

Lake Michigan Fisheries Team
9 am – 3 pm, Wednesday, July 8, 2009
Wells Fargo Room
Lakeshore Technical College

Final Notes – prepared by Mike Donofrio and Bill Horns

Present: Schumacher, Boronow, Horns, Peeters, Hogler, Eggold, Hansen, Groth, Jerich, Fajfer, Treska, Nelson, Paoli, Donofrio, Bruch, Hirethota

1. Review/revise agenda

- No revisions made

2. Review/approve meeting notes from May 14, 2009

- Approved

3. Designation of note-taker

- Donofrio was selected.

4. Whitefish harvest limits and allocation

Background. The Lake Michigan Commercial Fishing Board has recommended that the annual total allowable commercial harvest of lake whitefish be increased by 200,000 pounds, with the increase to be split equally between zones 1 and 3. Scott Hansen and Ted Treska have completed their review of whitefish harvest limits. Mike Staggs is expecting a recommendation regarding 1) what the overall harvest limit should be and 2) how it should be allocated among zones if it is increased.

Action. Hansen and Treska presented results from the SCAA model for lake whitefish. A lively, dynamic and energetic discussion evolved among Team members. 1) The Team adopted a harvest recommendation based on a target total annual mortality rate of 35%. That conservative approach is appropriate because we have several unknowns including projections from a new model, no inputs in the model from the sport harvest, incomplete mixed stock analysis regarding interactions of sub-populations in Michigan and three Wisconsin zones, and limited information about the Michigan harvest from the North/Moonlight Bay stock. The Team recommended a Lake Michigan whitefish quota of 2.87 million pounds (dressed weight), which is a 410,000 pound increase over the present quota. 2) The Team also recommended allocating the increase among our three zones according to existing proportions (approx 9% zone 1, 82% zone 2, 9% zone 3).

5. LMFT memo regarding Conservation Congress question #75

Background. This Great Lakes Study Committee advisory question was supported in spring hearings this spring. It calls for the Department to prohibit all commercial fishing in grids 1901, 1902, and 2002. Brad has pulled together some relevant data and drafted a memo on the subject

Action. Brad reviewed the draft memo to Dale Maas and Steve Alt from the Lake Michigan Fisheries Team. The Team discussed the content, suggested minor adjustments, and gave approval for Horns to discuss with Staggs after Brad provides a revised version, and eventually distribute to the Great Lakes Study Committee.

6. Kettle Moraine SFH

Background. Randy Schumacher has reviewed production capabilities of KMSFH at its current reduced staffing, and drafted a proposal for discussion.

Action. Randy presented a summary document to the Team describing the need to reduce fish production at Kettle Moraine relative to staffing issues and infrastructure shortcomings. Eggold and Peeters argued that we should pursue rearing Skamania in addition to Chambers Creek and Ganaraska strains of steelhead. They advocated leaving the overall reduced steelhead production at a temporary level of 270,000 fish and expressed a willingness to reduce chinook numbers. Hogler, while agreeing completely with the work load analysis that indicates that with 2 vacancies at KMS staff can not meet the production numbers requested of them, said he could not accept the further decline in steelhead stocking numbers. He indicated that in the recent past steelhead yearling production dropped from 500,000 (about 165,000 of each strain) to a proposed 270,000- a 46% decline. He also stated that, in his opinion, after chinook salmon steelhead adds the greatest diversity to the Lake Michigan fishery both on the lake and in tributary streams making them important to the program. Hogler suggested that propagation consider moving one or all the steelhead strains out of KMS and consider raising another species such as coho salmon instead at KMS. These issues will be discussed at an August 3 pre-production meeting dealing with Wild Rose and Kettle Moraine. Bill will try to attend.

7. Steelhead passage at BAFF

Background. Steve Hogler has drafted a “straw dog” memo regarding steelhead passage at BAFF.

Action. Steve distributed his draft issue brief to the Team. The Team endorsed the brief with minor changes and advocated recommendation number 3, “return steelhead back to the river above BAFF. Harvest all salmon returning to BAFF during fall migrations. Continue to assess the passage protocol for other species”. Ron Bruch, as acting Fisheries Policy Section Chief, will carry the recommendation to the FH Board.

