extremely important right now, and critical for overall longevity and effectiveness of the facilities. Concerned individuals should contact Representatives and Senators in the Legislature. For reference review: SB839 and HB5789

Lake Trout overharvest in MH-1 from De Tour to Rogers City during 2021 with a reduction in daily bag limit for 2022. (Randy Claramunt and Frank Krist).

Due to exceeding the state recreational lake trout harvest quota in management unit MH-1 extending from De Tour to 7 miles east of Rogers City, reducing the daily bag limit from 3 lake trout to 2 lake trout is being proposed. According to the 1836 Treaty Waters Great Lakes Fishing Consent Decree, if the quota is exceeded by more than 15%, there must be a change in regulations to bring the harvest within limits the following year. The overharvest in 2021 was estimated to be 20.7% over the quota. Even though negotiations for a new Decree have been going on for over 2.5 years, the 2000 Consent Decree has been extended so the 2000 Consent Decree rules still apply.

During a similar lake trout overharvest, in 2018, the Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee recommended reducing the daily lake trout harvest bag limit in MH-1 from 3 to 2 fish. At that time, there was interest from some of the DNR Natural Resources Commissioners (NRC) for increasing the daily bag limit in MH-2 (Rogers City to Alpena) to 4 fish to provide additional opportunity in those adjacent waters where the quota was higher. The Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee recommended that increasing the daily lake trout bag limit in MH-2 to 4 fish would send the wrong message to the parties while the negotiations of a new Consent Decree were ongoing. The NRC decided after careful consideration and following the recommendations of the Advisors not to change the bag limit in MH-2 for the 2018 season.

Currently, a similar recommendation is on the table for the NRC to reduce the lake trout daily bag limit in MH-1 to 2 fish. In addition, there is an amendment of the original NRC proposal to

increase the daily lake trout bag limit in MH-2 from 3 to 4 fish. The NRC is looking for input on the proposed regulation changes for both MH-1 and MH-2.

Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee Advisor discussion of the proposed changes:

The Committee supported changing the bag limit in MH-1 to 2 fish while there was nearly unanimous support for maintaining the bag limit in MH-2 at 3 fish. The reasons given for not increasing the bag limit in MH-2 from 3 to 4 fish were:

- This is not a good time while a new Consent Decree is being negotiated,
- Avoid complications in regulations
- Increasing the bag limit in MH-2 could discourage anglers from visiting ports in MH-1.

Since some of the index ports in the 1836 Treat Waters were not directly creel in 2021 but instead estimates were used, it was suggested because of the extreme importance that all index ports have onsite creel surveys conducted to obtain the best data possible.

Comment: Commissioner David Cozad commented that the Advisory Committee is doing an excellent job in reviewing and sharing information. Based on comments and questions at the previous Natural Resource Commission meeting, the NRC is gathering input from this Committee and others to consider an amendment to allow for an increased daily bag limit for lake trout in MH-2 from 3 to 4 fish. The change being considered would increase the bag limit by 1 fish for one year to offset lost opportunity in MH1 as a result of a penalty from the over harvest. Considerations of passing this change includes the potential biological impact on the fishery and whether the change in MH-2 would lead to an allocation issue. Both were considered to have little or no likely impact.

Note: At the May 12, 2022, NRC meeting the proposal to reduce the daily bag limit of lake trout from 3 to 2 fish in MH-1 was approved with no change occurring in MH-2.

Review of opening the Lower Saginaw River to year-around fishing the entire year beginning in 2023 (Dr. Jeff Jolley; Dr. Dave Fielder, DNR Research Biologist, Jason Gostiaux and April Simmons).

Jeff Jolley provided an update of the ongoing preparations for the year around walleye fishery in the Lower Saginaw River. Evidence shows that the abundant walleye population in Saginaw Bay should be able to support the additional harvest in 2023 and this will allow more opportunities for shore and small boat anglers. The creel survey program will be expanded to gather additional data during this newly expanded fishery. We will also continue to monitor the walleye population through the extensive annual Saginaw Bay sampling surveys and other data collections. We have been communicating often with Law Enforcement and coordinating efforts to increase their presence and closely monitor activities during the new open season.

