



## 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.

### **Draft Minutes**

#### **Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee Meeting Tuesday March 5, 2019 Jay's Sporting Goods, Inc. in Clare 10:00 am – 3:00 pm**

**Attendees:** Frank Krist\*, Randy Claramunt, Ken Merckel\*, Tod Williams\*, Jim DeClerck\*, Brian Roth, Doreen Campbell, Tom Keerl\*, Gene Kirvan\*, Tom Hamilton\*, Rick Kretzschmar\*, Andrew Briggs, Judy Ogden\*, Tom Frontjes\*, Lance Campbell, Randy Terrian\*, Ji He, Greg Byford, Ed Roseman, Eric Plant, Dana Serafin, Mark Lentz, Lee Martin, Glen Buehner, Kinzie House, Jan Hamilton, John Moore, Leo Mrozinski, Nick Torsky, Eric Morrow, Aaron Switzer, John Walters, Tom Goniea, Gary Decker\*, Eric Andersen, Brad MacNeill, Jerry Serafin, Nick Atkin, Craig Milkowski, John Letts, Tess Nelkie\*, Jim Baker, Steve Sendek, Julie Shafto, Steve Shafto, Dave Fielder, Robin DeBruyne, Jason Gostiaux, Dave DyBowski, Cody Heiser, Tom Heritier\*, Ed Retherford\*, Jim Johnson\*, Wayne McElhaney, Richard Haslett, Dave Borgeson. \*Committee Members

#### **10:00 Welcome and Introductions (Frank Krist and Randy Claramunt, DNR Lake Huron Basin Coordinator).**

Frank thanked everyone for coming and the attendees introduced themselves. Frank mentioned that Tom Frontjes from the Les Cheneaux Island area is a new Member of the Committee representing the Straits Area. Tom is very active and involved with the community in several organizations.

#### **Discussion and a recommendation of potential Coho Salmon stocking sites in Lake Huron (Randy Claramunt, Jim Baker, DNR Southern Lake Huron Unit Manager and Dave Borgeson, DNR Northern Lake Huron Unit Manager).**

Randy Claramunt introduced the subject and provided background to the issue. Current indications are that the predator-prey situation in Lake Huron is balanced, so a 30,000 reduction of Chinook salmon stocking at the Swan Weir opens an opportunity for increasing coho stocking based on Chinook equivalents. Bioenergetic studies showed that a Chinook salmon eats as much food during its life as 3.2 coho salmon so there is an opportunity to stock 100,000 coho. With the food web changes, this experiment will determine if the current conditions in the lake are favorable for coho salmon survival.

The question to answer today is, where to stock them and how many ports should be stocked? The internal DNR Basin Team Fisheries Committee preferred 2 sites, splitting the available numbers in half. This would allow a more measurable quantity to be stocked at each port so the fishery could be better evaluated. The Subcommittee of the Lake Huron Advisors had a similar recommendation but there was interest in stocking a total of 4 sites by rotating between stocking 2 sites one year and another 2 sites the next year. There was interest in stocking 1 site north of Saginaw Bay and 1 site south of the Bay during 2020 and switch to a different site in the north and a different site in south in 2021. This yearly rotation would continue during the length of the project.

Randy indicated that the stocking sites needed community support and the ability to measure the success of the fishery. After a discussion, there was much interest expressed in the Thunder Bay River and Au Sable Rivers for stocking sites in the north, and Port Sanilac and Harbor Beach in the south. All these sites have yearly creel surveys and provide access for shore and boat anglers.

Unfortunately, the fish will not be tagged. There was much concern expressed by the Advisors that extensive valuable information will be lost if the fish are not marked but budget issues are preventing tagging the fish this year. The assumption is, that there currently is not a major coho return at any of the proposed stocking sites so any return will likely be due to the stocking. A question was raised about prey availability? Answer: coho will move to find prey, and usually they will move great distances. In addition, coho are more generalist feeders than Chinook salmon. Question: should the stocking be dispersed so the prey fish are not overwhelmed at a return location? Answer: the goal is to create a quality return fishery both off shore at the stocking site and adjacent to shore for anglers without boats. Stocking a substantial number of fish at a location will assist in overwhelming predators and increase post stocking survival. Jim DeClerck asked if we should be considering more sites such as 3 in the north and 3 in the south. Also, Jim felt that it might be good to locate sites where there is a possibility of natural reproduction. He then said that perhaps we will have to wait to see what happens with the first sites chosen and then adjust as needed. Randy Claramunt added that we should know quickly how well the coho are performing. If there is good survival, jack coho will return this fall at the sites stocked this spring and after only 1 year the adult fish will return in the fall of 2020. By the fall of 2021 when the adult coho return from the second set of stocking sites, there should be an indication of how well the coho are surviving at all locations.

Jim Johnson said it is a shame that the coho will not be marked since it will not be possible to measure how many of the harvested coho were stocked at the specific sites in Lake Huron, how many coho are wild and how many harvested coho migrated from Lake Michigan. Frank mentioned that despite no stocking in Lake Huron since 1989, during 2018, 571 coho were harvested by anglers at Harbor Beach, 943 at Port Sanilac, 1045 at Lexington, 59 at Alpena and 21 at Oscoda. Ed Retherford stated it is better to consolidate the plants with fewer stocking sites. He agrees that fish should be marked with coded wire tags. Ed mentioned that there already is a substantial wild run of coho in the Black River in Alcona County. Randy repeated that we should have a good idea of the success by the quality of the return fishery that will be created. Randy noted that we already are marking a lot of the hatchery fish, and any additional marking becomes problematic because of the lack of adequate raceways to separate the different marked groups of fish. The DNR has resumed marking Lake Huron Chinook salmon and Fishery Division funds had to be utilized to continue this project.

