

Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee Meeting

Wednesday, October 20, 2010 --- Ram Conference Center, Roscommon, MI

Introductions:

Bob Wagner was introduced as the new Lake Huron Region Manager (a self-described Conservation Ombudsman) who will be responsible for the Lake Huron Region Citizens Advisory Council. The Citizen Councils are being formed for each lake region surrounding the state to get citizen input on all DNRE programs. The councils will meet bi-monthly and will be self-directed with assigned time for discussion and public comment. Issues will be taken to work groups composed of citizens and DNRE personnel. Broad recommendations will be forwarded to the department and the information will be shared with the various constituencies the members represent in their communities. This concept came about during the time the two departments (DNR & DEQ) were merged into one.

Atlantic Salomon Rearing Update. (Gary Whelan, Fish Production Manager)

Lake Superior State University fall fingerlings and eyed eggs: There is a parasite present in the water at the Platte River Hatchery that is inhibiting the department's ability to rear Atlantic salmon eggs at the hatchery. It is a spore and looks like *Myxobolus cerebralis*. It produces whirling disease type symptoms. The issue is the open water supply. It will take \$1.2 million to fix the water problem with a UV system but funding is an obstacle. The test run during 2009 showed that fall fingerlings could be raised to acceptable yearling stocking size at the Platte River Hatchery. It appears that eyed eggs from Lake Superior State University would have to be raised to at least fingerling size at another hatchery because of the newly discovered parasite. The key rearing issues continue to be obtaining sufficient eggs for production, finding 4 raceways since Atlantic salmon require twice as much space as other yearlings, and the need to develop a second brood stock other than St. Mary's. Other rearing options include Thompson State Fish Hatchery which has a successful history of rearing Atlantics but will need to reduce another species to make room. Wolf Lake State Fish Hatchery has a poor history with Atlantics but there is some potential if production of other yearlings is reduced. The reality is in order to raise Atlantic salmon yearling brown trout or rainbows will have to be reduced. Summary: a possible scenario would be to raise Atlantic salmon at Thompson State Hatchery and reduce brown trout or rainbow trout production.

When the Lake Huron Chinook salmon fishery crashed four options to improve the fishing were developed including 1) stocking large 10 to 13 inch yearling browns in the fall to avoid predators, 2) placing steelhead in pens before stocking to determine if they survive better 3), attempting to reestablish the native cisco as a the main forage by raising and stocking spring fingerlings and 4) experimenting to determine if the Atlantic salmon program can be expanded. The goal is to continue with these projects for a predetermined specified period and then evaluate them.

Brown trout are making a real positive impact at Harbor Beach. We know we can raise Atlantics at the Thompson. The Atlantics are not reproducing naturally yet. Lake trout outlook is positive with the Federal Hatcheries putting over one million lake trout in Lake Huron. The steelhead are doing well. Diet study shows the make up of their diet is bugs, smelt and gobies. There needs to be a review on planting Chinook salmon since few hatchery fish are being caught south of Alpena and the 5-year study after cutting the plants in 2006 will be completed at the end of 2010. Chinook are planted as fingerlings and cost much less than most other species which are stock as yearling and cost near \$1.00 per fish because of lower densities. Discussion on private hatcheries determined they are unable to meet State standards without significant improvements to those facilities but because of lack of funding there is no money available. The executive branch has no influence with the legislature. The people are the only ones who can influence the legislature.

Action Item: Yearling Steelhead allocations for the Platte River. (Todd Kalish)

Everyone agreed we need to have a second egg taking hatchery other than the Little Manistee River/Weir to raise wild steelhead trout. It is possible that this source could be jeopardized at some point due to disease, environmental factors, or facility breakdowns. Platte River State Fish Hatchery is the best place to raise the planned 20,000 wild steelhead. The facility is staffed appropriately and the infrastructure is right. We are at capacity at all hatcheries now and have to prioritize where we “cut” fish rearing at the current hatcheries. The subject of allocation was debated and several options including 1 and 2 below were developed by the Lake Michigan Basin Team.

