

Coldwater Resources Steering Committee

April 26, 2018

Jay's Sporting Goods-Gaylord

10:30am- 3:00pm

Attendees: Jim Bedford, Dave Borgeson Sr., Jim Bos, Bryan Darland, Christian LeSage, Terry Lyons, Steve Mondrella, Bryan Burroughs, Nick Popoff, Bill Ziegler, Phil Schneeberger, Jan-Michael Hessenauer, Tim Cwalinski, Scott Heintzelman, Mark Tonello, Jay Wesley, Amy Trotter, Mike Verhamme, Don Wright, Roger Hinchcliff, John Walters, Bryan Darland, Gary Isaman, Bill LaBelle, Ray Danders, Dick Buss, Bernie Campos, Cameron Goble, Dani Knoph, Jeff Carpenter, Cory Kovacs (notes), Troy Zorn (chair, notes)

Welcome and Introductions

Troy Zorn welcomed attendees who introduced themselves. Troy distributed copies of the Inland Trout Management Plan.

10 Brook Trout Bag Limit Update- (Schneeberger)

Phil provided an overview of regulation and added streams. Thirty-three stream sections were added totaling 1,100 miles of Type-1 streams (8%).

Comments/Discussion

- Question: Are any studies now in place to evaluate impacts of regulations? Phil commented that nothing is formally in place, but Troy planned to continue sampling on Bryan and Two-mile creeks.
- Question: Did you consider flows, temperature, and locations when sampled during the study 2013-2017? Troy said that their sampling for the project occurred every year in early July, so temperature and flow conditions were similar from year to year. Many variables affect catch per unit effort of trout in streams, complicating interpretation of survey results.
- Question: How did the proposal start? Phil overviewed the design of the study and how we got to this regulation change. The NRC was interested in pursuing this increase in hopes getting more people to fish UP trout streams.

Staggering of Trout, Pike and Walleye openers- (Darland)

Bryan described that sales in store are influenced by these openers for each species. He thinks that separating the opening dates for trout and the Lower Peninsula inland waters opener for pike and walleye would increase store traffic and fishing activity. He asked if one of the openers could be moved and felt this would influence an increase in overall angling activity.

Comments/Discussion

- Comment: Inland Walleye opener should open earlier. Spawning would not be impacted since most of our lakes are dependent upon stocking. Tim Cwalinski stated that some of our lakes do have natural reproduction and this would not be suitable making Walleye extremely vulnerable during that time period.
- Comment: Many waters are already open and this kind of change would complicate LED's ability to enforce and patrol.
- Comment: Fishing Guide is confusing already and this is the primary reason why we are losing anglers, not because of the openers.
- Comment: Tradition may just supersede any other changes. Opening day is typically the most pressure all year for any one species especially Walleye and Trout.
- Comment: Maybe we need to consider year round trout angling. Why are things closed in the winter if we are not protecting anything other than during fall months (September and October)?

Closure in fall makes enforcement of trout regulations simpler, enabling conservation officers to concentrate on hunting issues.

- Group recognized this is a bigger conversation to have regarding angler recruitment and retention and more time could be spent on this topic at a later date.

Long-term sand trap evaluation study- (Hessenauer)

Jan presented on a long-term study by MDNR evaluating effects of sand traps on several Michigan streams. This was a long term evaluation to determine if installing and operating sand traps were an effective habitat improvement technique for coldwater streams. Previous studies have shown an increase in sand resulted in decrease in trout abundance, and that traps might help trout populations, resulting in a boom in sand trap construction in Michigan. Traps are expensive to operate and costly to construct. Over the past decade, operation of sand traps has dwindled. Data was collected for 6-10 years after trap construction in five stream reaches associated with traps in the Upper and Lower peninsulas. Overall, this study found that traps did not affect stream shape, did not noticeably affect substrate conditions, and had no discernable adverse effect on channel dimensions. In conclusion, the study found sand traps are unlikely to be an effective standalone habitat restoration tool.

Comments/Discussion

- Question: Did the Twomile Creek sand trap continue to be maintained during the study? Troy and Jan responded that they thought so, but would look into the frequency of cleanout.
- Comment. Maybe the intentions were to not only change downstream habitat, but rather to speed up the process of sand removal. Many sand traps were/are being used to help mitigate a habitat degradation issue (i.e. road crossing).
- Comment (Anglers of the Au Sable): Au Sable River traps (5) are still maintained. No longer really collecting sand, but are addressing “issues” in each subwatershed where they are placed.
- Discussion: Specific traps and utility of those traps. Design flaws and operation success. As traps fill up they become less effective immediately and maybe design needs to be considered when constructing. Many were placed on land that was available and DNR could find agreements to operate the traps. Length of the traps may not be the only limiting factor for performance, as width and depth can also play an important role.

