Lake Michigan Fisheries Team
September 18, 2007
Wisconsin Training Room
Lakeshore Technical College
Cleveland, WI

Draft Notes –prepared by Bill Horns

Present: Bill Horns, Pradeep Hirethota, Brad Eggold, Steve Hogler, Scott Hansen, Pat McKee, Dave Geihtbrock, Al Kaas, Randy Schumacher, Dave Rowe, Paul Peeters, Steve Fajfer, Sue Marcquenski, Randy Link, Mark Opgenorth, John Komassa, George Boronow, Mike Donofrio, Tammie Paoli, Chris Groth

1. **Review/revise agenda**
2. **Review/approve meeting notes from July 9-10, 2007**
3. **Brief updates**

Time was allowed for short updates and reminders of topics of interest.

- New staff introductions. We have three new biologists -- Tammie Paoli, Dave Rowe, Scott Hansen.
- Spotted musky.
- Cormorant control. A presentation to the NRB of cormorant management objectives is scheduled for September 26. Jeff Pritzl will make the presentation.
- YOY perch survey in Lake Michigan.

4. **Implications of VHS for salmon and trout production**

Background. The production of salmon and trout for Lake Michigan is being affected by DNR and DATCP policies related to VHS. Of particular importance is the policy that offspring of Lake Michigan feral brood stocks will not be transported to hatcheries outside the Lake Michigan drainage. Al Kaas has been asked to develop a production plan for 2008-09. Because VHS policies will limit the ability of our production system to produce salmon and trout for stocking in Lake Michigan, the LMFT was asked to help prioritize the various hatchery products and provide any other guidance to Al.
Action. The LMFT explored the problem by listing 1) criteria that are relevant to choosing among or valuing hatchery products and 2) general observations about the problem. Some of these may reflect consensus of the group, but others may reflect minority opinions.

Criteria:

1. return to creel
2. broodstock availability
3. alewife control
4. natural reproduction
5. maintain brood stock runs
6. regional importance
    a. coho for south
    b. brown for GB
7. species diversity
8. angler preference

Observations:

1. Chinook cuts OK, if other states maintain production. We suspect that a large % are naturalized.
2. High angler preference for chinook
3. Regional preferences may differ (e.g., coho in SER)

4. Better to reduce everything a little than one thing a lot, with exceptions
5. Expendables
    a. Nipigon brook trout
6. Essentials
    a. Diversity (species and strains)
7. Some changes are more permanent than others.
8. Could we send $ to Michigan and have them raise our coho?

With all that in mind, the Team asked Al to outline a production plan for Lake Michigan under each of two scenarios for review by the Team in the very near future:

1. Proportionately reduce yearlings to capacity and reduce chinook by some percentage to make it work. Maximize fall fingerlings, after maximizing yearlings. Maintain brood river stocking of Chinooks at current levels, with reductions of up to x% elsewhere.
2. Scenario #1, but eliminate one steelhead and one brown trout strain (maybe Skamania and Seeforellen).

5. Lake trout restoration planning

Background. A draft strategy called *A Fisheries Management Implementation Strategy for the Rehabilitation of Lake Trout in Lake Michigan* has been drafted. The draft strategy calls for intensive stocking in the two major refuge areas, with relatively few fish allotted for stocking elsewhere to support sport fishing. On October 25 the Lake Michigan Committee will meet to discuss the draft strategy. Before then I hope to bring LMFT recommendations to Mike Staggs and Steve Hewett for their review. The draft strategy draws on an earlier draft document called *A Guide for Rehabilitation of Lake Trout in Lake Michigan.* The guide is a fairly comprehensive overview of thinking about lake trout restoration/rehabilitation in Lake Michigan and includes the following list of "stocking considerations", factors that should be considered in any modifications to the baseline stocking strategy: 1) trends in total annual mortality rates, 2) fidelity of adult spawners to the stocking area, 3) trends in survival of stocked fish, 4) magnitude and sustainability of natural recruitment, 5) long-term trends in egg thiamine levels, and 6) egg predator abundance. When the LMFT met in March of 2006 we developed a list of Wisconsin interests that should be advanced in seeking consensus on a new lake trout restoration plan. Those were 1) a sport fishery for lean lake trout, 2) natural reproduction by lean lake trout, 3) a multi-species sport fishery, including salmon and trout, 4) a multi-species forage base, including lake herring and bloater chubs, and 5) a viable multi-species commercial fishery.

Action. We discussed the draft implementation strategy. Some concerns and observations were raised, including the following:

1) Under the draft strategy the proportion of lake trout stocked in WM-5 is less than under current practice or as outlined in the rehabilitation guide.
2) The implementation strategy incorrectly prioritizes reefs within the MidlakeRefuge.
3) The implementation strategy appears to satisfy the consent decree at the expense of lake trout reproduction and sport fishing.
4) The allocation of lake trout to the two primary refuge areas does not reflect the suitability of those areas in terms of stocking considerations laid out in the rehabilitation guide.