Jim DeClerck said we need to know if the project meets minimum return standards and we need to distinguish between wild and stocked fish. This calls for some benchmarks for success. Randy says we will monitor via the creel survey, but hard and fast harvest targets are not established at this time. He agrees we need to assess the relative success and make decisions based on the continued viability of the stocking effort. Frank indicated that the coho return rate to anglers in Lake Michigan during the last 10 years ranged from about 1 to 4%. During most years the range was from about 1 to 2%. It was suggested that otolith microchemistry might be done to determine origin of the coho harvested. Simply clipping fins would still incur a significant cost.

John Walters asked about tribal concerns. Randy indicated the tribes have agreed with the proposed coho stocking, if they are not stocked in the northern treaty waters. Tom Keerl asked why Harrisville is not being considered as a stocking site. He said that Harrisville had a productive salmon fishery in the past and historically raceways at the site were used for imprinting. Randy mentioned two obstacles to stocking Harrisville, even though steelhead are stocked in the Harbor there is a lack of interest in the fishery and there is also limited access for

shore anglers at this site. Glen Buehner indicated the net penning coho at the Ludington State Park in the Sable River was a success and the return this season provided an extended fishery late into the fall. He mentioned that net penning might provide benefits in Lake Huron.

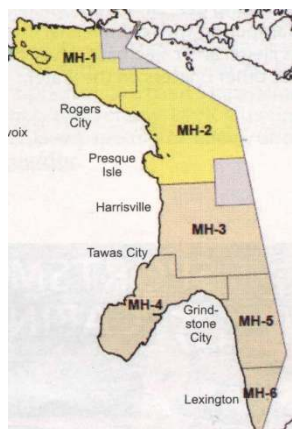
A proposal was made by Jim DeClerck that the Thunder Bay River and Port Sanilac be stocked with coho salmon this spring and following year the stocking be rotated to the Au Sable River in the north and Harbor Beach in the south. This rotation schedule will continue until it is decided changes are needed. Frank asked each Committee Member if they supported the proposal and all agreed.

**The Lake Huron/Lake Michigan Predator Diet Study results and your assistance is crucial again this season (Professor Brian Roth, Michigan State University Department of Fisheries and Wildlife).**

Brian Roth provided an overview of the Lake Huron/Lake Michigan Predator Diet Study. Katie Kierczynski who has been working on the study will be graduating this summer, but other students and experts will be continuing the work. Brian showed the invasive species timeline of the exotic species introductions:

1930s Alewife  
Early 1970's Pacific salmon  
Mid-1980's Spiny water fleas  
Late 1980's Zebra and Quagga mussels  
1990 Round gobies  
2004 Alewife and Chinook salmon decline

VOLUNTEER DATA TAG	Date caught: _____
	Port fished: _____
	Species: _____
	Length (to ¼ in.): _____
	Adipose Fin Clip (Yes/No): _____
	Depth (ft., optional): _____ / _____ Lure Water



For Lake Huron, over 1,500 stomachs samples were analyzed in both 2017 and 2018. The samples were divided by location and season. Brian showed the process, from field collection to analysis. Everything in the stomachs is counted, not just food items. Stomach contents were often very digested, and the contents were a challenge to identify. Much progress has been made identifying the digested remains with the use of fish boney structures such as cleithra, otoliths, and caudal bones that are unique to specific species.

A breakdown of where the stomachs came from was provided. For Lake Huron, USFWS, MSU, and volunteer collectors predominated and were augmented by DNR creel clerk data and USGS collections. Unfortunately, some of the volunteer samples could not be used because certain stomachs were not completely identified with the species name, date and the port where

the fish were caught. Entering the depth and clip as indicated on the label also provides useful information. Some labels could not be read because they were stained heavily with blood and other fluids. It is best to protect the label by placing it in a smaller snack bag first and then place it along with the stomach in the larger sample bag. Please be sure to place each stomach in a separate bag with an individual label also known as a tag, see label above. Several samples had to be discarded because more than one stomach was placed in a bag. This link <http://www.miseagrant.umich.edu/explore/fisheries/great-lakes-angler-science-fishing-for-answers/> will take you to the Michigan Sea Grant website that provides a Predator Diet Study video and links to instructions, tags (sample labels) and a sign.

The results are being compiled by the statistical districts from MH-1 to MH-7, see map above. Low brown trout numbers were encountered in both lakes with declining survival in Lake Michigan and the lack of stocking in Lake Huron. Chinook were eating mostly coregonids (bloaters), ninespine sticklebacks, and bythotrephes (spiny water fleas). Most of the Chinook samples came from July in the MH-1 region from Rogers City north. Lake trout and walleye were caught throughout Lake Huron.

Lake trout fed primarily on round gobies and smelt along with some other fish and invertebrates. There was a more even distribution of lake trout stomachs collected throughout the year, with goby dominating diets early in year, transitioning to include smelt and invertebrates later in the year. Lake trout had a much more diverse diet than other predators. Walleye ate goby early, then added many invertebrates during June and July, and then fed mostly on yellow perch and unidentified fish in August through October. Walleye were not eating as many gobies as might be expected in Saginaw Bay.

