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41-05-16

Date: April 11, 2016

Title: **Reduction of bag limits on Lake Michigan Steelhead**

The Problem:

Wisconsin's Steelhead stocking in Lake Michigan has been reduced by more than 50% in recent years to an estimated 270,000 this year from a recent history of 600,000 to 800,000 and a current missed goal of near 500,000. While there is a plan to rebuild and repair the Kettle Moraine Hatchery, the primary hatchery for Wisconsin's Steelhead, the forecast is to increase stocking in 2020 yet mature fish will not be available for at least three years more.

Salmon stockings have been reduced dramatically each year, in recent years, due to a collapse of the forage base. Sport fishermen and charter boats have suffered significant reductions in their catch. Also, shore and tributary anglers have had poor catch rates. This reduction of salmon makes Steelhead, Brown Trout and Lake Trout more attractive targets for Lake Michigan boating anglers and has reduced the fishing opportunities available during the spawning runs in the tributaries and harbors.

Steelhead are reported to have an expected lifespan of 6 to 8 years in the Great Lakes and mature to spawn in 3 to 5 years. Releasing more fish through a reduction in the bag limit could leave more fish available to all anglers. **Steelhead are not totally dependant on alewives and cisco.** They often roam the lake to scum lines where they feed on bugs and minnows.

Michigan, which shares our fishery, has a three Steelhead limit on Lake Michigan and a one Steelhead limit on Lake Superior. Wisconsin has a current limit of 5 Steelhead. Limits of 5 fish can be harsh in the lake, where 4 anglers per boat has the potential for 20 Steelhead days....and in the tributaries a handful of anglers in each stream can dramatically eliminate the already reduced resource in a few successful outings.

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Conservation Congress work with the Department to correct this situation by intruding a regulation change to the Steelhead limits from 5 per day to 2 per day.

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