The Team also reviewed the summary of Wisconsin interests, and agreed that they remain valid. The Team also reviewed the stocking considerations in the guide and found them acceptable. Finally, the Team agreed to the recommend the following approach to the October 25 meeting:

1) Emphasize the 5 Wisconsin interests.
2) Ask for an objective technical comparison and ranking of restoration areas based on the considerations listed in the rehabilitation guide.
3) Offer for discussion the following alternative implementation strategy: a) Select the single area of the lake with the most promise for natural reproduction and stock ½ of the 2.75M yearling equivalents there. Use the strain(s) most appropriate for the selected area. Follow up with intensive study/assessment/monitoring of reproduction in that area. b) Distribute the other ½ of the 2.75M

yearling equivalents among all jurisdictions in proportion to recent stocking patterns, with details of location and strain to be determined by the receiving jurisdiction. c) Agree to maintain total annual mortality of 40% or less among all fish stocked outside of the selected refuge. d) Limit stocking to 2.75M yearling equivalents until and unless ecological space is provided by reductions in stocking levels of other salmonines.

4) Suggest GLFC facilitation of further discussions.

6. Zone 3 whitefish quotas

Background. We have received requests from Glenn Seger and Mike LeClair regarding whitefish harvest limits. Glenn is requesting changes in the harvest limit for Zone 3. He also would like the ability to fish large-mesh gill nets for whitefish and would like some changes in the trap netting rules. Mike LeClair is requesting rule changes to allow the transfer of whitefish quotas between fishing zones.
Action. The LMFT discussed both requests and declined to support either one, although we recognize that broad support in the industry expressed by the Lake Michigan Commercial Fishing Board would warrant further discussion of the issues.

7. Green Bay yellow perch harvest limits.

Background. NRB Order FH-07-07 would increase the total allowable commercial harvest of Green Bay yellow perch from 60,000 pounds to 100,000 pounds. Hearings have been held on the rule, and we are scheduled to take this proposal or a revised version of it to the NRB for adoption on December 5. We have received a pretty substantial expression of opinion from anglers that the increase would not be appropriate. They report that fishing has been poor, and doubt that the yellow perch population could support the proposed increase in commercial harvest.
Action. Discussion was limited. Tammie Paoli observed that anecdotal reports by creel clerks and others suggest that at some times this summer yellow perch fishing in Green Bay has been very good. The Team recommended moving forward with the rule as drafted. We will attempt to develop as much new data as possible from the 2007 fishing year. We have time for further discussions of the issue before the green sheet deadline of November 5.

8. Review resolutions to be considered by the Great Lakes Study Committee

Background. The GLSC will consider the four resolutions listed here with local hearing votes: 1) Change the minimum length limit for muskies north of Waldo Boulevard from 50 to 54 inches (Barron County, 20 yes, 6 no). 2) Make permanent the closure of commercial fishing for yellow perch on Lake Michigan (Milwaukee County, 89 yes, 12 no). 3) Use an 11 inch minimum as the average length of sport targeted yellow perch when computing any future Lake Michigan yellow perch harvest to be divided between sportsmen and commercial fishers (Milwaukee County, 89 yes, 16 no). 4) Correct the numeric division of Lake Michigan yellow perch, so as to be split 65/35, in favor of sportsmen (Washington County, 37 yes, 33 no)
Action. The Team reviewed the resolutions and developed the following observations to be passed on the to the GLSC: 1) Muskies. This regulation would be atypical and therefore contribute to regulation complexity. Our biologist, Kevin Kapucinski, speculated that the rapid early growth of these muskies might contribute to early mortality, reducing the chances of attaining the target size of 54 inches. The rule as drafted includes the Menominee River, where it would be problematic because that is a boundary water. 2) Permanent closure. It is not clear what is meant by permanent closure. In a sense the Lake Michigan yellow perch fishery is already permanently closed, since it will not re-open until the Administrative Code is changed. The next step in closure would be to remove yellow perch from the list of commercial fish, but that would involve also closing the Green Bay commercial fishery, and would have no more legal force or permanence than the existing closure. The Department operates under a statement of legislative intent that there shall be both sport and commercial fisheries in Wisconsin waters of the Great Lakes. 3) Average size of yellow perch. This refers to the Department policy of attempting

to split the yellow perch harvest 50/50 by numbers of the long term between sport and commercial fishers. We agree that in translating that allocation rule to harvests by weight, changes mean size should be considered. 4) Sport/commercial split of yellow perch. The 50/50 split by numbers has worked well for some time. People will differ about what is fair.

9. Next meeting date and location

December 6, 2007. Lakeshore Technical College.