Access to the water is critical for allowing anglers to utilize the fishery so extensive surveys are being conducted to determine the status of the boat launches and access sites. Currently, in the Lower Saginaw River there are 12 boat launches and 500 parking sites that have been identified.

Work is continuing to improve the facilities and educate the public so anglers can easily find the access sites.

Major outreach efforts will continue. Besides the workshops, we are continuing to meet with groups and city leaders to discuss the potential impacts and prepare them for the possibility of additional anglers visiting the area. Law Enforcement will continue to take part in the discussions. Efforts will be made to communicate with the news media along with using various social platforms to inform the public of the changes.

We are very open and will continue to seek input from Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee and others as we prepare to move through the extended walleye season next year.

Dave Fielder Saginaw Bay Walleye Telemetry Project: Dave added to Jeff's outreach overview by suggesting to the Advisors and others that they should let them know if they would like fact sheets or other materials to assist in educating their members and others about the upcoming year around walleye season in the Lower Saginaw River beginning in 2023.

An ***acoustic telemetry study*** is beginning this May to determine which rivers and offshore reefs that the walleye use for spawning. The DNR is asking for volunteer Charter Captains to donate their time and work with DNR staff to capture 150 mature walleyes and surgically implant digital transmitters in each fish. During the spring of 2023, another 200 walleye will be implanted with transmitters. The fish will be released and be tracked closely for four years during the spawning season to determine where they are spawning. By next spring, receivers will be placed in the rivers along Saginaw Bay and throughout the Bay. In conjunction with other studies, there will be a good number of receivers located throughout the Bay and rivers, which should provide much data as the fish transmit continually their locations to the receivers. If a tagged fish is caught, there will be a reward of \$100 for the return of each transmitter.

Comment: Laura Ogar thanked the DNR staff for their hard work making the year around walleye fishery a success. She mentioned that access for shore anglers is critical, and the work being done to inventory and improve these sites will be beneficial. Laura also recommended that the new walleye fishery be marketed as an urban and shoreline fishery. This should motivate local and visiting anglers to enjoy this new opportunity.

Comment: It would be helpful to the public to post a sign at the Center Street Bridge so it is clear where the upstream boundary of the open season is located.

Comment: Placing refuge containers at the heavily used sites would help keep the public areas clean.

Progress toward obtaining funding to implement the Cormorant Management Program. (Randy Claramunt).

Last year was the first year of the new permit system and the DNR worked hard with federal partners to implement it. Across the United States, about 110,000 birds were approved to be removed including 75,000 across our region. We were the first state to apply, and we received our request of taking up to 10,500 cormorants in 2022.

Previously there were \$150,000 from the General Fund to support the program and contract with the US Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services to assist in controlling the birds. This line item was eliminated from the budget under the new management program and hasn't been reinstated. We identified 30 sites that needed some lethal control including 7 large colonies along with several inland lakes and stocking sites. Without these additional dollars, Wildlife Services was only able to control 3,000 birds in the large colonies using their very limited internal funding. We received a permit again this year for 9,650 birds and we have identified sites where lethal control will take place again including large colonies, inland lakes, and stocking sites.

The decision to add this expense back into the budget is a state decision, not a departmental decision. Because of this, stakeholders need to advocate for this program through their representatives if they wish to have similar funding become available. In order to control birds a volunteer must be certified with extensive training and background checks. Because the funding was eliminated there are not enough resources available for the DNR to certify volunteers for lethal control. A private entity could fund their own cormorant control and operate under a permit, but the same restrictions would be required. The cost for the DNR to implement a complete program to fund lethal control of approximately 10,000 birds would be about \$250,000.

More is being learned and new technologies are being developed that assist in controlling the birds with non-lethal methods such as the drones that are being used around aquaculture ponds. These drones can be programmed to identify cormorants and drive them away from the farm area.

Comment: Could the program be funded with private funds?

