

Executive Director's Report – December 2012

We are coming off one of the best years in decades for catching large Chinook, Coho and lake trout on Lake Michigan, thanks to a good 2010 alewife class. Equally impressive is the rebound of walleye, steelhead and lake trout fishing on Lake Huron. There are still Chinook being caught in parts of northern Lake Huron but not in sufficient numbers to encourage targeting them on a daily basis. Lake Erie had a below average year. Walleye and perch fishing were not as good as in past years and storms and bad weather caused many anglers to stay off the water. Algae blooms were especially bad this summer.

Stream fishermen are reporting excellent catches and the number of salmon in the streams is definitely higher than the past two years. Winter steelhead fishing should be excellent. Slightly better catches of brown trout this year and the spring fishing for 2012 looks good. We are expecting an increase return of steelhead this coming spring so fishing overall looks to be on an upswing. Bag limits for salmon will remain at 5 per angler per day in 2012.

The most exciting development on the scene is the mass marking activity for hatchery planted Chinook and lake trout with the longer term goal of marking all fish (steelhead and Coho as well) in the future. The Federal Fish & Wildlife Service has received grant funding to underwrite the cost of purchasing and equipping sophisticated trailers to mass mark Chinook and lake trout without needing to physically handle the fish. The speed and efficiency of this process is truly impressive and there are reasons to believe that federal funding will be available to insure this is a long term undertaking to help fishery managers determine the natural reproduction impact and fish migration patterns that will influence meaningful long term decisions for the fishery.

A major share of my time these past months has been concentrated on resolving the matter of IRS penalties to the organization for failure to file income tax returns in a timely manner for the tax years 2008, 2009 and 2010. Steve Haddad did a major disservice to our organization by neglecting his duties and responsibilities as office manager and I have tried to my best to resolve these issues since taking over as executive director. I am relieved to report that the IRS has waived the penalties for 2008 & 2009 and we are in the process of showing reasonable cause to waive the penalty for 2010.

On the legislative front, the most alarming recent development is the introduction of H.R. 2840 "Commercial Vessel Discharge Reform Act of 2011" offered by Congressman LoBiondo of New Jersey.

The bill amends the Federal Water Pollution Control Act giving the power to circumvent Michigan's more stringent Ballast Water Discharge Law. The bill gives the final authority for

regulating ballast water discharges to the “Secretary” who oversees the Coast Guard. The concept definitively and effectively preempts state’s rights since the Secretary, without consulting with the affected state(s), can unilaterally make a determination, which subsequently allows an operator to circumvent the discharge provisions of the act. The state is precluded from protecting its own waters under this concept. Michigan should have authority to inspect and enforce the law free and clear of any such obstacles to protect its waters from aquatic invasive species. Governor Snyder recently vetoed a Michigan Senate Bill that would have allowed federal law to supersede state law on matters of commerce, thereby safe guarding the state’s right to continue exercising its authority over such things as ballast water discharge regulations in its own waters.

Acting Fisheries Chief, Jim Dexter, asked me to serve on a special committee as part of Gov. Snyder’s Executive Order 2011-5, establishing the Office of Regulatory Reinvention. I was vetted and approved to serve on the Natural Resources Advisory Rules Committee authorized to meet over a period of 160 days to discuss and recommend elimination or amendment of duplicative, obsolete, unnecessary, or unduly restrictive rules. We are in the process of evaluating rules covering licensing, real estate, fishing activities, fish consumption advisories, the Natural Resources Trust Fund, forestry activities, and oil and gas extraction activities.

As a principal member of the Lake Michigan Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee, I was selected along with former Fisheries Chief John Robertson and committee chair Denny Grinold of the Michigan Charter Boat Association, to represent the Lake Michigan advisors on a taskforce charged with formulating stocking strategies for Lake Michigan. This task force is composed of the Fishery Management Agencies of Lake Michigan, including Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana and Michigan fisheries agencies. We meet quarterly to discuss Red Flags, abundance indicators, natural reproduction, and decision analysis to put us in a position to advise the agencies on the best stocking decisions for Lake Michigan. I attended my first strategies workshop on November 5th in Portage, IN.

I am glad to report that Michigan Legislature has reinstated the Michigan Legislative Sportsmen Caucus. Legislators who share our passion for fishing and preserving our fisheries, as well as hunting and making hunting more accessible to sportsmen. The group held a Kickoff Breakfast on Nov. 10th in Lansing which I attended and talked with representatives from many of our chapter areas. This is the group of legislators we can most easily go to when we have issues and need support in the house and senate.

I have been busy securing advertisers for the Great Lakes Sport Fishing News and working with Deb on our Show Edition. We held a planning meeting on November 22nd to develop goals for 2012. We went over responsibilities, assignments, and objectives for the coming year.

Finally, I was invited to speak at the DNR Fisheries Division management meeting in Lansing on November 30th, covering the history of our organization and sharing our near term objectives. The length of the Q&A session suggested that the managers appreciate having an advocacy group like the Michigan Steelheaders to assist in their efforts to protect and promote the fishery. Following me on the program was John Hesse from our Mid-Michigan Chapter. He presented the Dr. Bill Earl Program, a kids' fishing clinic underwritten by grant monies and sponsorships that provide opportunities for kids to experience the thrill of learning the proper way to fish, including rigging, casting, catching and cleaning their catch for the table. The fishery managers were impressed with John's presentation and committed their full support and even some additional funding. This is a program well worth the support of our chapters by sponsoring and conducting the programs in their local areas. The program is scheduled to be presented in detail and discussed at our Presidents' meeting on January 28th.

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