

Warmwater Resources Steering Committee

Meeting Notes - Final

Michigan United Conservation Clubs
2101 Wood St
Lansing MI 48912



March 18, 2019

Welcome, Introductions, and Review Agenda (Jim Francis)

- Everyone introduced themselves.
- Nick Popoff was the Chair for this committee but has since moved and is now working for the State of Maine. Seth Herbst, the current Aquatic Species and Regulatory Affairs (ASRA) Manager, will be taking over as Chair. However, to bridge the transition to Seth in this new position, Jim Francis will be the Acting Chair for this meeting.
- The agenda was accepted with one minor revision - Christian would be presenting the Regulations topic rather than Seth.

Review Terms of Reference and Membership (Jim Francis)

- It is good to occasionally revisit the structure of the committee, including the Terms of Reference and membership. The timing seemed appropriate for a review given that it was not done in a while and with the transition to a new Chair.
- A map was reviewed that graphically depicted the geographic distribution of members and their general interests, including things like species of interest or method of take. Everyone was comfortable that the current membership – there were no gaps identified either geographically or based on interests.
- There was one suggested change to the Terms of Reference related to establishing meeting dates. Rather than having pre-determined meeting dates, the wording was changed to allow the Chair to schedule meetings as-needed or at the request of a member. The change was accepted by the committee and the adoption date was updated to reflect the meeting date.

Regulations (Christian LeSage)

- The statewide yellow perch bag limit is now 25, with the exceptions of Lake Erie (50) and Lake Gogebic (25 total, but no more than 5 greater than 12 inches). This regulation goes into effect April 1, 2019.
- The new Fishing Guide is available and is being produced annually. A two-year guide was tried previously, but regulation changes had to be made timelier than on every other year basis.
- Based on the Consent Decree, sport anglers had an over limit of lake trout in unit MM-4 in Lake Michigan. Therefore, the bag limit is being reduced from 2 to 1. This regulation has been proposed to the NRC and is not in the new guide.
- Drop shotting will be legal beginning April 1 in Type F waters - which are drowned river mouths. This allows the expanded use of this popular technique in areas where there are not concerns about snagging salmon.

- The restrictions related to scented material have been relaxed. The regulation was changed because today, almost all plastic baits manufactured have some type of scent, such as garlic or salt.
- As of January 1, 2019, walleye and muskellunge tournaments need to be registered.
- In FO 202, the size of the hook gap was increased from 3/8 to 1/2 inch to make hook requirement regulations consistent.
- A spawning closure was added to the Cheboygan River to protect walleye.

Yellow Perch Bag Limit – No more than 5 over 12 inches (Jim Francis)

- On Lake Gogebic, special regulations went into effect April 1, 2012 – the yellow perch bag limit was lowered to 25 per day, with no more than 5 over 12 inches. There was no biological basis for the rule, it was purely a social concern that was supported by local interests.
- Last year, interest was expressed in expanding the “no more than 5 over 12 inches” regulation statewide. This support came from the Western Upper Peninsula Citizen Advisory Council, the Eastern Upper Peninsula Citizen Advisory Council, and adoption of a resolution at the MUCC annual convention.
- A fisheries assessment was conducted on Lake Gogebic in 2005 and 2017, and creel surveys were conducted 2005, 2016, and 2017.
 - There was no change in the size structure of the yellow perch population in assessments pre- and post-regulation change.
 - There is a strong inverse relationship between walleye and yellow perch abundance. It looks like walleye abundance plays a bigger role in structuring perch populations in Lake Gogebic than fishing regulations.
 - Results from the creel surveys indicate that very few anglers catch even more than a handful of yellow perch. In 2005-06, only 15 interviews out of about 600 caught more than 10 perch.
 - There are enforceability concerns related to limiting the number of fish over a given size. Anglers can use scissors to trim the tail of a fish to get around the length limit.
- **Discussion:**
 - This regulation was a local issue for a specific waterbody, but there is no biological basis and was likely an over reach.
 - Although there was the perception that this regulation would protect female spawners – it is just a “feel good” regulation.
 - Lt Wicklund reported that he has patrolled the Lake Gogebic ice fishery and concluded it is a hard lake to fish. Most conditions do not allow vehicle traffic and it is a long walk to get to the good fishing locations – not a lot of people put in that effort.
 - The regulation does not appear to be having any effect on the perch population in Lake Gogebic, so there is no reason to expand the regulation statewide.
 - MUCC reported that they have support for the resolution (needs 2/3 majority to pass). Part of the argument to support the regulation is that larger sized perch school together, so that if anglers get on a school of large fish, they can have an impact. And if the largest perch are targeted and harvested, it could influence genetics.
 - The NRC is mandated to use sound scientific management; unless this regulation is necessary – it should be opposed.

