

Muskellunge Management Team Notes
Kemp Natural Resources Station – Lake Tomahawk
Thursday August 25, 2011, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

In attendance: Tim Simonson (CO –Chair), Scot Stewart (Sponsor-SAD), Dave Rowe (SAD), Steve Gilbert (NAD), Terry Magenau (NAD), Mike Donofrio (EAD), Doug Welch (SAD), Gary Lindenberger, and Bruce Underwood; Mark Luehring, GLIFWC, John Aschenbrenner and Joe Weiss (Conservation Congress); Tom Penniston (Muskie, Inc.) Bob Munson (Musky Clubs Alliance); Matt Faust, Dan Isermann (UWSP); Steve Hewett (CO), Steve Avelallemant (NAD), Dave Seibel (NAD), Lawrence Eslinger (NAD), Steve Bolssen (CO).

1. We briefly reviewed our charge, as originally set forth by the FM Board. We jotted down some ideas for changes, which will be sent out to the committee for review and comment before eventual approval by the FM Board. (<http://dnr.wi.gov/fish/musky/muskymanteam.html#charge>)
2. Steve Hewett reviewed the new revised regulation development process. Essentially, the process will be lengthened, so no proposals will be ready in time for spring 2012. All proposals for this cycle will be taken to public hearings in spring 2013. In the future, fisheries may be on an alternate (odd) year cycle with rules.
3. The team discussed and approved the proposed rule change from Steve Hogler (EAD) to raise the minimum length limit on muskellunge to 54" for outlying waters of Lake Michigan north of Waldo Blvd., Manitowoc.
4. The team discussed the following resolutions from the 2011 Spring hearings (http://dnr.wi.gov/org/nrboard/congress/spring_hearings/2011/2011Resolutions_index.htm):
 - a. 041011 - Allow group bagging – Recommend rejection
 - b. 080311 - Include Spider, Butternut, Julia in 40" minimum statewide – refer to local biologist
 - c. 440411, 640311 - Allow trolling w/ electric motor w/ live bait (while casting artificial) - Recommend rejection, as written, but supports the concept and will 1) work with LE on a consistent interpretation, or 2) develop a statewide rule change proposal to address the problem.
 - d. 580511 - Include Spider in 40" – Refer to local biologist
 - e. 680411 - Extend Musky season to Dec. 31 statewide – Recommend support
 - f. 680511 - Pewaukee River refuge – Refer to local biologist
5. Propagation/Stocking - 2011 was one of the worst springs ever, in terms of spawning, with fairly low numbers of adults. However, hatching and survival of fish in the hatcheries has been excellent and we are expecting a surplus of fish that will be stocked using the tier system.
 - a. The team discussed stocking guidance for our brood lakes, in terms of priority and stocking rate. We concluded that brood lakes, which are stocked only in years that they are spawned, should be priority 1 quotas. The stocking rate will be determined by the local biologist, but will do not recommend that the per-water-maximum be lifted for brood lakes.
6. Steve Bolssen provided the team with a progress update on the implementation of the musky spawning habitat model across the north. Steve expects that a significant number of waters will be completed by next spring.
7. Musky Waters – Simonson provided a summary of the revised musky waters classification. Several musky waters were dropped from the 1996 list and the total is now 660 lakes, down from 794 in 1996 (see table, below). We also discussed a pending request to include a fifth designation or classification that would be used to describe extremely high density waters with very little chance of growing fish larger than about 38" (i.e., class "A3" or "D". There was very little support for the proposal because most felt it was a subtle variation of our existing class "A2" and the, because only a small handful of waters would be listed under this designation, it did not warrant a new class. With the new classifications, we now have a list of designated trophy waters (class A1 waters). There are currently 61 inland lakes that are designated as "trophy" waters, with 41 lakes and 20 chains or systems of lakes. A review of these designations also allowed a more accurate accounting of waters that are actually stocked, which should be an improvement over the 1996 list.

Comparison of designated musky lakes, by class and category, between the 1996 and 2011.

	Year	
	1996	2011
Class		
A1	104	125
A2	252	185
B	222	225
C	216	125
Total	794	660
Category		
0	151	69
1	140	298
2	364	179
3	149	114
Total	804	660

