

Lake Michigan Citizen's Fishery Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

Jay's Sporting Goods

Clare, MI

April 10th, 2024 – 10:30 AM to 3:00 PM

Attendees:

Denny Grinold, Jay Wesley, Chuck Pistis, Jim Fenner, Eric Braden, Justin Vanderlinde, Edward McCoy, Randy Claramunt, Bob Reider, Riley Smith, Jonathan Durtka, Jim Bos, Mike Radcliffe, Bill Winowiecki, Mark Williams, Kevin Hughes, Tom Andris, Frank Krist, Theresa Krist, Scott Heintzelman, Dean Jessup, John Stegmeier, Blaise Pewinski, Brian Gunderman, George Freeman, Jim Bedford, Jim Squier, Nick Torsky. Via TEAMS – Paul Jensen, Mark Tonello, Kendra Kozlauskos, Lucas Nathan.

Advisor Reports:

- Fairport produced limit salmon catches last year with good numbers of Alewife around and a nice temperature set up.
- Lake Huron is producing early catches of Atlantic Salmon, Steelhead, and Lake Trout. Saginaw Bay Walleye fishing has been great.
- The Lake Huron Citizen's Fishery Advisory Committee is meeting May 7th.
- Ludington had Lake Trout and Brown Trout stocked recently with lots of seagulls one of the days. Net pens will be installed this week. Early Brown Trout fishing was good when the water was dirty. It slowed down when colder and clearer water moved in.
- Pentwater Yellow Perch fishing has been good in the lake. Steelhead fishing is on-going in the river.
- East Grand Traverse Bay has been terrific for Lake Trout and Cisco. They have been full of 2-inch Alewife. West Bay Lake Trout numbers seem to be down.
- We would like to see Atlantic Salmon continued in Torch Lake. There is a plan to stock some in 2024.
- Arcadia and Manistee are seeing some Lake Trout and Coho Salmon this spring. Stocking location change seems to be helping there.
- MUCC Kids Camp will go for 8 weeks this year. Metro-West fished the Manistee River and landed a dozen or so Steelhead. There is a Brown Trout event coming up out of Ludington.
- Drowned River mouth lakes are producing an excellent Walleye fishery throughout the winter trolling when no ice.
- Kalamazoo River Steelhead fishing was tough in November and better in December.
- St. Joe is producing Coho Salmon, Brown Trout, and now some Kings are showing up.
- Grand Haven had some Chinook Salmon and Brown Trout.
- Prairie Creek Steelhead run was down based on catch and redd counts. It has been a tough spring for Steelhead.

- PM River has a bank stabilization project along a railroad that is great to finally get done. This is the weakest run ever for Steelhead on the PM River.
- Spearfishing for walleye has been good in Saginaw Bay. Thunder Bay has had good clear water, but Southern Lake Michigan has been tough with turbidity.
- Glad to see Brown Trout fin clipping in Elk Lake to see where they are going.
- Big Manistee River was slow for Steelhead in the fall with mostly wild skippers. January and February were decent for wild fish. March saw more hatchery fish.
- Betsie and Muskegon rivers have been slow for Steelhead.

Great Lakes Advisors Report from March Lake Committee Meetings

- Resolution concerning Canadian Budget and their contribution to the Great Lakes Fishery Commission.
 - The Annual Meeting has been delayed two years because of this.
 - Finally meeting in 2024 in Ottawa, Ontario.
- Resolution supporting the authorization of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.
- Discussed the Commercial Fishing Bills 5108 and 5553.
- Discussed the Great Lakes Decree.

Committee Roster Review

- Some alternates were added.
- Several individuals and groups have not been active for a few years. They will be contacted to determine their interest.