- In western Lake Erie, there were 39 million yellow perch in 2018. But of that total, only 122,000 are 6 years or older – which is about a 10-inch perch. Based on creel results, only 3 perch were recorded that measured 10 inches and 394 that were 9 inches. In Lake Erie the perch grow well but are not long lived. But it is not due to harvest, but environmental conditions.
- Decision: After a thoughtful discussion, a poll was taken on the proposal. It was opposed by all members but one. Because we did not achieve consensus, it defaults to the Chair to make a Consulting Decision. The position of the WRSC is to oppose the proposal.

Online Muskie Survey (Cory Kovacs)

- Cory shared the results of an online survey that was used to collect public input on the proposal to spear muskellunge on Lake St Clair. The NRC has already decided to not pursue this regulation at this time, but this is the first opportunity that Cory has had to share the survey results with this committee. So, the purpose is to discuss the survey, not have another debate about the merits of the proposal to spear muskellunge on Lake St Clair.
- The survey was distributed to over 200,000 licensed anglers. The survey targeted general anglers and consisted of 14 general angling questions, 7 specific to muskellunge angling and preferences, and 1 specific to muskellunge spearing on Lake St Clair. Anglers who received the survey were able to forward the survey to others. There was a total of 19,378 responses.
 - A third of the respondents reported fishing more than 20 times per year.
 - The most targeted species were panfish (27%), walleye (22%), bass (20%), and trout (12%).
 - Most fishing took place in inland lakes (39%), inland rivers (23%), Great Lakes (21%), and St. Clair River-Lake St Clair-Detroit River (12%).
 - When stratifying the data to only look at responses from the St Clair System, most targeted walleye (36%), followed closely by yellow perch, muskellunge, and bass – which each scored 18-19%.
 - Cory was also able to stratify statewide responses and just look at anglers who targeted muskellunge in the last 12 months (20%). 89% identified themselves as Catch and Release only.
 - Anglers who identified themselves as having caught a muskellunge in the last 12 months – 80% supported the current harvest regulation of one per year. Of the 20% that did not support it – 72% thought it should be catch and release only and 28% felt the bag limit should be increased.
 - 59% of all anglers surveyed supported spearing as a method of take for muskellunge and 41% opposed it.
 - When asked about spearing muskellunge specifically on Lake St Clair, 81% supported some form of spearing, while 19% opposed it.
- **Discussion:**
 - Public input at the local level (Citizen Fishery Advisory Committee and Conversations and Coffee) was mixed on the proposal. Homes did not think it was appropriate to handle as a local regulation, as it is a fairness issue. There is no biological support to restrict muskellunge harvest on Lake St Clair, so it should be open to any method of take.

- Koehn countered that at the last meeting the MDNR did provide feedback that indicates there is a possible biological concern with regards to the muskie population on Lake St Clair, based on declining catch-per-effort in trap net catches and declining catch rates in charter captain reports.
- Some members indicated that this issue is not done; there is a new DNR Director and new Commissioners and they may be willing to address.

Muskie and Sturgeon Registration System (Cory Kovacs)

- 2018 was the first year of mandatory reporting for muskie harvest.
- Prior to the reporting system, there was the harvest tag required for both sturgeon and muskellunge. This was expensive to provide the tags and there was no data collected.
- There are three options to register a fish; 1) telephone hotline, 2) online, 3) or in-person at a Customer Service Center.
- As of March 16, 2018, a total of 27 muskies were registered. Seventeen were harvested through the ice and ten were harvested during open water, from 20 different water bodies.
- The size of fish harvested ranged from 43 to 55 inches.
- The reporting system seemed to work well, but there may have been some under-reporting given this was the first year for the requirement.
- When a fish is reported, it is associated with the angler's license number. This would prevent anglers from trying to register a second fish.
- Felgenauer reported that sturgeon fishing on the St Clair River continues to increase in popularity.