8. Matt Faust, UWSP, presented his modeling results on the Impact of exploitation on musky size-structure. His project focused on the extent to which harvest affects muskellunge size-structure. Establishing and maintaining a trophy fishery is dependent upon the growth potential of the population and the risk of mortality. Matt found that low levels of mortality can have a profound impact on the number of large fish in the population. **Abstract** - Muskellunge management is often aimed at producing large trophy individuals. However, the muskellunge is a long-lived species that occurs naturally at low population densities, which makes it susceptible to the effects of harvest mortality. Muskellunge populations within Wisconsin's ceded territory are exposed to both angling and spearing fisheries. Our objective is to determine the extent that harvest mortality affects muskellunge population size structure in Wisconsin's ceded territory. We developed a simulation model to predict the effect of varying levels of harvest mortality from angling and spearing fisheries on size structure of muskellunge populations producing large-, medium-, and small-bodied fish. We found that muskellunge size structure decreased as harvest mortality increased, and identified specific combinations of angling and spearing harvest mortality that prevented trophy muskellunge populations from producing large individuals. Some levels of harvest mortality are detrimental to muskellunge size structure, so changes may need to be made to current muskellunge management in Wisconsin. In addition to this talk, I posted Matt's Poster from the AFS meeting on the Growth Potential of Muskellunge in Wisconsin at http://dnr.wi.gov/fish/musky/muskymanteam_products.html.
9. Dan Isermann, UWSP, presented the results from the 2010-11 Musky Angler Survey, which was conducted by he and Kristen Flores, a social scientist at UWSP – College of Natural Resources. This survey is one in a series of musky angler surveys that have been repeated every 10 years since 1989. The results are available on the Musky Management Team web page at <http://dnr.wi.gov/fish/musky/documents/muskellungeanglersurvey.pdf>.
10. We also discussed a 2011 Conservation Congress Advisory Question from the Warm Water Committee (stemming from resolution #200110) that directs the department to ask a series of 4 questions to all ALIS customers who purchase a fishing license. 1) Did you fish exclusively for muskellunge in Wisconsin at any time in 2010? 2) Did you catch muskellunge at any time while fishing in Wisconsin in 2010? 3) Did you keep a muskellunge that you caught in Wisconsin, for any reason in 2010? 4) How many muskellunge did you keep in 2010? The team recommended further development of the idea and directed Simonson to contact CS&L to find out what the costs would be of conducting this census of license purchasers. I heard back from Penny Kanable - the system programming to include survey questions could cost upwards of \$10,000, but their bigger concern is repercussions they would receive from our ALIS agents. Asking additional questions during a transaction would be viewed as time consuming to the agents and they would want a larger commission for license transactions. Some agents may even choose to not ask the questions if they were not compensated. One alternative to reprogramming the license issuance system would be to provide a (monetary) incentive to ALIS agents to obtain a valid email address for customers. We could then use Survey Tool and Gov Delivery to directly contact fishing customers. Agent's fees are included in Chapter 29, Wis. Statutes; in order to provide such an incentive to Agents, WDNR would have to add appropriate language to Chapter 29.
11. Mike Donofrio (sitting in for Steve Hogler) gave us an update on the Great Lakes Spotted Musky program. The DRAFT Green Bay Great Lakes Spotted Musky Management Plan 2010 has been written, discussed with the

public and circulated widely. They would like closure on this plan, so we agreed to distribute the plan to the team and provide them with a peer review of the plan. We will provide final ratification at our Winter 2012 meeting. A copy of the Draft plan can be found at http://dnr.wi.gov/fish/musky/muskymanteam_products.html. Please review and return comments to Steve or Mike.

- a. Egg take/fingerlings from Lake St. Clair – In terms of implementation, we have been fortunate this year to have received 3,000 fingerlings GLS muskies from the state of Michigan. They had a difficult year (as we did) with spawning, but they ended up spawning a few individuals and had good success with the eggs they did get. The fingerlings arrived at the Wild Rose State Fish Hatchery on August 31, 2011 with 100% survival. The plan is to hold them over winter and rear them to a size that will allow them to be PIT tagged before stocking in our selected inland brood lakes.
- b. We are also having a pretty good year with GLS muskies at the CD Besadny Facility in Kewaunee. They have about 3,000 fingerlings from Fox River brood fish. These fish will be stocked directly back into the Green Bay/Fox River to supplement the population.

12. The report from the North Central Division of the American Fisheries Society, Esocid Technical Committee can be found at <http://www.ncd-afs.org/Default.asp?mid=23&sid=32>. Jordan Weeks (EAD) is the WI state AFS chapter representative to the ETC.

13. Be aware and add this to your calendar. Muskies, Inc., and NCD-AFS ETC will be sponsoring a Musky symposium in spring 2016 in Minneapolis, MN in conjunction with the 50th anniversary of Muskies Inc.

14. 2010 Rule Proposals - Updates - Simonson

- a. 40" Statewide (28" exempt waters) - Done
- b. 50" minimums for GL Spotted Brood Lakes – Done
- c. Quick-set sucker rule proposal – Done, with modifications

15. Winter Meeting? 2012 – Where, when, etc. (before the NP season closes!)

Topics to carry over from this meeting:

1. Team Charge
2. Discuss Protocols to manage fish health and diseases in brood stock lakes
3. Specific management objective and final cost-effectiveness (e.g., "cost to creel") for all types of stocked muskellunge.
4. Criteria, stocking rates, frequencies for yearlings (or extended growth large fingerlings) – are there specific situations where larger fish are needed to meet management goals?
5. Ratification of GLS Musky Management Plan.
6. Evaluation of NAD Stocking Framework – Progress and 2012-13 work plan projects.
7. Sampling methodologies/protocols/metrics
8. Trolling proposal