Answer: Yes, private funds could be used.

Question: Is oiling the eggs still being used to control the birds.

Answer: Yes, Wildlife Services is using this method to control the birds in the colonies.

Updates from agency representatives

Donna Wesander, DNR Charter Boat Program: Donna is retiring at the end of the week. Her position has been posted and is going through the process of hiring her replacement. Charter season has kicked off and all captains will be reporting online this year.

Frank thanked Donna for her many years of service and her willingness to support and share information with the Advisory Committees. ***Thank You Donna and enjoy your retirement!***

Cpl. Nick Torsky: Great Lakes Enforcement Unit (GLEU): Lt David Shaw, who was in charge of the Great Lakes Enforcement Unit, has been promoted to Chief of the Law Enforcement Division. GLEU has an acting Lieutenant and 2nd Lieutenant. Lt Terry Short retired and is working for the Great Lakes Fishery Commission. Several officers have or will be retiring but these vacancies are being filled regularly so we are at full staffing. A position stationed in the Escanaba area has been moved to Houghton to provide more coverage for the 1842 Treaty waters. There is still an officer stationed at Escanaba.

Ten previously certified police officers that were placed in the accelerated training class last year have been in the field since the beginning of the year. The rest of the officers in the class are in the

field completing their training and will be on their own during early summer. A new class will begin in June. New officers come in waves as well as retirements, so it is an on-going process to fill vacant positions. The process has been working well. There are no known issues at this time.

Question: Are you aware of any issues with the new steelhead regulations?

Answer: We do not often work directly on the rivers, but we have not learned of any problems.

Dan Sampson Manager, Oden, Thompson, and Marquette State Fish Hatcheries: Dan is taking over Jan VanAmberg's role managing Thompson and Marquette Hatcheries along with Oden State Fish Hatchery previously managed by Aaron Switzer. Stream bank modifications are being made at the Marquette Hatchery and solar energy installations are underway at the other two Hatcheries. The solar installations will save a significant amount of money each year. All three hatcheries are operating smoothly. Possibly, in 2024 Arctic Grayling eggs will be available to incubate to raise for stocking at the Marquette State Fish Hatchery.

Dave Borgeson Northern Lake Huron Management Unit: We are getting ready for the ice to come off the inland lakes and we are working with the hatcheries to begin stocking. A full year of surveys are scheduled. This summer we will be surveying sturgeon in Burt Lake to determine if stocking efforts are having success similar to Black Lake. Mullet Lake will also be in this rotation. This is the special year when all of the Great Lake agencies will be focusing their coordinated research efforts on Lake Huron so we will be involved with that project.

Dave announced that this is likely his last meeting with the group as a state employee and is looking at retirement during the end of June. Dave acknowledged the excellent relationship between the DNR and the Committee through mutual respect and the willingness to discuss difficult issues with the goal of finding the best direction going forward.

Frank thanked Dave for having to cope with all the intense debates over the years and the Advisors greatly respect his willingness to listen to our concerns and work together for the best possible outcome. Frank acknowledged that Dave was the best note taker he ever encountered and encouraged him to visit the Committee often in his retirement and volunteer to be our official note taker. Dave just laughed. **Thank You Dave and enjoy your retirement!**

Dave Fielder Alpena Fisheries Research Station: annual spring lake trout survey is underway which is one of the longest running surveys that spans the length of the lake. Ji He coordinates the survey and models this work.

Jeff Jolley Southern Lake Huron Management Unit: He is approaching his third year, has new staff on board and things keep getting better each day.

Jason Gostiaux DNR Southern Lake Huron Fishery Biologist: Jason shared an update of fall port sampling. We took an aggressive look at stocking sites. We sampled the following sites, Sanilac, Lexington, Port Hope, Harbor Beach, Grindstone, and Port Austin given the excitement in Port Hope from shore anglers catching Coho. Jason was excited to look around, but all ports except Lexington were not very fruitful. Lexington consistently produced good numbers of fish. Stocking for the area is wrapping up on Coho and Atlantic salmon. Although angler reports are anecdotal, they provide a lot of useful information.

