

Wisconsin Muskellunge Standing Team Notes
August 26, 2014
Cabela's, 1499 Lombardi Avenue, Ashwaubenon, WI 54304

1. In attendance – Tim Simonson (CO), Scot Stewart (SAD), Aaron Cole (NAD – Barron), Steve Hogler (EAD – Green Bay), Dave Rowe (SAD –Fitchburg), Jordan Weeks (WAD – La Crosse), Greg Matzke (NAD – Florence), Luke Roffler (SAD-Sturtevant), Jeff Kampa (SS-Spooner), Mark Luehring (GLIFWC-Odanah), Don Gilbert (Muskellunge Clubs Alliance of Wisconsin), Joe Weiss (Congress-Washburn Co.), Roger Sabota (Congress-Oneida Co.), John Aschenbrenner, Dan Isermann (UWSP), Janice Kerns (UWSP), Justin Van De Hey (UWSP), Mike Donofrio (EAD-Peshtigo), Steve Fajfer (Wild Rose Hatchery), Jesse Landwehr (Hatchery Supervisor), Mike Baumgartner (Besadney Anadromous Fisheries Facility), Max Wolter (NAD-Hayward). A special THANKS to members of the Titledown Chapter, Muskies, Inc., for providing interested team members with an opportunity to fish out on Green Bay, including Bob Volm and Bill Gerndt for coordination, and to Ron Myslik, Steve Haas, and Mike Wichmann for sharing time in their boats! And, thanks to John Aschenbrenner, who also took a couple of us out fishing! THANKS GUYS!
2. Team Structure, Charge, and Work Plan - We reviewed the team structure and team charge ([Musky Team Web Site](#)) – no changes were suggested. Outstanding Work Plan objectives: a) Explore the idea of changing the 28” minimum lakes to “no minimum” and to also consider a protected slot proposal, if accompanied by a convincing modeling effort; b) To specifically consider removing the 2500 cap on selected lakes to allow for more efficient management of these fisheries. One idea was to cap small lakes to provide enough fish for larger lakes. We will explore the implications of this idea and discuss at a future meeting; c) add a habitat element to our general charge, to specifically look at the weed control issue as it relates to fish mortality, and to develop more specific research topics related to bulrushes, critical habitat designation/sensitive area designation, etc.; d) pursue the use of fin rays for aging muskies (including validation of fin rays from known-age fish), and exploring the idea of PIT tagging every musky handled in our surveys (may require external funding).
3. Habitat Protection and Improvement – a) AIS Plant Control – impacts on fish – Andrew Rypel (SS) was hoping to attend but was unable to make it. He provided a write-up of a proposal to evaluate the impacts of plant management on fish populations. The proposal was distributed to team members (via email), who provided comments directly to Andrew; b) WI Conservation Congress WWSC – Habitat Sub-committee – Joe Weiss provided a brief update on an advisory question that was being developed for the 2015 Spring Hearing questionnaire, related to seeking support for more research and on-the-ground habitat management in warm-water systems.
4. Harvest Regulations – The following proposals were reviewed and discussed:
 - a) 2014 Conservation Congress Resolutions ([Link to 2014 Resolutions](#)):
 - i. 030214 – 50” minimum length limit – Holcombe and Wissota, Barron (63-12), Brown (21-16), Chippewa (11-32), Dunn (65-13), Eau Claire (63-18), Trempealeau (21-9), TOTAL (244-100) – Approved;
 - ii. 050114 – Reinstate dark-house spearing WI/MI waters Brown (26-16), Marinette (22-9) – Reject;
 - iii. 080114 – Allow trailing one line with live bait while casting (38-18) – Defer to statewide trolling proposal;
 - iv. 640214 – Allow trailing one line live bait while casting – (34-41) – Defer to statewide trolling proposal;
 - v. 640514 - Allow trolling while positioning when fishing (39-26) – Defer to statewide trolling proposal.
 - b) 2015 Fisheries Management Proposals:
 - i. 50” minimum length limit on Garden and Jackson Lakes, Bayfield Co. (connected to Lake Namekagon) – Approved (could Garden be considered housekeeping?);
 - ii. Eliminate 3-line trolling in 5 Oneida County Lakes – defer to statewide trolling proposal;
 - iii. Eliminate 28” minimum and revert to statewide 40” - Spider Lake Chain, Tiger Cat Chain, Mud/Callahan Lakes, Chief River (Sawyer County); Solberg Lake (Price County) – Approved.
 - iv. 50” minimum length limit/Saturday nearest Memorial Day to November 30 season on WI-MN boundary waters – Approved.
 - c) 2017 Fisheries Management Proposals:
 - i. Statewide Trolling Proposal – Because the rule adopted by the Natural Resources Board in May 2014 included a 3-year sunset, we’ll need to come up with a new proposal for the 2017 Spring Fish

and Wildlife Hearings (to be effective in 2018). We discussed the logistics but no specific proposals were advanced; this topic will need to remain on the front burner.

