



# 2023 SPRING FISHERIES SURVEY SUMMARY

## LAC COURTE OREILLES, SAWYER COUNTY

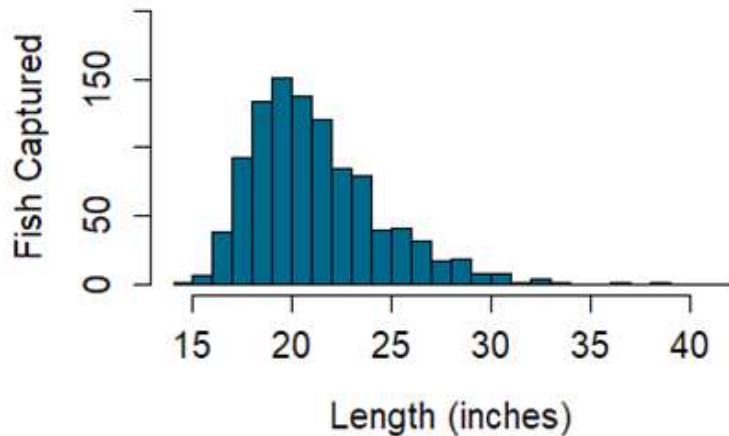
Report by Evan Sirianni

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Hayward Fisheries Management Team conducted a fyke netting survey on Lake Lac Courte Oreilles (LCO) from April 19-21, 2023. The primary species targeted were northern pike and muskellunge. Up to six nets were set out over three nights, which resulted in 15 total net-nights of effort. Quality, preferred and memorable sizes referenced in this summary are based on the standard proportions of world-record lengths developed for each species by the American Fisheries Society.

### NORTHERN PIKE



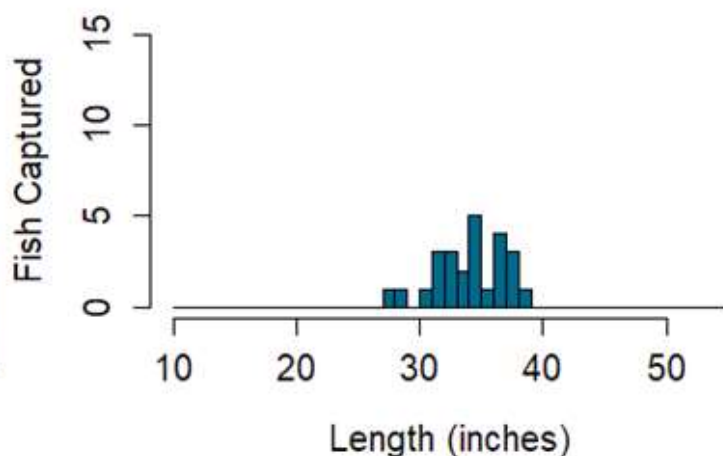
Captured 68 per net-night $\geq 14$ inches	
Quality Size $\geq 21''$	45%
Preferred Size $\geq 28''$	4%



### MUSKELLUNGE



Captured 1.7 per net-night $\geq 20$ inches	
Quality Size $\geq 30''$	61%
Memorable Size $\geq 42''$	4%



## SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The netting survey was timed to target both northern pike and muskellunge as the two species moved into warmer and shallower water to spawn shortly after ice-out. LCO is a Complex-Two Story lake based on the DNR Fisheries lake class system. This classification refers to the lake's ability to provide a deep, cold-water habitat for coldwater species like cisco during the summer months of the year. This report will compare the catch rates of northern pike and muskellunge to lakes with the same classification of "Complex-Two Story," as well as past surveys of LCO.

### NORTHERN PIKE

Northern pike, a non-native species to LCO, have been a species of interest in recent years, particularly because of their ability to compete with muskellunge across most stages of life. Northern pike removal projects have been conducted in past years to reduce their abundance and improve their overall average size in LCO. The catch rate of northern pike in this survey (68 per net-night) was essentially at the 100<sup>th</sup> percentile for Complex-Two Story lakes, with most of the fish caught in the low 20-inch range. Only 45% of fish caught were above a quality size of 21 inches, while only 4% of the total northern pike caught were a memorable size of greater than 28 inches. Harvest of northern pike on LCO is encouraged. There is no minimum length limit for northern pike, and the daily bag limit is five.

### MUSKELLUNGE

Muskellunge were also captured in this survey effort despite less than ideal timing (too cold for prime muskellunge activity). Muskellunge capture rates have increased from 0.9 fish per net-night (2022), up to 1.7 fish per net-night this year (2023). LCO was between the 95<sup>th</sup>-99<sup>th</sup> percentile of Complex-Two Story lakes for catch rate (1.7 fish per net-night). This was an increase from last year when it was between the 90<sup>th</sup>-95<sup>th</sup> percentiles. Quality-sized fish (greater than 30 inches) made up for 61% of the total fish caught, which was also an increase from last year, however memorable-sized fish (greater than 42 inches) decreased from 19% (2022) to 4% (2023). The stocked year class of muskellunge in 2017 was very apparent in both the 2022 and 2023 surveys with many of the fish between 29-36 inches carrying a tag from



DNR fisheries technician, Scott Braden, with a healthy northern pike from Lac Courte Oreilles. This is a great example individual of the average northern pike size caught in the survey. Photo courtesy of Max Wolter

that stocking year. This would put many of the fish caught of that size at six years of age, which indicates the strength and success of that stocked year class. There is a 50-inch minimum length limit for muskellunge on LCO, and a daily bag limit of one.

Survey Crew: Max Wolter and Scott Braden

*Reviewed and approved by Aaron Cole*