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Ed Eisch Fish DNR Fish Production Manager: There is lots going on in Fish Production with stocking and egg takes. There are many maintenance mechanics and technicians that work in the background that keep the hatcheries running smoothly. With aging facilities, emergency repairs often are needed, and it is remarkable how well the staff responds to keep daily activities going. These individuals are very dedicated and deserve much credit.

There is a huge backlog of needed maintenance issues that must be addressed, and we are beginning the planning process with the hope of obtaining the 30 million dollars of Capital Outlay funding. The funding is not approved yet, but we are optimistic that it will be approved. There are a lot of projects that will be addressed with the new funding. A major item would be building a separate cool water facility at the Wolf Lake Fish Hatchery which would be separated from the trout and salmon operations. In addition, there is a backlog and a long list of repair items that may not sound dramatic but are desperately needed including updates to wells, electrical systems, roofs, parking lots and many others. Dan mentioned Solar power projects and 5 of the 6 hatcheries will receive solar arrays with Oden getting 2. This work is being covered by nearly \$2 million from 2022 special funding. This will not replace reliance on power companies but will offset it significantly. The 3rd and final year class of brood stock of Artic Graying will be in the Marquette Fish Hatchery, and it appears that eggs will be available for raising in the spring of 2024. Nicole Watson has been hired by Bureau of Land Management in Fairbanks and she will be bringing the last year class back to Michigan. Much work is still needed to determine the specifics of the program. For example, the most suitable streams and sections of watersheds need to be decided for stocking to increase the chances of Artic Grayling survival in the wild. Funding for the Arctic Grayling is from private fund, not from budget. Atlantic Salmon are looking really good this year. They are growing very well, and we are expecting to meet and exceed the 180,000 goal.

Todd Wills, DNR Lake Huron, Lake Erie and Lake St. Clair Research Manager: Todd echoed what Dave said, the Research Vessel Tanner is in the water conducting surveys. Keep a look out for our staff and be sure to stop by and say hello.

Steve Lenart DNR Tribal Coordination Unit: This unit deals with both the Great Lakes and Inland waters located within the 1836 Treaty boundaries. Negotiations for a new Great Lakes Consent Decree are still ongoing but currently the 2000 Consent Decree rules have been extended and are in use. This time of year, we are working on lake trout stock assessments and establishing harvest limits. The unit also monitors state commercial licensed operations. On the inland side, we are waiting to begin, and finish planned work mostly focused on walleye surveys.

Julie Shafto, DNR Rogers City and Alpena Creel Clerk: The winter weather is slow to leave with lots of wind. In Alpena, there is some improvement with the suckers beginning to show up along with some steelhead and walleye. Lots of rain is keeping the Thunder Bay River high. Fishing at Roger City has been slow with only a few boats getting out and little reported. There was still ice in the Harbor last week.

Emily Aisthorpe, DNR Creel Clerk, Les Cheneaux Islands and DeTour: The ice just left Friday and fishing has been slow, however, two splake were just caught off the pier. There was a heavy run of smelt last night at the nearby Carp River. Perch fishing was great through the ice, but splake fishing was down. The splake that were caught during the winter were small and probably were planted last year.

Drew Bies DNR Creel Clerk, Cheboygan and St. Ignace: Steelhead fishing in Cheboygan has been slow with anglers saying the best is yet to come. The colder spring apparently delayed the run. People are excited for the walleye season to open in Cheboygan. The Harbor in St. Ignace just opened recently. Steelhead fishing in the Carp River has been slow but the smelt fishing in the river the last few nights has been good. Fishing in the Pine River has been slow with most anglers waiting for the walleye season to open.

Seth Roy DNR Creel Clerk, Harrisville, Black River and Oscoda: Seth's last day is May 8. The ramps just went in at Harrisville and a boat went out and caught 2 lake trout. An occasional steelhead is being caught in the Black River. In Oscoda, fishing has been decent. The walleye have just started to show up all the way up to Foote Dam. Steelhead fishing has been sporadic with some very good days. Some Atlantic Salmon and Coho have been caught off the pier. The pier anglers do well for both species by fishing with minnows for bait.

