

Coldwater Resources Steering Committee
Jay's Sporting Goods, Gaylord, MI
Sept. 24, 2018
10:30-3:00

Attendees: Mike Verhamme, Bill Ziegler, Dennis Eade, Linn Duling, John Walters, Terry Lyons, Jim Schramm, Jim Bos, Bill LaBelle, Ray Danders, Steven Mondrella, Mark Tonello, Bryan Burroughs, Corey Jerome, Chris Adams, Jay Allen, Neal Godby, Randy Claramunt, Jan-Michael Hessenauer, Tim Cwalinski, Phil Schneeberger, Ed Eisch, Christian LeSage, Roger Hinchcliff, Jim Bedford, Don Wright, Bryan Darland, Dave Borgeson, Sr., David Malloch, Seth Herbst (notes), Troy Zorn (chair, notes).

Atlantics at Harrietta State Fish Hatchery (Eisch)

Ed provided history of MDNR involvement in Atlantic salmon rearing.

Lake Superior State University is the leader and appreciated partner of DNR with this program. Historically the Wolf Lake Hatchery raised Atlantic salmon for a while and had disease issues. The species can be a challenging species to rear. Issues likely stemmed from high densities. DNR moved production to the Thompson Hatchery. The fish reared reached good size, but again had issues with disease. Issue is thought to be to gases in water.

About 2008, Platte River Hatchery chinook rearing was reduced and more tank space available. Decided to use that space for Atlantics. Fingerlings were started at Thompson, and mortalities occurred after their transfer to Platte. Since then, Platte has started them as eggs, though whirling disease showed up in the hatchery. Platte invested in UV Filter on spring water line and dredged pond to remove of disease issues. That addressed many of the concerns and target is 180,000. Still, challenges with stressors remain. Backed off on densities to 100,000 to reduce health concerns. Production levels in 4 raceways at 25,000 each and still dealing with some health issues. Fungal issues are primary concern, especially after rainfall because Platte River Hatchery is surface water.

Harrietta State Fish Hatchery recently reduced its brown trout rearing assignment, so Fisheries Division is considering transitioning some Atlantic rearing to Harrietta because of more favorable and consistent water conditions (temperature, dissolved gases, etc.). Plan going forward is trying to produce 80,000 Atlantics at Harrietta Hatchery, while producing 100,000 at Platte Hatchery. Expect to have some challenges, as there is always a learning curve for raising this species at a new hatchery. Some future expansion of Atlantic salmon rearing might occur at Harrietta, but it will depend on other decisions on statewide stocking and available space at existing hatchery facilities, but meaningful expansion of the Atlantic salmon program is currently limited by the availability of eggs that can be produced at LSSU's hatchery.

Planting will continue at same L. Huron ports (i.e., St Marys River, Thunder, Au Sable at Oscoda, and Lexington). Return to creel isn't always reliable as the sole measure of success of a stocking program because of fish being caught and released in tributaries. We currently don't have evidence of natural reproduction in the Great Lakes, except for very limited evidence it in the St. Marys River rapids area. Atlantic salmon have been reported in the recently restored

"little rapids" area of the St. Mary's River during the fall, so it will be interesting to see if any natural reproduction develops over time. The DNR is working to provide a fishery at a moderately low cost. We are seeing returns on Atlantics and this stocking is providing a unique fishing opportunity. Creating natural reproduction would come at greater cost and likely with limited return, but something that is of interest to the Department.

Angler reporting is critical to quantify the return of this stocking program. Species identification might be a challenge when relying on angler reporting for Atlantic salmon. Coho are not clipped, but all Atlantic salmon are fin clipped. Very few of these fish are moving to L. Michigan.

Big Manistee sturgeon rehabilitation and assessment activities (weir) update (Jerome)

Little River Band of Ottawa Indians continue to operate a stream side rearing facility (SRF) for lake sturgeon. The operations have been conducted since 2004. This year they released 75. Some fish from SRF have been recaptured, so survival is occurring.

They are conducting night-time visual surveys to evaluate natural reproduction. The survey results indicate some natural reproduction is occurring and some of the stocked fish are surviving.

Save-our-sturgeon survey operations have been occurring prior to sea lamprey control treatments. Most fish were caught at Bear Cr. Up to Orchards Landing, from Orchards Landing up to Ebels, and below Blacksmith Landing.

Juvenile index netting is conducted at the mouth of the Manistee in L. Michigan, and at mouth of the Muskegon River.

Last adult population estimates were obtained during 2001-2004. LRBOI is planning to use a seasonal board resistance weir during spring migration to characterize and estimate the spawning run. This is a technique used in AK for over 20 years. Had a two-week test run during this summer and planning to install next spring. The weir still allowed for boat traffic since it only covered half the river. The tribe is also using netting surveys to assess the adult population. The tribe is also using ultrasound to determine sex of adults that are captured.

The target population size of population restoration is about 750 adults. The amount of suitable lake sturgeon habitat will aid in determining the appropriate population size.