Terms of Reference

- The terms of reference were reviewed.
 - There were questions about meeting minutes being posted on DNR website.
 - Issues with minutes having to be summarized and needing to meet accessibility standards.
 - Other organizations can post minutes and supporting presentations and documents.
 - Question about advance notice for meetings and whether that should be removed. This gives an option for DNR and Chair to limit attendance to advisors during controversial or confidential topics.
- The terms of reference sets the terms for the Chair and Vice-Chair at three years.
 - The current Chair and Vice-Chair are past the three-year mark.
- A motion was made for Denny Grinold to remain as Chair and for Bill Winowiecki to remain as Vice-Chair.
 - The motions carried by unanimous vote.

Charter and Lake-Wide Harvest Report

- There were 20,742 charter excursions, 80,693 anglers, and 438,458 angler hours in 2023 statewide.

- Statewide Walleye, Lake Trout, Chinook Salmon, Smallmouth Bass, and Yellow Perch made up most of the catch.
- For Lake Michigan, the catch was dominated by Chinook Salmon, Lake Trout, Coho Salmon, Smallmouth Bass, and Yellow Perch.
- Chinook Salmon were mostly caught between Arcadia and Grand Haven.
- Lake Trout were mostly caught around Charlevoix, Grand Traverse Bays, Leland, and the south ports from Holland to St. Joseph.
- Overall, Lake Michigan Recreational Harvest for all states increased year after year since 2020. Harvest in 2023 was the highest since 2013 with Chinook Salmon, Coho Salmon, Lake trout, Walleye, and Steelhead making up most of the harvest.
- Many thanks to Chris Kemp and Kendra Kozlauskos for summarizing the data and running the Charter Reporting Program.
- Discussion:
 - What about the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for MM-5 Lake Trout?
 - It is expected to go from 160,000 to 87,000.
 - If technical staff from all parties can't agree, the decision goes to Executive Council.
 - If Executive Council can't negotiate a solution, the TAC stays with model estimate of 87,000.
 - Model is run every three years.
 - There is no longer a penalty if either party goes over.
 - Revisit in August
 - What is going on with Lake Trout?
 - 2020 Stocking was in different areas.
 - Lake Trout appear to be moving out of MM-5.

Lake Committee Presentations

- The agenda for the Lake Committee meetings was provided.
- This meeting is an excellent opportunity to take the first look at new research and last year's assessments.
- Video recordings will be provided at:
 - <http://www.glf.org/lake-michigan-committee.php>

Regulation Proposals

- Expanded opportunities to underwater spear harvest Lake Trout, Northern Pike, and Walleye started in 2022. Most of their harvest is walleye from the Saginaw Bay area. These regulations are set to sunset March 2025 and were limited to areas outside the 1836 Treaty Area, which is south of Grand Haven in Lake Michigan and south of Thunder Bay in Lake Huron.
- The proposal is to expand to all Great Lakes waters, permit night fishing, and expand species to include Bass, Yellow Perch, Sunfishes, Salmon, and Trout.
- Discussion:
 - Anglers can already spear in inland waters.

- There have not been any conflicts reported in the Great Lakes areas that are open.
- Night fishing would follow night-time SCUBA regulations.
- There were a lot of comments about safety of the diver and that the average boater would not recognize their buoy or what it means.
 - Divers must stay 100 ft within the buoy.
 - Boats must stay 200 ft away from buoy.
 - Need diver down education.
- Spear fishers may have an advantage over hook and line anglers.
- Also must stay 150 ft away from marinas.
- What about Bow Anglers? Does this open the door for that group to have access to more sport fish?
- Several had concern for spawning bass.
- This could get too big – then what?
- Divers will stay away from conflict to protect their own safety.
- Etiquette of the underwater spearfishing group will be important.
- MSA is willing to consider a season that limits busy boating times of year.
- Concern about non-reporting. Creel clerks should keep an eye out for diving activity and interview spearers for accurate catch and effort.
- Lake Whitefish are in decline throughout Lake Michigan, so managers have been discussing how to decrease harvest while maintaining fishing opportunities.
- There are known snagging issues at the piers that could be addressed first.
- Proposal from November 1 to November 30 on pier and channel (exact location TBD).
- Single pointed hook ½ inch or less point to shank.
- Unlawful to take Lake Whitefish by spear, bow-fishing, or underwater spear.
- Discussion:
 - Why not extend it to December? There are still Lake Whitefish around.
 - Why not all piers?
 - Snagging seems to be a bigger issue right now at Grand Haven, Muskegon, and Whitehall.
 - Why not close the fishery?
 - Want to see if limiting gear would reduce harvest and hooking/snagging mortality.
 - What about people fishing Steelhead, Brown Trout, and Walleye?
 - They would have to following the single hook rule.
 - Why not lower the limit?
 - Could be considered if gear change is not effective.
 - Make sure that you have signs when or if the change is made.

