



Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee

Established by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, to improve and maintain fishery resources of Lake Huron through better communication and partnership.

April 1, 2009

Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee Minutes

Wednesday, April 1, 2009

Doherty Hotel, Clare

10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Approved June 25, 2009

10:00 Welcome and Introductions (Frank Krist and Kurt Newman MDNR)

Attendees: Bud Donnelly, John Dobis, Tom Pawlaczyk, Dave Borgeson, Brandon Schroeder, Jim Johnson, Ken Merckel, Fred Sterns, Bill Leichtman, Shirley Martin, Ji He, Jim Baker, Lynn Duling, Terry Walsh, Fred Sterns, Jim DeClerck, Jack Noble, Tom Cadwalader, Gene Kirvan, Judy Ogden, Dave Fielder, Frank Krist, Kurt Newman, Tom Keerl, Ed Roseman

Minutes from the last meeting were approved.

Kurt spoke about the new effort to produce a lake-wide management plan. He mentioned that during the upcoming workshops the use of new technologies may help gather information from attendees. As the planning process proceeds, more frequent meetings of the LHCFAC may be needed to ensure sufficient input and timely production of the plan.

10:05 Possession limit for walleyes and yearling cisco from Wisconsin

Ken Merckel mentioned an incident concerning the potential to have tickets written for those people who possess more than one day's limit of walleye. Ken expressed a desire to allow for more than the one day's creel limit than is currently allowed by the 1928 regulation. Kurt asked if the committee was in favor of pursuing this issue, and said, if so, he could talk to Todd Grischke and possibly work this into the lake management plan. Frank said it makes sense to change this regulation because many people on vacation or camping spend several days fishing, and the current possession limit seems to be overly protective. Kurt will determine what action would need to be undertaken to change the regulation.

Ken also said that the Iron River Hatchery in Wisconsin has 8,000-10,000 yearling cisco available for stocking in Lake Huron. They need to be stocked by May 1st because the hatchery is running out of room. Dave Fielder mentioned that the fish have been disease tested, but are of Western Lake Superior origin. Kurt suggested that Dave F. contact Dr. Kim Scribner to discuss the genetic implications to stocking these fish. Jim Johnson said that the only opportunity to study these fish would be in Alpena because of ongoing monitoring efforts, and that another reason to stock Alpena is that there is likely to be a new reef constructed near the stocking site. Walleye and cormorant

predation is a potential concern. MDNR has had success with the pilot project, but currently does not have the infrastructure to rear lake herring at a full scale production level. Jim DeClerck would like to see this effort get more traction. Dave Borgeson will pursue the logistics involved in getting approval for stocking of these fish, making sure the disease testing is in order. Our current understanding is that this would be no cost to the MDNR. Dave Fielder, Dave Borgeson, Frank Krist, and Ken Merckel will work together to see this issue through to fruition. Ken said the Wisconsin facility has a large capacity to rear herring.

10:20 Biological conditions of Lake Huron's fishery and other issues (Jim Johnson, and Dave Fielder MDNR)

Jim gave an overview of what he planned to present at the workshop in Bad Axe. He emphasized the tremendous changes in the Lake Huron community since 2003. The Chinook fishery has greatly declined. Walleye are making up a greater proportion of the catch, making up over 70% of the pounds harvested. Overall effort has declined dramatically with the decline in Chinook, and the number of charter operations has declined as well. The past two years (2007, 2008) have been about the same for the charter fishery.

Jim plans to talk about diagnostics at the upcoming workshops. He talked about the prey limitation, both in size and abundance, and the implications on the recruitment of fish to the fishery. Young yellow perch, chinook salmon, brown trout, whitefish, lake trout have all become prey items. Jim presented a graph of chinook harvest as a function of stocking, and the only fishery created was at Rogers City, otherwise stocking was not related to harvest. Chinook are vulnerable to predation in their first year, staying nearshore for a longer time period. Would steelhead and Atlantic salmon suffer lower predatory pressure because they are stocked at larger size as smolts? Restoration of a pelagic prey base would also help remedy this predatory dilemma, as would cormorant control.

Dave Fielder then presented historic walleye abundance and recent trends. Increasing walleye production was most likely a result of changes in the food web, including the decline of alewife. The walleye population has begun reaching some of the target parameters as described in the recovery plan (year classes dominated by natural fish, growth declines). Overall fishing effort has declined in the face of a greatly improved walleye population, a likely result of the greatly diminished perch fishery. Perch are experiencing good reproduction, but survival is low probably due to the large predation pressure exerted by walleye. Ken Merckel asked about the recovery status for walleye. Tom Keerl asked how yellow perch fit into the recovery plan. Dave said that they weren't a part of the original plan, but recent discussions involving potential role of cisco have included perch. Cisco recovery might provide more larger bodied prey for walleyes which could reduce predation pressure on the perch and increase their survival.

