

Great Lakes Committee Meeting

September 26th, 2009 at the Wild Rose Fish Hatchery, Wild Rose, WI

10:05am call to order:

Present at the meeting: Dale Maas (chairman), David Tupa (secretary), Richard Alvin, Donald Anderson, Norman Blohm, John Blumreich, Pete Petrouske, Bruce Prentice, Ronald VanderLoop, DNR LE liaison Chris Groth, DNR Fisheries liaison Bill Horns, Wild Rose Hatchery Director Steven Fajfer, and resolution authors Steven Alt and David Tupa. Excused absentees included Eugene Altweis, Richard Becker, Alvin Bochler, and William Tisch. Unexcused absentees included Dan Lazzeroni, David Wineburner, and Michael Witkiewicz.

In keeping with past practice Dale Maas asked that the unexcused absentees be removed from the committee, stressed the importance of all committee members attending this annual meeting, and asked that the secretary keep track of “excused” absentees to see if there has been a pattern. There were no objections to this request.

A point of order was raised as to the number of committee members that need to be present in order to have an official meeting. Dale Maas called Kurt Thiede to confirm that 50% +1 is the minimum number required and since we had 9 of our 16 members present, we had the minimum number of committee members to proceed.

Our mission statement was briefly discussed prior to hearing DNR report updates.

Reports from DNR Fisheries:

Bill Horns distributed and discussed Lake Michigan Forage updates from USGS trawl and acoustic surveys, pointing out that there are big changes occurring in the biomass structure throughout the entire Lake Michigan ecosystem. See USGS reports: “Status and Trends of Prey Fish Populations in Lake Michigan, 2008¹” and “Status of Pelagic Prey Fishes and Pelagic Macroinvertebrates in Lake Michigan, 2008.”

In an effort to assist the DNR in collecting more data and observations it was suggested that the DNR set up a webpage survey for sport fishermen, similar to the deer hunter observation survey that was set up to collect data.

The federal lake trout plan is currently on hold since it was concluded that there are enough predators in the lake and the forage base is not there to support more predators and the plan will not move forward until there is a consensus to do so.

Stocking levels have been reduced since 2006 in response to low forage numbers and were reduced again by 25% last year. As a result, the salmon appear to be healthier and heavier than in the past few years. Currently the DNR Fisheries program is continuing to produce fish with less money and fewer staff, including the purchase of 120,000 rainbow eggs from out of state. Chinook salmon eggs will be collected at Strawberry Creek during the month of October to be incubated, hatched, raised and stocked from Wild Rose to Lake Michigan next year. In addition, the Wild Rose Hatchery will continue to process coho salmon eggs and brown trout eggs collected this fall and raise them to stocking size. Bill Horns commented that natural reproduction occurring in Michigan rivers and streams accounts for 50% of the Chinook salmon in Lake Michigan. The Wild Rose Hatchery is in conversations with the USFW service with plans to test out a new wire coded tagging program and may be running trials through one or more of these federal trailers in the future.

Bill Horns gave a Chicago River Carp Barrier update and distributed a hand-out, explaining that both mechanical and chemical treatments are being used to prevent the spread of the Asian Carp into Lake Michigan. *Retenone* and *permanganate* treatments are scheduled for November.

Motion made and seconded to draft a letter from our committee in support of continued efforts to prevent the spread of Asian Carp to Steven J Shults. Aye – all / Opposed - none. Motion carried.

Bill Horns is not aware of any wind farm project proposals in Lake Michigan at this time. Our committee would have some concerns and would like to be involved in the discussion process if future plans are made to install wind generators in Lake Michigan.

Bill indicated that a billion dollars of federal money may be coming from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative to help with funding programs.

Bill reported that there is a proposed 17% quota increase for commercial whitefish. (A hearing is scheduled for Monday, October 26th at 5:00pm in the Greene Room of the Door County Public Library in Sturgeon Bay, WI.)

A study along with egg oiling continues to be in place in an attempt to manage double crested cormorant populations on a few of the many islands they inhabit on the bay and lake.

DNR Law Enforcement reports:

Chris Groth reported that DNR law enforcement is still having difficulties with some charter boat fishermen not reporting trips and catches as required, while some are giving inaccurate reports. Overall, Chris indicated that about 95% are actually sending in reports,

but the accuracy of some reports is in question. A proposal that will revoke a charter captain's license for failure to report accurately may help the situation.

According to Chris, there is an electronic reporting system being tested on Lake Superior where there is a smaller fishery of only 10 commercial licenses. Once all the bugs are worked out through the trial period on Lake Superior, this system will be implemented on Lake Michigan where we have 65 commercial fishing licenses.

The DNR continues to collect data on the condition and pounds of fish through wholesale fish dealer reporting. However, this system is not without flaws as Chris pointed out to the committee.

Chris reported on the very successful Water Guard program in place to help prevent the spread of invasive aquatic species across the state of Wisconsin.

Preliminary discussions have taken place between NOAA, the DNR, the Governor, and the State Historical Society about a ship wreck sanctuary in Lake Michigan that would protect and establish dive sites with buoy markers over selected ship wrecks.

Short break for lunch-

Resolutions:

150109 Funding of Great Lakes Fisheries

Discussion of the resolution led to a motion and second to forward this resolution as amended: (replace "General Account" with "Fish and Wildlife Account" in the language of the resolution). Aye – all / Opposed - none. Motion carried.

410109 Elimination of Great Lakes Commercial Fishing Subsidy

After much discussion, and explanation to Steven Alt that neither this committee nor the Conservation Congress could cause the change he was asking for and that his efforts would be better spent convincing a state legislator to draft a bill to introduce his proposal, a motion to reject was made and seconded: Aye – all / Opposed - none. Motion carried.

A motion was made and seconded to draft a new question from the committee with language as provided by Bill Horns to gain public input on the issue: Aye – all / Opposed - none. Motion carried.

The resolution author, Steven Alt, agreed that he did not need a follow up letter/response from the committee since he was in attendance at the meeting.

410409 Increase Lake Michigan Forage Fish Biomass

After much discussion, it was concluded that increasing the phytoplankton biomass would be the only real way to increase forage fish biomass, but due to environmental, ecological, and biological limitations, any attempt to increase the biomass of forage fish without controlling exotic invasive species, would simply result in an increase in exotic invasives and not have the desired effect called for in the resolution. A motion was made and seconded to reject the resolution: Aye – all / Opposed - none. Motion carried.

The resolution author, Steven Alt, agreed that he did not need a follow up letter/response from the committee since he was in attendance at the meeting.

Member matters:

Dave Tupa gave a summary report on the Upper Great Lakes water level meeting he attended in Fish Creek. See www.iugls.org for more details.

The committee discussed SB 305 allowing for the catching of fish using the bag limit of another person. (Group fishing) Committee members as well as DNR law enforcement have some serious concerns about the potential for abuse of this rule and nobody at our meeting spoke in favor of this proposal.

Bruce Prentice spoke briefly on alternative funding.

Motion made and seconded to adjourn. Aye – all / Opposed - none. Motion carried.

2:19pm-

The committee was guided on a very informative tour of the newly remodeled and upgraded Wild Rose Fish Hatchery by Steven Fajfer from 2:30 to 4:30pm.

Respectfully written and submitted by
Dave Tupa, WCC Great Lakes Committee Secretary