

Northern Inland Lakes Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee

Inland Lake Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee Minutes

Monday, November 23, 2009

Tuscarora Township Hall

1:00 p.m. – 3:15 p.m.

Approved January 23, 2010

Attendees: Kimberlee Pappas, Dustin Saker, John McDonald, John Hutto, Virgil Smith, Dave Bock, Wally Gemignani, Roy Tassava, Frank Krist, Kelley Smith, Tim Cwalinski, Al Terry, Rebecca Behm, Wayne Blomberg, Erin McLean and Steve Hewett

Frank called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. The Attendees introduced themselves.

Dr. Steve Hewett, MDNR Lake Huron Basin Coordinator; Dr. Kelley Smith, MDNR Fisheries Chief and Tim Cwalinski, MDNR Fisheries Biologist discussed options for proposed changes to the recreational walleye harvest regulations in Mullett Lake for 2010. These updated rules, if approved by the MDNR Director, would allow the recreational harvest of walleye to continue during 2010. The MDNR Natural Resources Commission will be reviewing the proposal at their December 3, 2009 meeting. Kelley's goal was to obtain stakeholder input before presenting the final options to the Commission and Director.

A discussion began describing the various techniques that could be used to reduce the recreational walleye harvest in Mullett Lake.

Bag Limits

According to the open water creel survey this year the recreational harvest of walleye in Mullett Lake was estimated to be 836 fish. A reduction in the bag limit would reduce the harvest by the following amount:

Bag limit of 1 fish would reduce harvest by 47% from 836 to 446

Bag limit of 2 fish would reduce harvest by 20% from 836 to 672

Bag limit of 3 fish would reduce harvest by 9% from 836 to 763

These are approximate numbers since the population changes each year and there is a margin of error of $\pm 30\%$ in creel survey data.

On most lakes that have a significant walleye fishery, approximately 20% of the walleyes are harvested during the winter. It appears that the ice fishing harvest on Mullett Lake may be less than 20% because the large areas of deep water make it difficult to regularly catch walleyes during the winter and many anglers target walleyes on other nearby lakes. After including an estimate for the winter harvest the projected harvest for the various bag limits would be the following:

Bag limit of 3 fish would result in an annual harvest of 953 walleye

Bag limit of 2 fish would result in an annual harvest of 840 walleye

Bag limit of 1 fish would result in an annual harvest of 558 walleye

Size Limits

According to the 2009 creel survey, approximately half of the walleyes harvested were smaller than 19 inches and the other half were larger than 19 inches. It is not known for sure, but it appears that the walleyes in Mullett Lake grow faster than the walleyes in Burt Lake and the walleyes in Pickerel and Crooked Lakes grow the slowest.

Size limit regulations, especially slot limits add complexity and confusion to the regulations and often do not produce the desired results. In addition, it is not always clear which size of fish should be protected. Larger fish might produce more eggs but smaller fish could live much longer and produce many eggs over a longer period of time. Kelley said that at this time he was not recommending any changes to the size limit.

Season Changes

At the beginning of the season, the walleyes are more vulnerable to harvest, especially near spawning locations. The colder weather in Northern Michigan slows the spawning cycle and moving the opening of the season to May 15 could protect more fish.

Recommendations

Kelley Smith recommended the following proposed changes to the recreational walleye harvest regulations during 2010 on Mullett Lake including the Cheboygan River from Mullett Lake to the Cheboygan Dam and Black River from the Alverno Dam to the Cheboygan River:

Bag Limit: 3 fish

Season: May 15 to March 15

Size Limit: no change

Kelley indicated that the Tribal reductions in harvest and implementing these regulation changes will protect the walleye population. This will allow the harvest of walleyes to continue while assessments are being conducted. A recreational creel survey will be conducted again during the summer 2010 through winter 2011 fishing season, to monitor the status of the fishery and the effectiveness of the new regulations.

Discussion of the Recommendations

Everyone present commented on the proposed regulation changes and unanimous support was given to the recommended changes. There was much discussion about including Burt Lake, Pickerel Lake, and Black Lake under these new regulations but it was decided to follow the rule changes for one year on Mullett Lake while obtaining feedback from stakeholders on the possibility of expanding the regulations to other lakes in 2011. This item will be discussed again by the Advisory Committee and MDNR during the fall of next year. Virgil and Erin were especially interested in implementing the changes on Black Lake during 2010 but they did not feel that there was adequate time to obtain input. They were planning to contact Kelley by Wednesday (November 25th) to discuss the possibility of making the changes but it did not appear that Black Lake would be included under the changes for 2010.

These proposed regulation changes will be presented to the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) at their December 3, 2009 meeting in Lansing Michigan. The importance of either appearing at the

meeting or sending a letter of support from each group represented on the Advisory Committee was discussed. Emails can be directed to Teresa Gloden, executive assistant to the NRC, at glodent@michigan.gov. To register for an opportunity to provide a public comment at the meeting, or to obtain other information, Teresa may be reached at (517) 373-2352.

Discussion of the future of the Advisory Committee.

Kelley indicated that the newly established Inland Lake Advisory Committee is an excellent way of increasing communications between the MDNR and stakeholders and he encouraged the group to formally organize and meet on a regular basis. Each Committee Member commented and it was unanimously agreed that continuing the Committee would be very productive. There would be opportunities to have experts update the Committee on various aspects of the fishery including the food web, partnerships with the State, Tribes and Universities, fish stocking, cormorants, research projects and other issues. These are the types of items that have been regularly discussed at the Great Lakes Advisory Committees for over 20 years resulting in much cooperation between the stakeholders and the MDNR.

It was decided that an organizational meeting would be held on January 20, 2010 at the Tuscarora Township Hall in Indian River from noon until 2 p.m. Frank will send the members a copy of the terms of reference that has been used to organize the Great Lakes Committees. This could be a starting point in developing similar guidelines for the Inland Committee.

Suggestions for agenda items for the January meeting should be directed to Rebecca or Frank. One item on the agenda already is an update on Mullett Lake. An effort will be made to send the agenda and meeting notice to the members about 2 weeks before the meeting.

Frank has indicated that he is willing to assist in organizing and getting the Committee running but he is looking for a new Chair to take over.

Meeting Adjourned at 3:15 p.m.