The study will be expanded to examining potential bias in sample collections which will include stable isotope analysis and net collected predators to compare with angler caught fish. Stable isotope examination of the predator's flesh provides clues on the type of food the predators have been eating. An attempt will be made to incorporate the results into the DNR predator/prey models and determine how the Lake Huron fishery is doing with less pelagic prey. In Lake Michigan, the predators are feeding heavily on alewife. The goal is to collect a **LOT** of stomachs this year. Brian encouraged volunteers to provide stomachs and gave a short explanation of how to prepare and provide samples.

Randy Claramunt asked if this project should be an index that is done every year, rather than just getting periodic snapshots. Brian said that they only have funding to collect through 2020, with analysis in 2021. Brian agreed that it should be an ongoing index, but there are some methodological issues that still need to be resolved.

**Note:** The goal was to place in these minutes many of the charts that show the amount and type of food each predator was eating in the various statistical districts but restrictions in the grant prevented early release of the data.

#### **Status of the Prey Fish Community (Ed Roseman, USGS Great Lakes Science Center).**

Ed mentioned the difficulties caused by the 5-week Federal government shutdown. He said that all the bottom trawl and acoustic survey sites were completed in 2018. The bottom trawl survey revealed 3 times higher biomass than the 2017 survey. It showed a high yearling and older bloater abundance and the highest young of the year bloater numbers they have seen. Ed also said alewife numbers were up a bit. The complete results will be available within a couple of weeks. There has been some recent discussion of implementing a spring bottom trawl survey to address goby and other spring preyfish populations. If it occurs, it won't be permanent, and could end up being a scaled back version. Goby sampling techniques are still being investigated by Todd Wills and Daryl Hondorp. Ed was asked if Canadian entities help USGS financially for the sampling that occurs in their waters. Ed indicated that Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry provides some fuel, and sometimes provides an onboard technician to assist the effort.

#### **Brief update on cormorant control (Randy Claramunt).**

Randy Claramunt gave an update on cormorants. During last August, regional meetings were held between the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the Michigan DNR Fisheries and Wildlife Divisions along with similar agencies from other states. The FWS asked if there is a problem? State representatives indicated that they were not going to ask their stakeholders that question, since we already know the answer. FWS wanted the State of Michigan to post available data into a website for their use. Instead, we invited the FWS and others, including bird experts, to a meeting to review the data we have. Progress was made at this meeting, and a framework was identified in order to enable us to move forward for the Great Lakes Region only. It was important to Michigan to have a procedure that allows control efforts that can be adjusted to deal with the changing problem but be defensible and not vulnerable to lawsuits. Currently, upper managers in the FWS are considering a process to address various aspects of the issue. It is not clear if they will support working on an Environmental Impact Statement or authorize another localized-type of approach. The DNR Director is informing them now of the DNR's position. On March 26, there will be a meeting in Virginia that may provide a degree of clarity. Randy is hopeful that using a cormorant consumption model that uses per unit area methodology will justify changes locally

when needed and be effective enough to be scaled up to include the entire flyway. The goal of the new methodology is to provide balance between cormorant numbers and fisheries concerns. Currently, a similar model is used to manage cormorants on Lake Oneida, New York. Kynzie House asked if it is still beneficial for anglers to contact their representatives on this issue. Randy said it is advisable to keep letting representatives know that this is a serious ongoing problem and is very important to the health of the fishery. Frank said Congressman Bergman has reintroduced his cormorant control bill and encouraged everyone to keep contacting their representatives. For example, the public support for the issue brought about the Congressional Hearing in Alpena last June, which resulted in the current progress. It is important that the public continue to be involved until a credible solution is developed.

Some key questions still need answers. Can lethal control be conducted at stocking sites? Harassment efforts are not effective unless there is a limited harvest of birds. Will this be permitted this spring? Jim DeClerck asked about Canadian efforts to control cormorants? Randy replied that there is nothing definitive yet on that effort. Jim questioned how Ontario can impose a hunting season? When the Migratory Bird Treaty was signed, only the U.S. agreed to a stipulation that does not allow the hunting of cormorants. Because of this, the US has a restriction that prevents hunting under the act while Ontario does not. Dave Fielder says there will likely be an upcoming national symposium that will focus on cormorant-fish impacts, which will help organize and bring all the research efforts together. Ed Retherford asked about the status of all the stomachs he and other volunteers collected from cormorants. Dave Fielder said that hopefully, this information would be available at the symposium.

## **Lunch Break**

### **Jim Bakers Retirement.**

Frank, Randy Terrian, and Jan Hamilton gave Jim Baker retirement gifts from the Committee and recognized innumerable contributions over Jim's 37 years of work and his willingness to share his experience and knowledge with the Committee and public. Jim plans to spend much time outdoors enjoying the natural resources.

### **Progress report of the experimental whitefish commercial fishery in southern Lake Huron and consideration of issuing a license (Randy Claramunt, Andrew Briggs, Fisheries Research Biologist, and Tom Goniea, Fisheries Biologist).**

Randy provided the goals and objectives of the current research permit:

#### ***Goals and Objectives for the Harbor Beach Lake Whitefish Commercial Fishery***

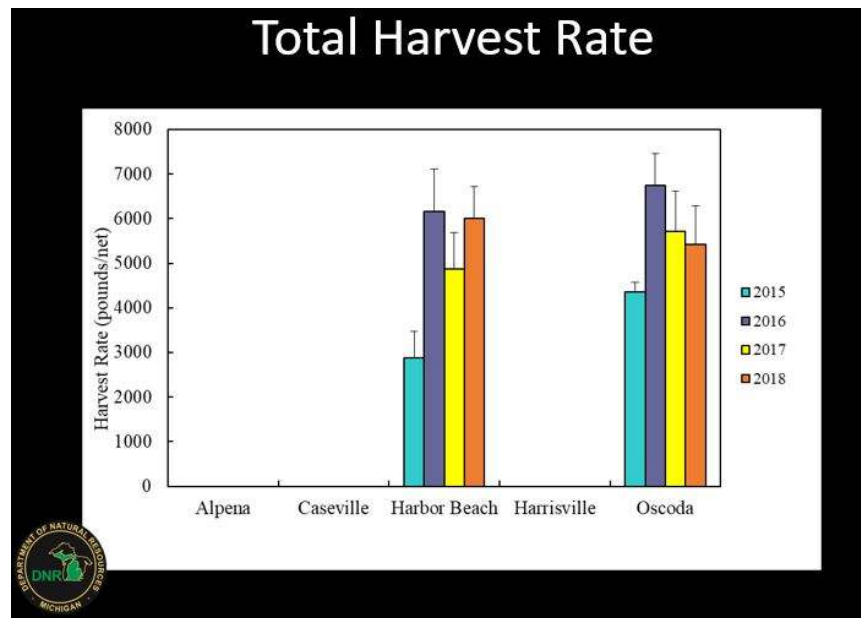
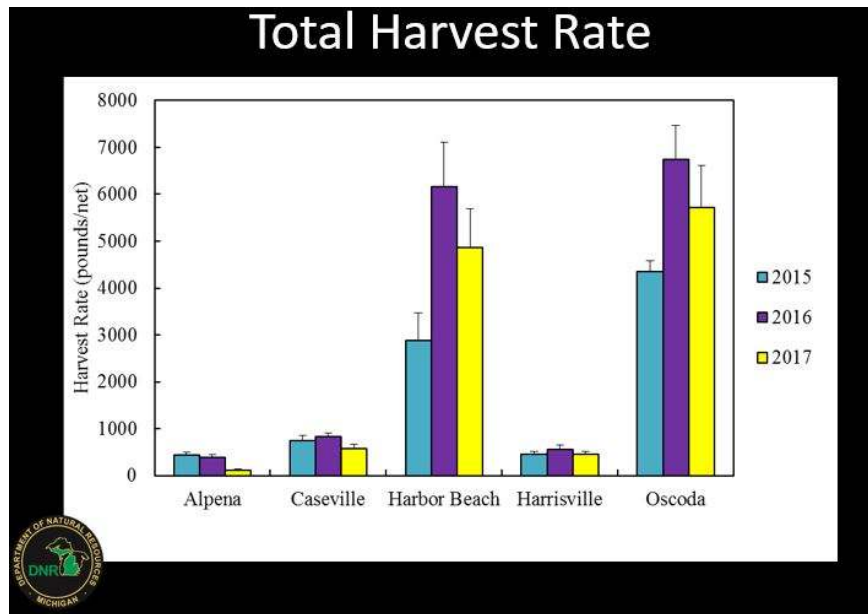
- Remove the greatest number of commercial licenses and gear possible from Saginaw Bay.
- Reduce commercial harvest or potential yellow perch harvest in Saginaw Bay.
- Evaluate whitefish population and stock health, in Southern Lake Huron.
- Harvest legal whitefish without taking game fish species.
- Evaluate and develop acceptable fishing grounds.
- Evaluate the timely collection and posting of trap net locations online.
- Evaluate the potential sustainability and profitability of a fishery for whitefish in Southern Lake Huron.

Randy gave a breakdown of commercial activity in Saginaw Bay and the permanent changes that could occur if the permit transitioned into a license. He said 20 licenses are issued in Saginaw Bay, and 15 of those have trap net gear. Only 12 of the 20 licenses reported a harvest in 2014, and 12 of 15 trap net licenses reported harvest in 2014. Three of the four licenses removed reported harvest in 2014.

#### ***Removed gear from Saginaw Bay included:***

- 86 trap nets (29% of 296)
- 2-pound nets (100%)
- 4580 feet of seine (16% of 28,625 feet)
- 15,600 feet of gill net (11% of 146,100 feet)
- 750 set hooks (7% of 10,700)

Andrew Briggs presented the data collection portion of the study. He looked at effort, harvest, bycatch and biological information from the catch. Andrew first showed the harvest rate for Lake Huron but then focused on the Harbor Beach and Oscoda fisheries, since they were the most comparable. He presented the annual mortality rate information, and age distribution of catch. Mortality rate remains rather constant around 10%.



Andrew then presented bycatch information from DNR onboard monitoring, that was present during 20% of the net lifts. The mean catch of lake trout was 105/net lift, with an average mortality rate of

5.4%. Catch of walleye averaged 2/net lift with a 90% mortality rate. The total estimated annual bycatch mortality for lake trout was fewer than 400, and for walleye it was fewer than 150. Other species were not common in the bycatch, with fewer than 10 burbot per net while channel catfish and sheepshead were rarely observed. Fewer than 10 steelhead and only two Atlantic salmon were caught in four years. Overall, whitefish comprised 89% of the catch, and bycatch species combined for 11% of the catch.

Tom Goniea reported on profitability of the fishery. The expected harvest was 200,000-300,000 lbs. of lake whitefish. Assumptions for the profitability estimation were: all 10 nets would be fished May 1-November 1, and the whitefish fishery will be stable. Tom reported the average wholesale price for whitefish has been about \$1.89 per pound since 2010. The wholesale/dockside value was then estimated to be about \$472,500 per year. If fillets average \$10-12/Lbs, based on a generous 8 oz fillet serving, base retail value of the fishery would be between \$1.25-1.5 million per year. This does not include smoked fish, spreads or other specialized processing that would increase value even further. The take home message is if the assumptions are met, the fishery can be profitable.