5. Information and Education – Max Wolter gave us an informative presentation on the work he and Jeff Kampa are doing in the Hayward area with PIT tags and using local guides and Muskies, Inc., club members to record recaptures of tagged fish. He discussed the many benefits of the tagging (and working in cooperation with area anglers), including individual growth increments, spawning site fidelity, stocking success, migration rates, and estimation of population size and survival. There are some issues with data management (particularly with stocking tagged fish, in terms of getting that information into the database), but those issues are being addressed, so the new interface should be well-equipped to handle PIT tags into the future.
6. Propagation/Stocking
 - a) Comparative Survival of pellet-reared muskellunge – We received an update on the study from Justin Van De Hey and discussed logistics with Steve Fajfer for the upcoming fall stocking and evaluation, including schedules for the pond harvest and hauling, and we reviewed the methods for the fall shocking. In addition to the established methods, we recommended that any yearling fish captured should be PIT Tagged for future identification.
 - b) Implications of eliminating the 2500 fish Cap on large waters – I had hoped to start the discussions, but we did not have sufficient time to discuss this issue. We will carry it over to the next meeting.
 - c) [Brood Stock Management](#)
 - i. 2014 Spawning/rearing report – A written spawning report was provided for AOH by Bruce Underwood (unable to attend); GTH was unable to provide a report due to commitments related to the anniversary celebration scheduled at that facility. I will try to get a report from Neal and send it out.
 - ii. Evaluation of the Brood Stock Management Plan – Update – Justin Van De Hey provided an excellent summary on the evaluation of our brood stock management plan, a study that was recently completed by Zeb Woiak. Generally, the plan is working as designed and we are doing a decent job at stocking a product with the appropriate genetic diversity.
 - d) GL Spotted Musky Update – Steve Hogler provided an update on the GLS musky program. Wild Rose has received about 12,700 fingerlings from Lake St. Clair via Michigan DNR in exchange for fingerlings from AOH for stocking in the Upper Peninsula. The fish will be reared overwinter and into next summer and stocked in the GLS brood lakes as yearlings (15" +). Steve expects to have about 8,000 available, in total; remaining fish will be stocked towards GLS quotas. Jesse Landwehr and Mike Baumgartner also provided an update on pond improvement at the Besadney AFF (Kewaunee). They will be expanding production of GLS muskies from Fox River eggs to 2 ponds at BAFF for stocking directly back into Green Bay. Much financial support has been pledged by local musky clubs and the Musky Clubs Alliance to complete this project.
7. Muskellunge Surveys and Assessments – We discussed three topics related to surveys and assessments:
 - a) There was a proposal at our last meeting that we investigate the idea of PIT tagging ALL muskies handled in our surveys. Based on a quick summary of the total number of fish entered in the database annually from 2005-2013, the average number of fish handled was about 1,953. That would equate to a total cost per year of about \$4,590. After some discussion, it was agreed that we proceed with this recommendation, modify the FM Handbook section on musky management, secure funding, and
 - b) Validation of fin-ray aging with known-age (PIT tagged) fish – This project is ongoing, with some effort in NW WI, under the direction of Jeff Kampa. We would like to see a more comprehensive effort to inventory all the known-aged fish around the state. Derek Crane, a research associate with Lake Superior State University, has expressed an interest in coordinating an effort to pull all this information together. He will be working with Jeff and Dan Isermann to develop a proposal and seek funding from the Hugh Becker Foundation.
8. Research
 - a) Evaluation of Methods to Estimate Musky Population Metrics in Northern WI Lakes - Janice Kerns and Daniel Isermann, UWSP, have developed a project proposal to evaluate variability in muskellunge populations through time. They will be conducting back-to-back population estimates on a few selected trend lakes in order to measure inter-annual variation in population size. A copy of the study proposal was emailed to team members for review. Comments should be returned to me, Janice or Dan.
 - b) Dan Isermann is working on developing a project proposal to study fingerling muskellunge behavior (and survival) just after stocking with radio telemetry. He will also be seeking funding, including writing a grant application with the Becker Foundation.

- c) We spent some time reviewing our research needs and priorities with Jeff Kampa. Jeff compiled the results of this effort, which was used in a larger exercise for Science Services to develop broader, program-wide priorities for research in the coming biennium. The following were identified and ranked as “High” priority by the Musky Team: Age validation of nonlethal aging structures; Performance of pellet-reared vs. minnow-reared fingerling muskellunge; Efficacy of iodophor treatment of muskellunge eggs for control of VHS; and Complete the spawning habitat model. The following topics were ranked as “Medium” priority by the team: Validate existing methods and develop alternative methods to estimate population metrics for adult muskellunge in northern lakes; and development of musky habitat restoration techniques. The following were ranked as “Low” priority: Determine the impacts of trolling on muskellunge populations; and Influence of Climate Change on muskellunge.

9. FYI - Upcoming Meetings

- a) Fall WDNR Biologist’s Meeting – October 22-23, 2014 - Oshkosh
- b) 2015 Musky Team Meeting – Late August, Green Bay
- c) International Musky Symposium, Muskies, Inc., Twin Cities, Spring 2016

Musky Team

Charge

1. Develop/review regulation guidance and proposals;
2. Develop/review stocking guidance and stocking plan;
3. Develop/review assessment metrics and sampling protocol;
4. Review/update management plan; assess status of fishery;
5. Identify research needs; coordinate statewide evaluations;
6. Maintain/update musky water classifications.