Timing of sea lamprey control treatment was mentioned, given existing concerns for non-target mortality. For example, is there an option for the treatments to occur earlier to avoid concerns with salmon in the rivers? One potential complication with earlier treatments is that juvenile lake sturgeon need to be large enough to see them during visual search and recovery sampling.

Trout declines in North Branch Au Sable River (Godby)

May 16- Upper Au Sable Fisheries Workgroup (UASFWG) – NLHMU was informed by multiple guides that trout densities appeared to be very low. Spot checks occurred at Twin Bridges and Dam 4 with sampling gear on May 30th. Results indicated that trout densities were much lower than expected.

June 7th- additional sampling conducted at more locations (Morley Rd, Kellogg Br, Sheep Pasture), and again trout densities were lower than expected.

June 13-14th DEQ-WRD did 3 P51 surveys (Dam 4, Twin Bridge, and Ford). All 3 sites scored “Excellent” for habitat and macroinvertebrates.

Aug./Sept. NLHMU conducted trout population estimates at 3 sites on the NBAS. The sites were Twin Bridge, Eamons Landing, and Dam 4 (the latter being a Status and Trends sampling site). Brown trout were present, but down compared to previous years. The degree of decline with brown trout is not as high as brook trout declines. Other fish species are doing well. (e.g., blacknose dace, white suckers). Monitoring for organic pollutants and other quantitative macroinvertebrate studies are ongoing. This will be a nice complement to the fish data that has been collected. Also collected BKT and tested at MSU’s Fish Health Lab for analysis. Nothing expected because no fish kills were reported.

Trout declines are observed in other streams in the state (Club stream, West Branch of Sturgeon, and Bigelow), suggesting change might relate to something happening across the region, such as regional flow conditions during critical periods such as when fry emerge from redds.

Future outlook: Decline is still a mystery. There is a good year class of age-0 of BKT in 2018. Lack of larger BNT may help survival of BKT. Continue to send reports/observations.

Fisheries Division items –

1. Proposed Fisheries Order changes:

FO 218: Fish using the “drop shot” techniques on type F lakes (i.e., drowned river mouth lakes). Problem was tight-lining, which was a snagging technique for salmon. Salmon runs are lower and with fish less concentrated, people aren’t tight-lining anymore. So, Fisheries Division feels comfortable allowing this technique in these lakes. (There was support of this change.)

FO 202: Removing anti-snagging (hook size) restrictions regulations enacted above dams. This anti-snagging regulation was initially applied upstream and downstream of dams, but is unnecessary upstream of dams. (There was support of this change)

2. Inland Trout Management Plan

CRSC Action item: Committee members should identify and submit 5 or more Goals/Key Issues/Actions from the Inland Trout Management Plan that they think are most important to the long-term strategy for focus/implementation. Send to Troy by Dec. 31st. Responses will be consolidated and discussed in detail at the 2019 spring meeting

3. 10 brook trout bag limit (Schneeberger)

Department was charged to look at 20% of streams in the UP, and the press release will come out on Thursday. Phil presented the proposed locations that will be proposed to NRC at Oct. meeting. Each stream was selected based on multiple selection criteria and best professional judgement. Several committee members had questions and discussion about how proposed

locations fit in properly with criteria and evaluation process. CRSC members should provide comments and opinions of the proposed additions prior to the NRC meeting on Oct. 10th. CRSC vote results regarding the additional streams follows: 8 members supportive of additional streams and 7 members opposed to the additional streams. Bryan Burroughs, Executive Director of Michigan Trout Unlimited, requested that his opposition to the proposal (on behalf of Michigan TU) be put “on record” in the CRSC meeting minutes.

Stream evaluator decision support tool demo (Zorn)

Troy provided an update on a new online tool, the Stream Evaluator, which provides information for streams throughout the state. The information allows the user to access fish and habitat survey data from any of several hundred surveys done on streams using DNR’s Status and Trends Random Sites survey methods. Then, after specifying a set of streams for comparison, they can see how habitat conditions, fish abundance, and game fish abundance and growth at the stream they selected compare with average values from their set of comparison streams. In summary, the tool provides a useful report-card based approach for seeing if stream habitat attributes or fish populations at that site are above, below, or comparable to average values. The tool can be accessed at the following link: <http://www.mcgi.state.mi.us/smdt/>

Pilgrim River coasters (Chris Adams, MTU)

Chris is leading a collaborative project, using PIT-tags and antenna stations to evaluate movements of brook trout throughout the Pilgrim River, which is in the U.P. near Houghton. He has documented regular movements of fish between the Pilgrim River and Portage-Torch Lake, which connects to Lake Superior. This indicates a definite population of coaster brook trout. He has commonly observed brook trout movements through stream reaches that have different regulations, noting that some coasters are vulnerable to overharvest since they reside at times in waters having a 7” minimum size limit for brook trout. Over 480 brook trout have been tagged so far. The rate of out-migration (i.e., fish leaving river to Portage Lake) generally increases after the fall spawning period. Fish return to rivers typically in the spring and are staying in the river during the summer season. MTU is also evaluating what factors may be causing seasonal fish movements (e.g., food source, river discharge, etc.)