### State-Licensed LWF Fisheries Value 2014-2018

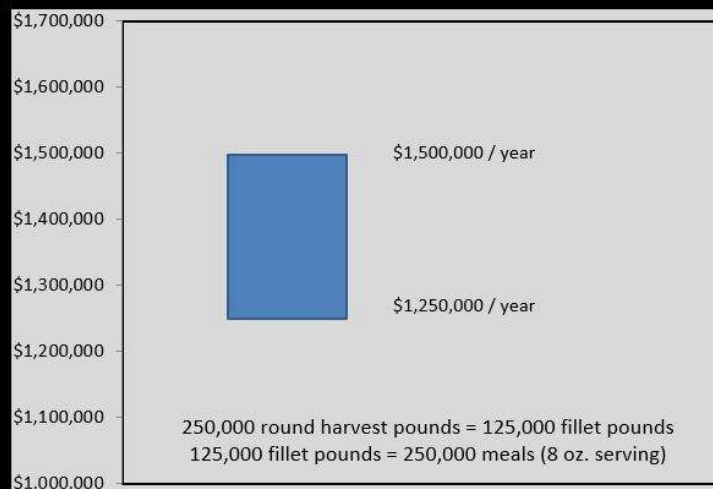
1. Cedar River* - 437,000 lb.	(\$700,000-\$1,050,000)
2. Oscoda - 417,000 lb.	(\$665,000-\$1,010,000)
3. Harbor Beach - 250,000 lb.	(\$347,000-\$605,000)
4. Saginaw Bay* - 181,000 lb.	(\$290,000-\$438,000)
5. Harrisville - 175,000 lb.	(\$278,000-\$425,000)
6. BBdN - 163,000 lb.	(\$260,000-\$395,000)
7. Muskegon - 140,000 lb.	(\$225,000-\$340,000)
8-13. 50,000-100,000 lb.	(\$80,000-\$242,000)

Total State-licensed Whitefish Fishery Wholesale Value: \$3 to \$5 million

\*Cedar River and Saginaw Bay is comprised of multiple licenses.