10:50 Lake Huron's prey fish and macroinvertebrates (Ed Roseman, USGS)

Ed and Jeff Schaeffer will split duties among the workshops. He presented the information given at the Upper Lakes meetings last week. Ed also distributed a handout summarizing results. Overall prey biomass has greatly declined since 1992. There was a bit of an increase in bloater for 2008. They were unable to sample the southern areas due to mechanical and weather difficulties. Ken asked about mysis evaluation, and Jeff has included this in the acoustic work. This aspect will be included in their presentation at the workshop. Kurt mentioned the letter from the committee to USGS imploring them to maintain this sampling effort and ensure that Lake Huron receives the attention needed. The letter was effective and received a positive response. Ed said that this past year safety was an issue, but they are working on contingency plans to make sure the sampling gets done, possibly reversing the order of sampling. Ed said that he will work with Jim Johnson asking anglers to save stomach contents this year. Kurt emphasized that members of this group can help by taking this message back to their groups so that they can participate and help gather the needed information to assist in better understanding the dynamics of the lake. Kurt suggested that the group should work through Frank. Ed and Judy said that there are some freezers available for assisting this stomach collection effort. Brandon said he will be able to assist in coordinating the effort as well.

11:15 New audience feed back technologies (Brandon Schroeder)

Brandon showed the website where videos of talks will be available for interested persons to view at their leisure. He passed out remote electronic devices that will be used to gather audience input at the workshops. Generic questions have been developed to test the system, and the questions will be evaluated as to their pertinence. Brandon presented a few questions to demonstrate the applicability of the electronic system. This system allows for more flexibility; that is, allowing the facilitator to change questions or add questions as needed. Kurt said a more detailed survey will be developed to collect information from licensed anglers, and a less detailed survey will be posted on-line to gather additional information. Judy expressed concern about how this method is to be used, with the role of the respondent a key factor to how they might respond. Care must be taken in how the information gathered will be used. Kurt recognized the validity of this concern, but said that this will not be used to make direct management decisions, but will help inform the process. Jim DeClerck suggested that asking a question prior to providing information will allow for follow-up to ask the same question later to see if any attitude migration or learning occurred.

11:30 Regional issues/management strategies and upcoming budget challenges (Dr. Kurt Newman)

We need to know what the lake has to offer in order to build an effective plan. Now is the time to write the lake wide plan, and to try some new strategies. Kurt emphasized that committee members should encourage their colleagues to attend the workshops. Kurt also encouraged them to attend the regional meetings planned to describe the DNR's budget situation, and gather concerns from the public. The first of these is scheduled for April 8th at Davenport University.

12:00 Lunch

1:15 The state of the Michigan DNR budget (Dr. Kelley Smith)

Kelley explained that the whole Department is undergoing difficult budgetary times. He said that meetings will be held around the state to discuss the issue and provided the date and locations of the upcoming meetings. Kelley passed out information regarding fisheries staffing and budget. Decisions must be made on what Fisheries Division will do, and also what the Division will not be able to do as this crisis deepens. The situation that is forthcoming this October is going to present a very difficult dilemma. Kelley explained the Game and Fish Protection Fund, and appropriation of that fund. Appropriation is the authorization to spend funds, provided they are available, but does not assure the funds will be available.

Theresa Pohl led the group through the Executive Budget Bill for the DNR, describing the difference between restricted funds and the general fund. She then focused on Fisheries Division's portion of the bill. Fisheries Division has a gross appropriation of \$30,473,700, of which 65% is of state origin, while 35% is federal. Questions were asked if the group could access information describing what was appropriated vs. what actually occurred. Kelley said that this could easily be provided. Chuck Pistis mentioned the very low amount of general fund dollars that Fisheries receives, and the problem has presented for quite a few years.

Kelley explained that invested fund returns are down, as are license sales, providing increasingly lower revenues. He showed time line which described the Game and Fish Fund beginning balance, revenue, appropriation, and expenditures, which results in the new G&F beginning balance. He described the scenario which resulted in a greatly reduced fund balance. Kelley then described the picture for 2009, which required a reduction plan. This reduction plan won't work for 2010, because the projected deficit is much greater. For 2010 Fisheries will need to reduce G&F expenditures by approximately \$6 million.

Frank suggested that there should be a coalition of groups put together to ask the legislature to address this situation. Jim DeClerck asked that folks talk to the Director to ask for a study to show the value of the DNR to the state's economy. Kelley said his purpose for this meeting was to gather information from those present; to have those present provide their thoughts as to what they think is important, and provide their thoughts as to what the Division should do with the limited revenue available.

2:25 Great Lakes Wind Council (Denny Grinold)

Denny mentioned that the northeast is a good spot for offshore wind power, with the continental shelf and proximity to large cities. He said the Great Lakes area is also a good location for wind power generation. Denmark has about 20% of their power needs served by wind power. The Great Lakes has the capability to produce enough to serve the power needs for the entire Midwest, perhaps giving Michigan the ability to export power. The council has been charged to produce criteria for identifying areas most and least desirable for offshore wind development. The depth these turbines are

placed is usually around 90-120 feet of water. If they are to be invisible from shore on a clear day, they would need to be placed 20 miles offshore. This would be difficult in the Great Lakes with the depth associated with these areas. Some issues have been identified related to this initiative: fisheries impacts, climate change, bird and bat collisions. Denny presented the lakebed alteration decision support tool to look at potential for site suitability.

2:50 Update on the lake-wide management plan processes (Dr. Kurt Newman and Jim Dexter, MDNR)

This process has really just begun, with a finished product perhaps 18 months out. As far as public input to this process, a new process will be employed to try to gather information. There will be the stakeholder workshops and stakeholder surveys as part of a multi-layered approach to gathering input. Kurt encouraged those present to participate in the planning process and encourage their constituency to participate as well.

3:00 Meeting adjourned