Lunch – provided by DNR

Roundtable Reports (all)

- Dan Kimmel
 - Hosting a fishing trip in May on Lake St Clair for legislators.
 - Hosting the 10th year of a youth tournament – always coincides with Free Fishing Weekend.
- Dennis Eade
 - Working with other groups like TU and MUCC towards a new commercial fishing statute. Working with legislators to find co-sponsors for a bill. The goal is to protect sport fish, prevent the take (by-catch) of gamefish, and represent interests in the upcoming consent decree.
- Frank Corl
 - Friends of the Detroit River have a fund-raising dinner March 30. They have been leading habitat projects on the Detroit River including at Stoney and Celeron islands.
 - Friends of the Detroit River have their annual River Cleanup on April 27.
- Jack Payne
 - They annually assist MDNR with operation of walleye ponds. They are trying to raise fall fingerlings because they have better survival than the spring fingerlings.
- Randy VanDam

- Many businesses, like Wendy's and McDonald's, have donation jars at the checkout. There would likely be support to have businesses have donation jars to support the DNR, as long as the money would be restricted to just DNR.
- Seth Herbst
 - His unit has been dealing with various invasive species, including grass carp and red swamp crayfish.
 - Currently reviewing the Collector's Permit program.
 - There may be the opportunity to expand the Sturgeon in the Classroom program.
- Brad Koehn
 - They hold General Membership meetings the 3rd Thursday of each month.
 - They will be hosting a new tournament this season - the Bob Brunner Memorial Open, the first Saturday of June, and will also hold the Musky Slam at the end of July which will be a casting only event.
 - They will be hosting a high school tournament this summer.
- Jim Felgenauer
 - House Bill 4018 was introduced – it would increase fines to \$5,000 for sturgeon poaching.
 - April 10 is their next membership meeting.
 - Participating in various outreach activities including the Outdoor Adventure Center, World Wetlands Day in Gibraltar, and Earth Day April 26-27.
 - The first weekend of June is Sturgeon Fest.
- Jay Wesley
 - Some recent findings of research on smallmouth bass at Waugoshance Point may lead to some regulation changes.
- Christian LeSage
 - The allocation of fish from the hatcheries is done for the year.
 - The deadline to submit new regulation proposals is April 15.
- Andrew Briggs
 - They will be making presentations at Sea Grant Workshops on both Lake Huron and Lake St Clair.
- Phil Schneeberger
 - The past several years they have struggled to raise walleye in their ponds. Given the amount of snow cover they currently have, it may push things back and could lead to poor production again this year.
 - Smelt production in Lake Superior looks good.
- Ian Fitzgerald
 - Policy Board meeting is March 23.
 - They are following HB4362 which would restrict boating on lakes with public access from 8 am until sunset.
- Cory Kovacs
 - Presenting on April 29 at Michigan Tech for a Sea Grant Fisheries Workshop.
 - Cory is encouraging units to conduct muskie assessments on their waters, which is called for in the Management Plan. Surveys could include population estimates and stocking evaluations. Similar work should be done for northern pike, as well.
- Will Schultz

- MMA will be participating in a tagging day on Lake St Clair to provide additional muskies to tag as part of the GLATOS telemetry study.
- Working with Brad Utrup to expand muskie angler participation in the angler diary program.
- Continue to fund minnow purchases for Wolf Lake for production of muskies.
- Although last year 36,000 muskies were stocked, still concerned that over the past 5 years, only 18% of the stocking requests have been met.
- Floyd Dropps
 - Concerned about walleye rearing, as only 43% of the lakes in the UP were stocked compared to requests.
 - When the Thompson SFH upgrades are completed, an expected 200,000 additional walleye will be available. That is still not enough to meet the UP needs.
 - Wisconsin is not having any problems with their walleye production.
 - Last year, walleye were in transit to Bay de Noc from the Sault Tribe but were not allowed to be stocked. Phil Schneeberger was able to provide additional information on this issue. The fish that were in transit, originated from adults spawned from the St Mary's River. Because Bay de Noc is a brood source, there were concerns that stocking fish from a different location could affect the genetic integrity of the Bay de Noc walleye. The Walleye Committee is currently drafting a policy to address this issue.
 - There are concerns about northern pike regulations in the UP. These waters are not as productive and most male pike never make it to 20 inches. Therefore, the 24 inch minimum size limit is too restrictive.
 - Raised concerns about muskie regulations on the Paint River. This is a "blue ribbon" trout stream in the western UP that is infested with muskies. The Northern Lake Michigan Management Unit is looking to liberalize muskie regulations on the Paint.

Aquatic Nuisance Control – vegetation management (Jay Wesley)

- The regulations relating to aquatic vegetation control are in statute.
 - The bar to get a permit is pretty low – if an applicant can document an invasive species or claim that vegetation is limiting use (swimming and boating) – a permit can be obtained.
- The weed applicators have a strong lobby, so there is little interest in changing legislation that would make treatments more restrictive.
- DEQ has 8 days to respond to a permit application or it is automatically approved – this is regulated by statute.
- Concerns were expressed that the active component of the chemical does not break down, resulting in accumulation and potential long-term impacts. This may be a concern specifically with copper.
- There was a specific example at Escanaba Marina where anglers felt the vegetation treatment removed too much vegetation and angler groups got involved to voice concerns.
- Part of the problem is that some applicators are good, and some are not. More scrutiny is needed for applicators that have a bad track record.
 - If chemicals are not applied properly, it falls under Dept of Ag.