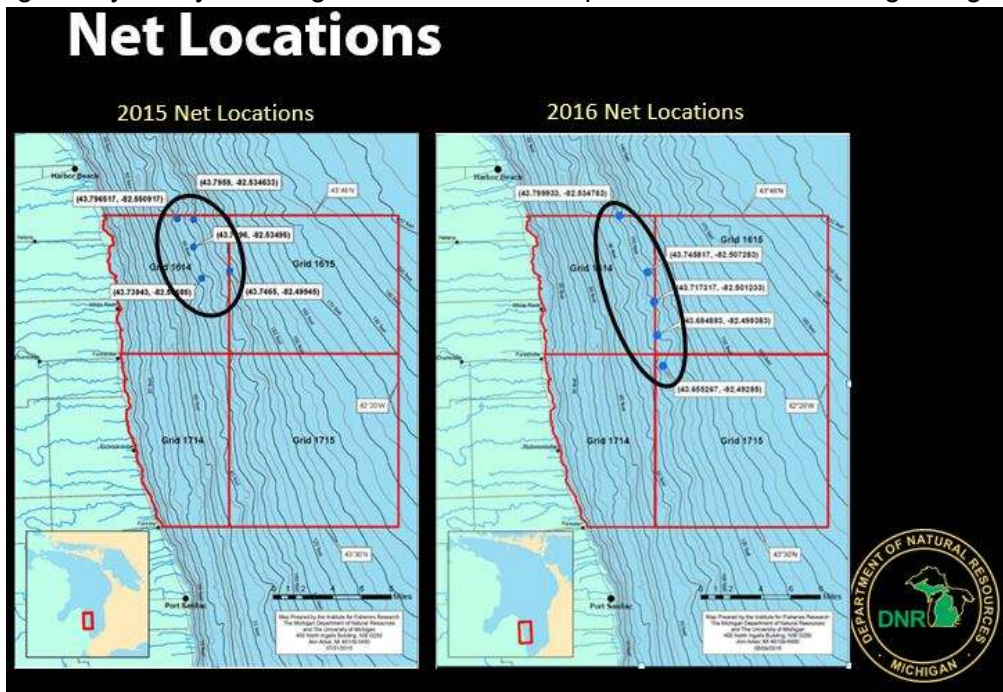


### Base Retail Fillet Value of the Harbor Beach Fishery (250,000 lb.)

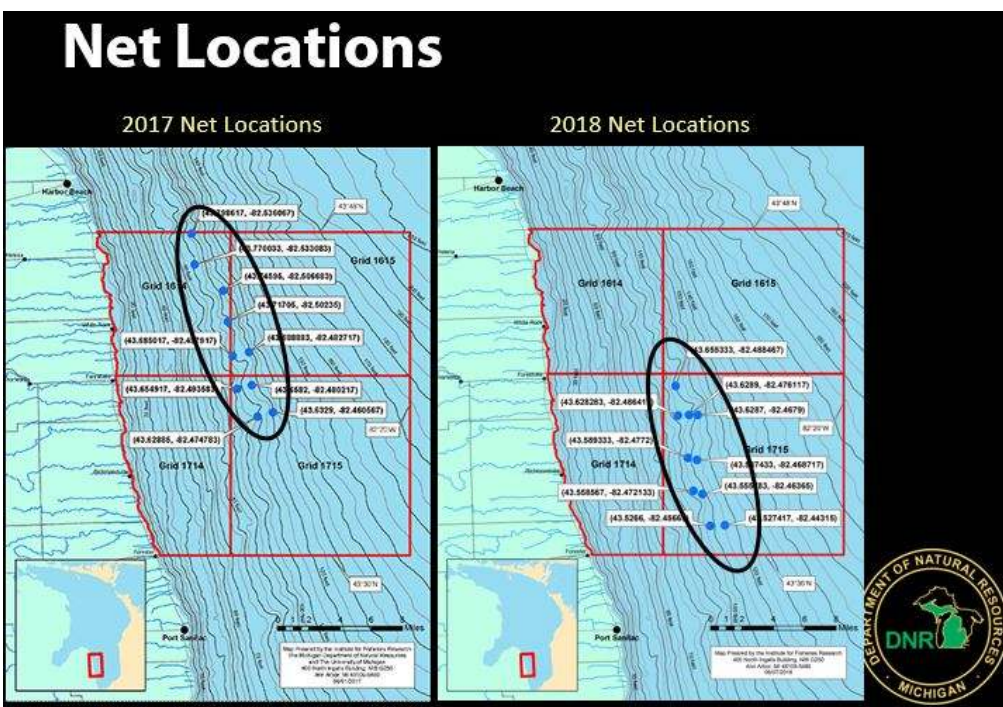


Tom then addressed the user conflict concerns. The fishing grounds were described, which included buffer zones at north and south ends of the grounds. There were online posting of net locations to assist in avoiding conflicts. Known wrecks and diving zones were protected. The first year beginning in 2015 was mostly an experimental period. In 2016 nets were set to explore more grounds, and in 2017 all 10 nets were set resulting in a fully engaged fishery. In 2018, nets were set further south than they were in previous years.

The Harbor Beach website posted the netting locations and was visited 319 times in 2018, with the peak occurring in July. Very little negative feedback was provided to the DNR regarding the fishery.



Law Enforcement Division had no reports of lost angling gear or other net entanglements. One



incident of a missing staff buoy was reported and was promptly taken care of by the fisher.

Randy provided a project summary. Whitefish stocks appeared to be sustainable during 2015-2018 when compared with other Great Lakes fisheries. The fishery also appears to be profitable and is managed by gear and fishery access limitations. The annual bycatch included fewer than 400 lake trout, fewer than 150 walleye, fewer than 10 steelhead and 5 Atlantic salmon. Netting locations were chosen that minimized user conflict. If a license is issued, the DNR will continue to work with the fisher to collect information. Randy outlined the next steps in the process, which included collecting the Advisory Committee's input, a recommendation to the Fisheries Chief, and the Chief making a recommendation to the DNR Director.

Eric Andersen asked why these mortality rates were so low for lake trout (5.4%) when compared to angler caught fish (41%). Randy said time of year may have something to do with this. Eric said perhaps there are issues with the hooking mortality numbers. Tom Goniea said most of the whitefish harvest occurs in the spring when water temperatures are low. In August, fewer fish are in the nets, so they are not in the warmer surface water as long because the nets can be emptied of the fewer fish more rapidly.

Frank asked if we know where these fish are coming from, where they spawn, etc. Randy said a lot of fish are produced in the north. Ji He indicated recruitment is likely somewhere north of Harbor Beach. Frank asked, isn't it important to know where these fish come from, if they are not produced in Harbor Beach? Randy outlined the process for how we should decide to move forward. Randy showed the trend of significant lake whitefish harvest decline. We still aren't sure about recruitment, and there are implications if recruitment doesn't improve. Frank noted how quickly the tribal fishery has declined in the north. Randy described how the DNR model works for whitefish, and how we do not know the recruitment and survival status of the younger fish. Since the young fish are not caught in the nets until about the age of 5 years, there is a waiting period of at least 5 years to know whether an age class was successfully produced and recruited to the fishery. The status of recruitment is an issue. Tod Williams remembered when his fishery tagged whitefish in Saginaw Bay, and the recovery information indicated the tagged fish stayed in the local area. He thinks those fish are produced locally, since there is ample spawning habitat in the region.

Tom Goniea said the Harbor Beach's fishery's impact is rather low when compared with other jurisdictions, including tribal and Canadian fisheries. The Ontario side is more heavily fished in terms of density and activity. He believes the dramatic changes in the Great Lakes are probably mostly responsible for trends in whitefish populations, not the fishery.

Jim Johnson said a stock assessment model should be done. He is cognizant of the monetary implications of this, however. These aren't the same fish as they used to be, considering the changes observed in growth rates. Many of the whitefish are originating from older years classes when recruitment in Lake Huron was much higher. Are the current mortality rates sustainable with the new status of the whitefish populations? Jim feels a license could be issued, but we need to keep looking at the long-term sustainability. Ji He says just modeling the Harbor Beach area wouldn't be too informative, but a stock assessment for the general area, over many years, would be useful.

Judy supported extension of the research permit because sustainability isn't assured with the current knowledge of the recruitment status. She also mentioned the commercial statute rewrite, and potential implications. She was concerned about the 2018 concentration of nets in the far southern part of the grounds. Hopefully that can be addressed with the fisher. She suggested that posting GPS coordinates of the nets be part of the license requirements. Is license transferable? Yes, it would be. She thinks we need the time to assess potential problems.