Option 1. Equitable reallocation from all the Fisheries Division basins in the state. The Lake Superior Basin is currently allocated approximately 7% of the 1.1 million steelhead allocated yearly in Michigan, Lake Erie Basin is allocated 11%, Lake Huron 35% and Lake Michigan 47%. If we equitably reallocated steelhead yearlings, Lake Superior would provide 1,400, Lake Erie 2,200, Lake Huron 7,000 and Lake Michigan 9,400 for a total of 20,000.

Option 2. Inequitably reallocate from all the basins in the state, with a heavy emphasis the Lake Michigan Basin. The Lake Michigan Basin would be responsible for 15,000 (75%) of the 20,000 yearlings requested. The remaining 5,000 yearlings would be proportionally reallocated from the other basins: Lake Huron would reallocate 2,800 (14%), Lake Erie 1,300 (6%), and Lake Superior 1,000 (5%).

Consensus of the LHCFAC was that option 2 made the most sense.

Acoustics Forage Survey (Jeff Schaeffer, USGS Research Fisheries Biologist)

Good News. Smelt are ubiquitous throughout the three basins in Lake Huron. Forage fish density and biomass are up substantially. These are “Field Observations” (subject to revision when all the data has been analyzed) Zooplankton samples show higher production this year. Bloaters are very prevalent. Diet study still continuing. Bottom trawl survey starts October 21st. Smelt are thriving and in good condition.

Advisor reports:

Harbor Beach – Lake Trout prevalent, steelhead much better and walleye increasing. Brown trout doing well and white fish are present in good numbers.

Port Sanilac -- Fishing started out slow this year but July and August were good. Perch were sporadic.

Rogers City/Presque Isle – May; outstanding for Lake Trout, great for Atlantics. June; superb multi-species fishery including Chinook, Steelhead, Lake Trout, Pink Salmon and Coho. July: same as June and the Steelhead were all over. August: good numbers of small Kings but larger Kings elusive and not very prevalent. Sept: Chinook salmon fishing disappointing, lots of 1 year old jacks but weather made it difficult to get out. Oct: Good weather and large Lake Trout with occasional Chinook salmon and steelhead.

Saginaw Bay – Good walleye fishing early but warm water caused slow down in the Bay and you had to go North to colder water Perch fishing was great in August norm was 8-10”s with occasional 12-13” fish. Atlantics in April and May.

Thunder Bay – Cormorants down from 20,000 pairs seven years ago to 740 pairs now.

Alpena – Walleye fishing was great and 2-4 small brown trout a day from last fall’s plant.

Oscoda – Steelhead fishing was great but we didn’t see the brown trout.

Fishery Division Management Updates (Dr. Kelly Smith & other DNRE Staff

Kelly reminded the committee that the department will be offering an early out program for employees that will result in back filling only some of openings that occur. About one-half of the positions will be filled State wide but it is not know yet what proportion of back filling will occur in the Fisheries Division. There are 59 employees eligible to take the early out opportunity.

Summary of Walleye Plants & Egg Taking Activity

A recap of walleye plants was discussed with stocking taking place in Black Lake and Mullet Lake. The Chinook egg-take at the Little Manistee River was the second lowest year on record but with a harvest from the Swan Weir enough eggs were obtained to meet Michigan's requirements. Not able to provide eggs to Illinois or Indiana this year. Coho egg take is currently underway.

Questions from the Committee

Gary Whelan was asked about obtaining new breeding strains of fish from outside the Great Lakes and he said it easily can result in disease. Western areas of the United States are having serious disease issues.

New Proposed Regulations for Commercial Fishing Operation Rules (Dave Borgeson)

Proposed spacing between nets, standardized license dates when restrictions are in effect, allow existing commercial fishers to operate deeper and continue no-fishing zones off Thunder Bay & Harrisville.

Meeting was adjourned at 3:00 PM