- If you witness a lake that you have concerns about vegetation management, contact your local biologist. They need to be aware of lakes where problems develop so they can monitor those lakes.
- Jay feels that we have made some progress with the DEQ and DNR work group. For example, there are now temperature thresholds that limit the timing of treatments.
- A consistent message is that the laws for aquatic nuisance management permits are set in statute. Therefore, the legislature would have to be involved in any changes to the law.

Tournament Registration System (Seth Herbst)

- Registration for bass tournament has been in effect in for the past two years. There were 2,276 tournaments held in 2017 and 2,226 in 2018.
- Changes were made to Fisheries Order 250 to refine the definition of a tournament. Fishing derbies, big fish contests, and who caught the most fish, do not meet the definition of a tournament.
- Beginning in 2019, all bass tournaments, all walleye tournaments, and any competitive event targeting muskellunge, are required to register.
- The data collected from the tournaments provides additional information for the local biologist's who manage the waters.
- Registration is required for tournament held at any Michigan boat launch. So, tournaments on Lake St Clair need to be registered, even if some fishing will take place in Canadian waters.

The spread of Largemouth Bass Virus (LMBV) (Jim Francis)

- Symptoms: fish die in the summer. There are no external signs, but there can be internal damage to the swim bladder.
- LMBV was first documented in Michigan in Lake George in 2000. Additional sampling in 2001 found several additional lakes, all located in southwest Michigan.
- During 2000-2004, 30 water bodies were sampled and 14 were positive, all in the southern half of the Lower Peninsula.
- There was a reemergence in 2018, when dead fish were reported in several lakes in the northeast part of the Lower Peninsula. Testing confirmed LMBV at three additional lakes – Cedar Lake (Iosco County), Beaver Lake (Alpena County), and Avalon Lake (Montmorency County).
 - In Beaver Lake, it was smallmouth bass that were affected.
- A likely vector for spread is anglers.
- It was a hot summer last year and that may have contributed to the mortalities.
- Bass numbers in many northeast Michigan lakes are very high – that may have contributed to the virus manifesting itself.
 - For example, trap net catches of bass from surveys on Grand Lake are much higher relative to the 1990s.
 - Many lakes have additional stressors like zebra mussels and gobies.
- Bass tournaments have requirements to check live wells before every tournament.
- Transferring fish between lakes by anglers continues to be one of the largest threats. Although we try to educate anglers, we know this practice still takes place.

Meeting Wrap-Up (all)

- Recognize MUCC for hosting the meeting – both the facilities and location worked well.
- Previous meetings were held in Clare, as an effort to provide a central location. But there was consensus from the group that Lansing was a preferred location for future meetings.

Warmwater Resources Steering Committee

March 18, 2019

Attendance

Committee Member:

Spencer Berman	MOMC/Lake St Clair Guide Association
Andrew Briggs	MDNR-Fisheries
Frank Corl	Downriver Bass Association
Jim Diana	University of Michigan
Doug Dingey	Independent
Dennis Eade	Michigan Steelhead and Salmon Fisherman's Assn
Jim Felgenauer	St Clair – Detroit River Sturgeon for Tomorrow
Brian Gilson	Bowfishing Association of Michigan
Seth Herbst	MDNR-Fisheries
Dan Kimmel	Michigan BASS Nation/TBF of Michigan
Brad Koehn	Lake St Clair Muskies In #58
Christian Lesage	MDNR-Fisheries
Jack Payne	West Michigan Walleye Club
Will Schultz	Michigan Muskie Alliance
Amy Trotter	MUCC
F/LT Jason Wicklund	MDNR-Law Enforcement
Randy VanDam	D&R Sports Center

Participated by conference call:

Tim Cwalinski	MDNR-Fisheries
Floyd Dropps	Upper Peninsula Sportsmen's Alliance
Mike Holmes	Michigan Darkhouse Anglers Association

Guest:

Ian Fitzgerald	MUCC
Cory Kovacs	MDNR-Fisheries
Duke LeBaron	Michigan Muskie Alliance
Jack Pikaart	West Michigan Walleye Club
Jason Quintano	Muskie Guide
Phil Schneeberger	MDNR-Fisheries
Jay Wesley	MDNR-Fisheries
Bruce Yinger	Downriver Bass Association