Meaghan Gass Michigan Sea Grant: Besides hosting several workshops and other online events, this spring I have been busy preparing to host 3 fishing camps, coordinating meetings and assisting with presentations. We are looking for mentors for fishing camps in the Bay, Arenac, Saginaw areas. We are looking for mentors to assist with the kids. I will be hosting public sturgeon release events in August and September in the Tittabawassee, Shiawassee, Cass, and Flint Rivers. Everyone is welcome to attend.

Brandon Schroeder Michigan Sea Grant: Brandon expressed appreciation to the Advisory Committee for being a great champion of getting fishing information out to the public and their willingness to develop new formats for having the meetings. We all are learning much with the experiments with hybrid in-person and online meetings. This format greatly expands the audience that can attend the meetings and spreads the information much faster to a larger audience. He is looking forward to continuing the relationship.

David Cozad Natural Resources Commission: I appreciate the opportunity to attend and participate in these Advisory Committees. As Dave Borgeson said, these Committees provide information you cannot get anywhere else. On the positive side I happy to help celebrate the retirement of two dedicated hard working employees. I never met Donna, but I have benefited much from reviewing the valuable data that she produced each year. I wish Donn the best in her retirement. I first met Dave Borgeson in College when we worked on a project together in the Au Sable River. I always enjoyed working with Dave and wish Dave the best in his new adventures in retirement. (Dave commented that Commissioner Cozad looks the same as he did in College but Commissioner Cozad responded that now his beard is gray).

The agenda was diverse, and the dialogs and discussions today were tremendous like they always are at the Advisory Committee meetings. There was thorough coverage of the lake trout overharvest in MH-1. Dr. Jolley's and Dr. Fielder's discussion on the opening of the Saginaw River was informative and focused on efforts to provide a positive outcome. I appreciated hearing suggestions from the participants that were brought up but had not been previously considered. If there are additional comments that you would like to share with the Commissioners, you will find the contact information at this link, <https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/about/boards/nrc>.

Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee:

Randy Terrian: Randy appreciated all the efforts assessing where Coho and other species may be available. The fishery is moving forward in many ways, and it is exciting bringing together stakeholders, community members and DNR staff to coordinate efforts to produce a better fishery. The DNR has a knack of hiring very passionate employees that are working hard to produce the best fishery possible. There is lots of excitement and everyday is a new adventure.

Randy Claramunt: I agree with Commissioner Cozad and Dave's comment how meaningful it is working together with the Committee sharing ideas to produce the best fishery possible.

As was noted, the passion of the employees is huge and encompasses many areas of coverage and growing responsibilities with constricted funding. Take Dave's job as an example. He is in charge of Lake Huron from the Au Sable River to Sault Ste Marie including all of the inland waters on the east side of the state north of the Au Sable River. This includes all of the associated programs and challenges dealing with these waters at a time when the funding and resources are decreasing and the employees in the Northern Lake Huron Management Unit has decreased from 40 to 6. Dave deserves much credit for dealing with all these challenges and I wish him the best in his retirement.

Finally, on the horizon there is a potential funding paradigm shift. When you buy a fishing license today you not only pay for the management of sportfish, but also non-game species. If the Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA) passes, the new funding model would allow the staff to address critical needs of certain species like lake sturgeon recovery, cisco restoration and habitat quality. The game changer for Fisheries Division is the current budget of about \$3 million (2/3 from license sales, 1/3 from Dingle-Johnson excise tax) would be increased greatly by adding \$10 million to the current budget. This would be a major increase in funding for the Fisheries Division.

Frank: Closing remarks. Frank expressed appreciation to Jay's for the use of their excellent facility and amenities. In addition, Frank thanked all of the presenters, committee members and participants both in person and virtually for taking the time to be part of the meeting.

Please plan to be with us at the next in-person/online hybrid meeting at Jays Sporting Goods in Clare on Monday August 8.