

WDNR Muskellunge Standing Team - DRAFT Meeting Notes - 23 February 2006

Brood stock management plan update - We discussed the attached list of lakes to be tested this season (2006) by Ed Murphy (graduate student) and Brian Sloss (UWSP). Brian provided a Standard Operating Procedure (I need to get an electronic copy from him). UWSP will supply all the equipment needed. It would be best to have one or two contacts so that Brian can get the supplies to a couple of locations for distribution to all the biologists collecting the samples. Also discussed use of fin clips stored in envelopes (for other lakes we can't get to). Brian said these would work okay (rather than ethanol) but the envelopes must be separated so the fins can dry out quickly. If regional biologists know of upcoming tournaments on lakes we would like to have samples from, they can use scale envelopes or contact Brian ahead of time to see if Ed can come up and collect the samples. Also, for guides/anglers that handle a large number of fish (> 50) from specific waters, this would be a good opportunity for them to participate.

We briefly discussed hatchery plans for this spring. The T.G. Thompson Hatchery intends to collect eggs from the Chippewa Flowage (Bone Lake would be a back up because FM crews will be in there). The Art Oehmcke hatchery plans to collect eggs from North Twin Lake in 2006. Bruce Underwood felt that the proposed changes to hatchery operations will be workable; there are just a few kinks they need to work out. The hatchery managers can work directly with Brian with questions or concerns.

Leech Lake paired evaluations are on schedule. Marty Jennings is testing tagging locations for PIT tags. The fish have been tagged, but no results are available yet. We need to develop a list of all of our tag needs over the course of this study so we can coordinate bulk purchases and so we have a number to share with clubs, etc., that might be interesting in donating money to purchase tags. Apparently we can get tags in bulk for \$3.75 each. There was a question as to whether those would all have to be ordered at the same time or if they would honor that rate on partial orders. Bob Benson would like to see us consider development of a brood lake for Leech Lake fish. We need to figure out what would be needed, in terms of numbers, sources, etc., to get that going.

We also discussed the ongoing "Green Genes" study being conducted by the Illinois Natural History Survey. They are looking at paired comparisons of Upper Mississippi, Ohio, and IL mixed brood sources. So far, the Ohio and IL stocks are performing well; the Upper Mississippi stocks (primarily Leech Lake fish), are not doing as well in their studies. We need to be aware of these results and keep abreast of the study as it relates directly to our southern waters.

- [Musky genetics study](#) lake list [PDF 16KB].
- [IHNS Strain Evaluation Summary](#) [PDF 103KB].

Specific Tasks:

Get electronic copy of SOP from Brian Sloss and distribute (Tim).

Review list of lakes for genetic testing, especially NER, and get comments to Tim Simonson ASAP (all).

Determine who in NOR will distribute genetic sampling supplies to biologists (Ave?).

If transport tournaments are planned for waters where we would like genetic samples, contact Brian to set up collection of tissues samples (biologists).

Develop comprehensive list of PIT tag needs for evaluations. Get tag needs to Tim (all).

Write plan for development of LL brood stock lake(s), in terms of numbers, sources, etc (Sloss, all).

2007-08 Stocking Guidelines

We briefly reviewed the stocking guidelines for 07-08. Please get comments to Tim Simonson ASAP. I will consolidate them and pass them on to Al Kaas.

Specific Tasks:

- [2007-2008 Coolwater Stocking Guidelines](#) [PDF 29KB].
- [2007-2008 Musky Stocking Guidelines](#) [PDF 21KB].
- Review attached stocking guidelines. Get comments to Tim ASAP, to be forwarded to Al Kaas (All, Tim).