Roundtable- All

Each committee member shared updates and reports from those they represent.

Au Sable River- Mio stretch project- (Cwalinski)

Tim shared details about the history of this renowned stretch of the Au Sable River including creel, regulations, stream temperatures, flows, and trout surveys. In 2010-2013 a Brown Trout strain evaluation took place between Wild Rose and Sturgeon River strain brown trout and the success of those strains. It was found that Sturgeon River strain performed 2.5 times better than the Wild Rose strain here in the Au Sable. However, there were as many unclipped fish found during those years to suggest that natural reproduction was occurring. Species present in the Mio to Alcona stretch include Walleye, Rainbow Trout, Brook Trout and Brown Trout, and Round Whitefish (menominee). Rainbow Trout and Brown Trout are stocked. Surveys suggested that natural reproduction was occurring for brown trout. Tim worked with Anglers of the Au Sable to manually clip all Brown Trout stocked in 2017 (and 2018) in order to identify the amount of natural reproduction occurring in this section. A mark and recapture effort from Mio to Meadow Springs was again completed in 2017 with two electrofishing boats and two chase boats. Preliminary findings from this population estimate (5.3 river miles) in 2017 include 9.7% survival of stocked Browns, and age-1 (yearling) population estimates of 1,545 clipped fish and 1,217 unclipped fish. Estimates for all ages and origins of Brown trout combined were 830 per mile and 23.6 pounds per acre for Mio to Meadow Springs, both above the long term average. A total of 723 yearling rainbows were captured (10.4% survival) in the reach. Total length range was 9-11 inches with fish up to 17 inches.

Brook Trout and Walleye were low in the catch, with Walleye most abundant near McKinley. In addition, one-pass electrofishing was done in the lower reach at both McKinley and 4001 Landing last fall, and the ratio of clipped to unclipped age-1 brown trout at both sites was about 50:50 as well. The conclusion from 2017 is that stocked yearling brown trout were about equal in numbers to wild (unclipped) yearling brown trout. We will be duplicating all this effort in 2018 to add to our dataset.

Trout Committee Items

The following proposed fishing regulation changes were vetted through MDNR Fisheries Division's Trout Committee, and provided to the CRSC for comment.

Muskegon River regulation change proposal 2019- Tonello

Mark proposed changing the reach of the Muskegon River from Croton Dam to Newaygo PAS from current Type-4 regulation to Type-3. This would increase minimum size limit for Brown Trout only, and no other species would be impacted. Mark is also considering increasing the stocking rate for brown trout in this reach, since he thinks the river is capable of holding more fish. Possible down sides of this change would be reduced trout growth and Chinook salmon predation.

- The CRSC members had no concerns on the regulation change proposal and supported the stocking increase.

Non-classified trout stream minimum size limit for BKT- Kovacs

Cory is proposing to lower the minimum size limit for Brook Trout on non-classified trout streams from 8 inches to 7 inches. Anglers indicated confusion on whether they were on a Type-1 stream or a non-classified stream in certain systems. Currently, the non-classified stream regulation is more conservative than the Type-1 stream regulation for Brook Trout, and this change would match brook trout minimum size limits for these streams. This change would only impact Brook Trout on non-classified streams.

- The CRSC members had no concerns with the proposed regulation change.

Scented material restrictions- Popoff

Nick presented a proposal to remove scented material from Type-D trout lakes and gear restricted waters. In the mid-1990's manufacturers started to put scent in many different types of bait. Michigan restricted the use of scented materials in order to prevent any additional mortality due to deep (gut) hooking. Studies since then have shown that scented materials have not caused deeper hooking or related mortality. In addition, it is nearly impossible to find artificial bait that is not scented.

- A lot of discussion ensued about scented materials and the different types of artificial baits. Members expressed clear discomfort with the scented material restriction being removed from the gear restricted streams. By a show of hands, all CRSC members present supported removal of the scented material restriction for Type-D trout lakes. With respect to gear restricted stream reaches, a show of hands indicated that 9 members supported removing the restriction, 4 did not support it, and 2 were undecided.