Platte River Dredging

- Anglers continue to ask for a dredging solution for the mouth of the Platte River.
- The National Park Service states that it will allow dredging if the natural river channel is maintained, that sand is deposited in the lake, and that no equipment drives on beach.

- Michigan DNR is looking to 1) purchase a dredge, 2) contract a dredge, or 3) find an alternate location for beach access.
- Frustration from the committee about how unreasonable that the NPS has been on this issue. Don't they care about safety?

Investing in Michigan's Fisheries

- Handouts were provided with statistics like each Michigan biologist covers 500,000 acres of water while the national average is 15,000 acres per biologist.
- Cost of living is really reducing are ability to maintain existing programs.
- Discussion:
 - How about a lifetime license prize for a pure fishing entry of \$5.00.
 - Senior license is too cheap.
 - Legislature agreed to make difference up with General Fund.
 - Go after the General Funds.
 - Fishing License could be \$40.
 - Raise it to what you need why you have the chance.
 - There will be political push back given the increase price in everything.
 - Bring back trout and salmon stamp.
 - People may not buy a license if their chances of getting caught are low. I never get check for a license while fishing.
 - Inflation is the issue so a \$10 increase would do nothing.
 - The politicians will call it a tax increase.
 - Incremental increases each year.
 - Don't ask for it all at once.

DNR Updates:

- Advisors were glad to see Chief Claramunt and asked him several questions.
- Avian Predation
 - New Cormorant permit allows lethal control of a total of 10,000 birds and eggs.
 - Doug Schultz (Lake Huron Basin Coordinator) is coordinating the cormorant program.
 - For stocking sites, we need to show that non-lethal harassment is not working. In those cases, lethal reinforcement could be done.
 - Working with Wildlife Division staff for this lethal reinforcement.
 - Need to be 500 ft from a dwelling and need a place to dispose dead birds.
 - Bangers are available for harassment. Flares have been used as an alternative.
 - The Director wants to address cormorants.
 - Need \$150,000 to \$400,000 to have an effective control program.
 - Contract with Wildlife Services.
- Brown Trout were stocking in Grand Haven again.
- There is a new Cormorant nesting colony on an island upstream of US131 in Grand Haven.

- The Niles Fish Ladder on the St. Joseph River has a broken gate so the ladder is closed to fish movement right now.
- Many staff saw the Sea Lamprey movie “Relentless” and suggested other see the movie if they get the opportunity.
- Law Enforcement Division Update
 - Dave Shaw retired.
 - Jason Haines is the new Chief.
 - There will be a recruit school that will start January 2025.
 - The southern Lake Michigan Great Lakes Enforcement vessel is launched.
 - Northern Lower Lake Michigan Great Lakes Enforcement vessel is getting a few more upgrades finished.
 - The Escanaba Great Lake Enforcement vessel will go in water soon.

Next Meeting:

- October 9th, 2024 at Jay’s Sporting Goods in Clare.
- Suggested topics:
 - Lower trophic issues with mussels.
 - Mussel mitigation work on reefs.
 - Goby diet and Goby bot.

Adjourned at 3:05 PM

Contact Jay Wesley if you would like copies of the presentations or need more information on any of the agenda topics.

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