8. Gill net mesh sizes and lifting requirements in the chub fishery

Background. 1) Mike LeClair has requested a reduction in the minimum allowable mesh size in chub gill nets. One request is to allow a 1/8 inch variance in enforcement. A second request is to reduce the minimum mesh size from 2 3/8 inches to 2 1/4 inches. 2) Mike has also requested a change in the lifting requirements to allow eight-night sets. The Lake Michigan Commercial Fishing Board will meet on the evening of July 22 and we have been asked to provide them with our opinion on these requests.

Action. The Team discussed the LeClair request as described above and decided not to favor a change in the mesh size of chub gill nets and not to allow an 8 night lift approach. For reasons explained by Groth, provision of an enforcement variance of 1/8” is not needed and would not be helpful. A reduction in the minimum mesh size from 2 3/8 to 2 1/4 inches would encourage the harvest of smaller chubs. This would be the wrong management response at a time when recruitment has been poor and the population is in decline; if anything chubs need more, not less, protection. The five-night limit on gill net sets has not been discussed recently by the Team. We believe its purpose is to minimize spoilage of chubs caught, help guard against lost nets, and minimize incidental kill of lake trout. The Team was not willing to recommend going to an eight-night limit.

9. Brown trout management options in Green Bay

Background. Notes from our May 14 meeting show that we discussed brown trout stocking in Green Bay and listed the following options: reduce stocking, stock only yearlings or fingerlings, shift locations to the east shore, conducting a food web analysis, and changing predator bag limits. The NER Lake Michigan fisheries staff was to get together to discuss those options further and recommend quotas for the next cycle.

Action. Tammie led a short discussion to update the Team on our progress to improve brown trout management in Green Bay. She relayed that NER staff had met on June 2 and endorsed changes in stocking strategy that will likely include eliminating fall fingerling stocking, raising and stocking fewer but larger yearlings, experimenting with off-shore stocking, and evaluating the impact of these stocking

strategies on return to the creel. Tammie will draft a new Green Bay brown trout stocking plan and deliver to the Team at our next meeting.

10. Updates

- a) Pending tasks
 - i) Arrangements for creel analysis project – Paul Rasmussen will review the present creel schedule and creel data but has not had time to start that review.
 - ii) Lake trout rehabilitation strategy/red flags review – Bill updated the group on the status of lake trout stocking. Some questions related to allocation the stocked fish remain unresolved.
 - iii) Net pen write-up for Fish Management Handbook – No progress.
- b) SCAA modeling group -- The modeling group met on June 23 and discussed the modeling process and the whitefish model outputs in detail. Treska and Hansen will complete the whitefish model this summer, then Treska and Paoli will work on the Green Bay perch model.
- c) Boat name ideas – Paul displayed draft designs of the new boat but the Team did not agree on the name of the new boat.
- d) Great Lakes Restoration Initiative – Bill
 - i) GLFHP- Bill explained this opportunity to the Team.
 - ii) GLFWRA- Bill explained this opportunity to the Team.
 - iii) Great Lakes Restoration Initiative - July 21 meeting between Federal and State officials will take place to review this \$475M budget proposal.
- e) Minimum catch rule revisions (FH-21-08) – Bill relayed to the Team the status of the rule revisions.
- f) Proposal to require electronic reporting by charter captains – Brad (Tabled)
- g) July LMTC meeting – Brad (Tabled)
- h) Walleye stocking in Sturgeon Bay and Little Sturgeon Bay – Scott (Tabled)
- i) SOLM – Bill suggested that Team members attend it and present relevant information.
- j) SMB lesions – Scott explained the latest developments but expressed that staff believe the lesions and likely VHS expressions appear to have only minor impacts on the population.
- k) Management reports – A couple of reports are still not completed. Bill will try to have the reports compiled before the September NRB meeting.
- l) NOAA Coastal Restoration funding for Milwaukee River – Brad and Randy updated the Team on Ozaukee county's awarded project to promote fish passage on the upper Milwaukee river. The project will include replacement of 22 culverts on tributaries, fish passage at Theinsville and Bridge Street dams and removal of the Lime Kiln Road dam. The projects will begin in 2009. The Team outlined their concerns related to invasive species management and Randy said the FM Board will discuss fish passage and related invasive species management.

11. Next meeting date and location

September 16, Cleveland