Troy read a letter from a concerned angler Fritz Heller, which expressed his concerns about large woody debris removal in streams and snagging. Mr. Heller stated that the continued removal of the wood is limiting the success of the trout fisheries in the streams and this should be more controlled. The letter also stated concerns about snagging at nighttime on the Muskegon, Manistee, and Pere Marquette rivers. He is frustrated with snagging that he sees on the Betsie Rivers, and suggested that night fishing be eliminated for spawning runs of Great Lakes salmon and trout that to prevent to help prevent snagging.

Comments/Discussion

- Comment: Mark Tonello and Scott Heintzelman have been in contact with Fritz and will continue to work with local CO's to address the snagging issue. All attendees agreed that wood removal is an ongoing issue that needs to be addressed as needed via education and other means.

Arctic Grayling update- Zorn

Troy provided some recent highlights for the Arctic Grayling Initiative.

- Currently, Fisheries Division and partners are trying to secure private funding (estimated at \$250,000) to install ultra-violet (UV) treatment of outflow waters at Oden State Fish Hatchery's isolation facility that will house future grayling brood lots during the one-year fish health screening period. Grayling cannot be brought to Michigan for developing a resident brood population until UV treatment is in place.
- Last week, an \$11,000 grant was received from the Petoskey/Harbor Springs Area Community Foundation in support of the reintroduction effort.
- MDNR received a letter from USFWS providing assurance that reintroduced Arctic Grayling populations in Michigan would not be subject listing under the Endangered Species Act since they occur outside of the historic distribution range of the grayling stocks being used for reintroduction efforts.
- A summary of Consumers Energy Foundation supported work done on the Manistee River system can be found on the Arctic Grayling Rehabilitation website (<https://www.migrayling.org/single-post/2018/05/11/A-Summer-on-the-Manistee-River>).
- Grayling eggs will be brought to Michigan from Alaska in early summer for use in Wenger Foundation funded, lab-based, collaborative study by MDNR and MSU entitled "Clarifying key uncertainties to successful reintroduction of Arctic grayling in Michigan streams".
- Wenger Foundation funding is also supporting training of two MDNR Fisheries Division staff and the MSU Ph D student on this project to Alaska to learn more about the state's rearing practices for Grayling in a hatchery setting.

Comments/Discussion:

- Question: Will LRBOI be installing the remote site incubators (RSIs) for this project? Troy responded that they are partnering in this effort with MDNR and others.
- Question: Will there be any studies in place once Grayling hit the water to find out if they are working? Troy stated that the study with Michigan State University involves assessing predation rates on Grayling by Brook Trout and Brown Trout, and competition among these species in a lab-based stream environment, since studies are not yet possible in Michigan streams.
- Comment: MUCC and TU had concerns regarding grayling project funding and prioritization, and will be discussing them internally and with Fisheries Division Chief Dexter.

Consumers Energy Foundation (CEF) funded Grayling project- Goble

This effort represented a collaboration between MDNR, MTU, and LRBOI. MTU post-doc, Cameron Goble described development a prioritization framework for assessing suitability of stream reaches for grayling reintroductions. He then showed how the framework was used to rank stream reaches in the Manistee system, based on suitability of habitat conditions in the reach for each of four life stages of grayling (egg, fry, juvenile, and adult). Data were analyzed from stream surveys conducted in 2017 by CEF-funded field crews and earlier surveys completed using MDNR Status and Trends Random Sites field protocols or comparable methods. A detailed report summarizing this work is currently being written for publication, and a brief summary of this work is at the link mentioned above.

Michigan Stream Evaluator tool- Zorn

Troy overviewed this soon to be released, online tool which was developed by MDNR and partners at MSU and Michigan Department of Technology Management and Budget. In short, the tool enables users to compare results from surveys conducted using MDNR's Status and Trends Random Sites protocols,

with benchmark values computed from a user-specified set of stream reaches. Users specify reaches for comparison based on the following attributes: geographic location; size of stream; July water temperature; channel gradient; and Great Lakes access. Data summaries include information on numerous stream habitat attributes, numeric densities (catch rates) for all fish species caught in the survey, densities for important game fishes summarized by fish size category, and average length at age for important game fishes. Statewide use of standardized survey methods, data summaries, and a stream classification framework enables stream reaches to be readily assessed via “apples to apples” comparisons. This tool should help answer many of the typical questions that managers, anglers, and the public might have.