Tom Keerl asked about recruitment, since the presentation seemed to indicate regular recruitment. He asked about the Canadian harvest, and are we doing anything about their impact on the fishery? What

is Michigan's proportion of the harvest? Tom Goniea said it currently is about ¼ of the lakewide harvest. Tom indicated that we used to be about 1/10 of the fishery. Jim DeClerck would like to see the year class distribution including juvenile fish to obtain a better forecast of overall sustainability. Jim Johnson explained the observed good harvest rate could be that the southern fishery has not been harvested by others in recent times. The harvest figure may not represent sustainable stock abundance, just an increase in removals.

Frank said the tribal harvest of whitefish has declined dramatically in the 1836 Treaty Waters, with the decline in the fishery seemingly moving from north to south beyond Alpena. Frank asked if we should be more protective of this southern population. Judy mentioned that in 2015 a Canadian fisher had to close operations in August due to lack of fish.

Tom Keerl asked about the difference between a license and a research permit. Randy said the DNR doesn't have the flexibility under a license when compared to research permits including collecting data, etc. For the fisher, the permit offers flexibility to go back to fishing the Saginaw Bay nets. Tom Goniea agreed that research permits do have flexibility, but the courts have determined that using long term research permits instead of licenses, is a misuse of the research permits, for example, not issuing a license only because it provides more control for the DNR.

The question was asked, what information will be gained from collecting data for another year? Tom doesn't know if one year would make a difference, more like 15 years is needed. Tom also doesn't want to tie commercial licensing to the statue rewrite effort because there is no clear timeline for that effort. John Walters asked what new research must be done to better understand this fishery. Ji agreed that a few years compiling data in Harbor Beach would not make a difference, but if the spatial coverage is expanded, there might already be enough information to make a prediction. Question: what if the fishery takes a sharp decline, what problems would a license present? Tom said a license is a permanent entity, so there would be no movement to revoke a license, but we could limit the amount of harvest on the license. Dana asked why the DNR doesn't set nets to determine reproduction off Harbor Beach. Randy said determining the number of juvenile whitefish produced each year has been a challenge because the fish are not caught in nets until the age of 4 or 5. Jim Johnson spoke of the past use of research permits after the 2000 consent decree, which was useful. He said we should be able to get the needed information if the license is issued. However, issuing a license connotes confidence that the fishery is sustainable. Jim supported extending the research permit to allow the DNR to look at available data. Tod said that he and Leonard Dutcher fished out of Port Sanilac, but he pulled out because he wasn't allowed to keep 17 inch fish. There were, however, many fish available. Dana and Judy don't know what the license would consist of, so how can a vote be made without that knowledge? Tom Keerl mentioned the Saginaw Bay net issue, and if the permit remains, the fisher can go back to Saginaw Bay. Tom Goniea said the research permit is a trial run for the license and the license should mirror the research permit if the permit meets the objectives.

Jim Johnson recommended a one year extension of the research permit while the DNR looks at existing data as Ji advised. This also would provide time for this group to furnish suggested modifications that would minimize conflicts. If approved, these modifications would be added to the permit this year and then transition into a license next year.

It was mentioned that the nets were moved further south and were set only about 5 miles north of Port Sanilac. There was a suggestion that moving the nets just a few miles further to the north would reduce conflicts. Dana said he moved nets further south because he wanted to get away from the lake trout.

Randy mentioned that a permit could be issued for 2019 but by May, recommended adjustments to reduce conflicts must be provided and by then the Fisheries Division would review if Ji's data and modeling could be expanded in a timely manner to learn more about the whitefish recruitment status in southern Lake Huron. The goal is to have the same conditions on the permit during 2019 as would

appear on the license when it is issued. The outcome of the above items in this paragraph will be discussed at the May 8, 2019 Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee meeting.

Jim Johnson offered a proposal that Jim DeClerck supported: Proposal: Extend the research permit one year and transition to a license the following year.

- Rick Kretzschmar – voted yes. And commented that all questions regarding conflicts need to be answered before May. We can't go on another 3 years. Tom Goniea – DNR has no issues at this point, and any conflict issues should come from advisors.
- Ed Retherford - yes
- Tom Frontjes - abstained
- Tom Hamilton - abstained
- Tom Keerl voted - no
- Randy Terrian - yes
- Judy Ogden - yes
- Ken Merckel – abstained
- Jim Johnson – yes
- Jim DeClerck – yes
- Gene Kirvan – yes
- Gary Decker – yes
- Tess Nelkie – yes
- Tom Heritier - yes
- Frank Krist - yes

Eric Andersen, president of the Charter Boat Association, is not a member of the Committee but indicated that the Charter Boat Association would have voted, yes. Eric mentioned that Terry Walsh cannot attend all the meetings because of conflicts but the Charter Boat Association that Terry represents, would like to have an alternate when Terry is not present. It was agreed that Eric would work with Terry and Frank to establish Eric as a possible alternate since Eric attends many of the meetings.

Totals: 3 abstentions, 1 no vote, with the remainder voting yes. Since it wasn't unanimous, Frank referred to the committee's terms of reference, that the decision defaults to a consulting decision made by the Chair, who serves at the pleasure of the members. Frank concurred with majority and made the decision to recommend extending the permit for one year.

Prior to the formal proposal from Jim Johnson, Tom Keerl had offered another proposal that would issue the license this year, but a discussion had ensued, and his motion was not seconded.

## **Brief Updates**

### ***African longfin eel.***

Randy mentioned the previous recommendations the DNR had made regarding the aquaculture industry requirements, including recirculation facilities, to avoid contamination of state waters. He said these DNR conditions would all be met by this proposed facility designed to raise the African longfin eel for food. Ken Merckel is still worried about bringing an exotic animal into Michigan. Randy reminded everyone that this activity is regulated under the Department of Agriculture.

### ***Cisco update:***

Dave Fielder said 1.1 million fall fingerling cisco were stocked last year in Saginaw Bay. We're planning to stock spring and fall fingerlings in coming years to learn about their relative performance. The fish will be OTC marked. Whitestone Point is a stocking location. We may have to use the same stocking location for stocking spring and fall fish due to logistical considerations, but this isn't necessarily a bad thing. Randy mentioned that the original 750,000 stocking target proposal, based mostly on production capabilities, has been raised to 1 million +/- 20% by the Lake Huron Committee.

***Lamprey treatments of the Garden and Mississagi Rivers:***

Randy indicated that there are still no plans to treat Garden and Mississagi rivers for sea lamprey this year. Ken Merckel said there has not been much movement on this issue. There will be a discussion on this subject at the March Lake Committee meetings. Tod Williams noticed a lot more lamprey-marked fish last year.

**Manager and Law Enforcement updates.**

**Craig Atkin**, Great Lakes Law Enforcement, said they are anticipating receiving another 32 foot patrol boat. Several new officers will start work in April and Great Lakes Law Enforcement Section will be receiving 3 new positions. They also have an underwater remotely operated vehicle (ROV) for net inspections and other uses. This new technology should be very useful.

**John Walters**, NRC Commissioner, said their next meeting will be at Shanty Creek on the 14<sup>th</sup> of March. He encouraged anyone to call him if they have any natural resource issues they would like to discuss.

**Aaron Switzer**, Fisheries Fish Production section, said that Atlantic salmon are smaller this year due to the cold weather, but are healthy. Young of the year Atlantics are now in tanks and feeding, and the plan is to raise 100,000 at Platte, and 80,000 at Harrietta. Harrietta fish seem to be doing well. Funding for the new grayling program became available, so there will be a preconstruction meeting soon for the Oden quarantine facility.

**Lee Martin**, Fisheries Division Creel Clerk said that anglers are doing well on Atlantics in the Thunder Bay and Au Sable rivers. Some are still being caught in both the rivers.

**Ed Roseman**, USGW said their office held their annual boat training meeting regarding large vessel activities and they held strategic planning sessions. The RV Arcticus is scheduled for its first haul-out this year, with one of the objectives to reduce noise. Currently, the boat operates with noise levels above OSHA thresholds.

**Dave Fielder**, Alpena Great Lakes Station, reported that Ken Glomski retired. Ken was essential in gear construction, maintenance, and field operations. He said Alpena is now down to a bare minimum in terms of staffing. Ji and Dave are currently analyzing data. The Great Lakes Fishery Commission's Upper Lakes meetings are coming up in March, as well as the Sea Grant meetings, and they are busy preparing presentations. The Saginaw Bay reef restoration design work is ongoing. The Alpena cruise schedule is set for the RV Tanner.

**Andrew Briggs**, Lake St. Clair Station, Lake Erie had a very good year class of walleye last year. The fishery has been good and should continue. They have noted increased recruitment of lake sturgeon in St. Clair/Detroit system

**Jim Baker**, Southern Lake Huron Management Unit of Fisheries Division, said their annual (since 2015) Lexington Harbor electroshocking ran for about a half an hour and caught 96 Atlantic salmon (47 males and 49 females, 21-30 inches), and possibly 3 year classes. They were clipping tails but did not encounter recaptures. They caught 8 rainbows as well. They then went to Port Sanilac, which continues to be a fish desert in the fall. They caught 1 Atlantic, 1 Chinook, some small pike and suckers. No gizzard shad were observed, which was a bit odd. No rainbows were observed even though the location is stocked. Saginaw Bay ice fishing was good when the ice formed in mid-January, but good fishing was far out in the bay. A large windstorm broke up the ice. Pinconning and Linwood have some fishing for perch. Anglers are heading out a mile off Bay City State Park and there is some fishing off Quanicassee. Saginaw River might get good soon with the colder weather. Jim's crew is doing the normal winter work, writing up surveys, fixing equipment, and getting ready for the field season.

**Dave Borgeson**, Northern Lake Huron Management Unit indicated that Technician, Tom Adams is retiring this month, and he will be sorely missed. The Lake Huron Technical Committee is currently writing the periodic State of Lake Huron Report, and will present chapters of the report at the upcoming Great Lakes Fishery Commission's Upper Lakes meeting in March.

**Randy Claramunt**, DNR Lake Huron Basin Coordinator, talked about the Retail Sales System (RSS), through which the state sells hunting and fishing licenses. There is a redo occurring of the entire licensing system, and in 2020 fishing licenses will be under the new process.

**Update on the agendas, meeting locations and dates of the Sea Grant Spring Lake Huron Fishery Workshops. (Brandon Schroeder Michigan Sea Grant).**

Brandon couldn't make the meeting, so Frank provided the dates for the upcoming workshops. A flyer was provided to each participant and Frank will send out an electronic version. As the agendas are developed those will also be sent out.

Below are the dates and locations of the Workshops. All meetings begin at 6:00 pm and conclude by 9:00 pm.

Port Huron	Thursday April 11
Bay City/Saginaw Bay	Tuesday April 16
Alpena	Thursday April 25
Cedarville	Tuesday April 30

Randy thanked everyone for their participation, as did Frank.

**3:00** Adjourn.

**Next meetings**

Wednesday May 8, 2019

Tuesday August 6, 2019

Tuesday October 22, 2019

All meetings will be held at Jay's Sporting Goods in Clare