Universal Receptors

We reviewed the list of waters and clarified the intent of the list. The list was established to provide clubs with a pre-approved list of lakes they could stock because we have no concerns about the sources of fish used. We also use the designation in our propagation program to determine sources of fish for quota requests. We also discussed Lake Michigan drainage waters. Ideally, waters with direct connections to Lake Michigan and Green Bay should be considered for GL Spotted fish. However, currently, the threat is minimal until natural reproduction is established in Green Bay/Lake Michigan. We have no idea how many fish are reaching Green Bay from inland waters. Brian will be conducting genetic testing on Green Bay fish, so we will have some idea of immigration to this point. This should be continued for Menominee River. The supply of GL fish is limited so all available production right now should be used to build up the Green Bay population.

Specific Tasks:

- [Universal receptors](#) lake list [PDF 11KB]
- Review impact of past stocking on Fox River genetic samples (ongoing); initiate additional genetic sampling on Menominee River population (or develop plan, with budget, if needed). Evaluate NR status in Green Bay. Make recommendation to the committee (Kapusinski, Sloss). Present Brood stock plan (discussed last fall) to committee, including an evaluation of the option of establishing brood lakes (Kapusinski).
- EA-type process for new introductions - We briefly discussed an EA-like process for new introductions (attached). Some sort of process is required by our stocking guidelines (since 1999). Very few have been done in general and none have been done for muskellunge. The case study right now is Lake Neshonoc, where the biologist and club would like to introduce muskellunge. Paul Cunningham will be coordinating this effort, but he was not able to attend. Please review the attached document and get comments to Tim. We will continue to discuss this process. We need to finalize soon so they can proceed with Neshonoc.

Specific Tasks:

- [Fish introduction analysis](#) form [PDF 22KB].
- Review Fish Intro Form (attached) and get comments to Tim (All).

Classification changes

We discussed a couple of proposed classification changes developed by Heath Benike (Sand Lake, Rice Lake, Lower Chippewa River). We decided that changes in the Classification proposed by biologists should be accepted as written because these have always been based largely on professional judgment. A recent test of these confirmed that they are, by-and-large, fairly accurate. Changes will be maintained on the Web site. The Water Division is working on a geo-referenced layer for the spatial database. The Muskellunge Waters Booklet has not been updated since 1996, so we need to think about re-writing that publication. Once again, Tom Soles, Muskellunge Clubs Alliance, has offered to work with us to get that booklet printed. I will check on existing supplies to see how many of the old booklets are left at Darwin Road.

We still, however, have a critical need to develop numerical criteria for the Reproductive Categories. The guidelines we developed a few years back (natural reproduction lakes average 1 young-of-year/mile) seem to be standing up to the test of time but we need to resolve this once and for all and refine the criteria. Tim will assemble the available data and wrap this up. It was pointed out that we need to be aware of QA/QC issues with fall survey data when it comes to what species/sizes were actually targeted. Apparently, Steve Newman, ISS, has been working on this as well. Need to make contact with him to see what he has for data. I would like to assemble a sub-team to work on this issue. If anyone in the regions has an interest, let me know.

Specific Tasks:

- [2002 Rice Lake Musky Evaluation](#) [PDF 16KB].
- [Musky Classification](#) [PDF 22KB].
- Check supplies of booklet (we have 7,140 on hand); develop plan to update booklet (Tim).
- Work with Steve Newman and the regional biologists to develop a database of targeted fall young-of-year musky surveys (Tim, others?).

Regulation categories and strategy

6.1 - Goal for number of trophy lakes? We discussed the concept of developing a goal for trophy management. Currently, our plan is to manage all lakes for a variety of angling opportunities based on the potential of the waters. In reflecting further on this, I think we need to specifically “designate” the lakes with the true trophy potential, distributed throughout the state, and work toward managing the best of the best as trophy lakes. What constitutes a trophy is lake-specific and is in the eye of the beholder, but there are several lakes that have the potential to meet the unqualified definition (50”). I have developed a “straw dog” list with some more thoughts on the idea. My first cut at this was just to list the largest lakes (~>1,000 acres) and work from there. More to come soon. I will send it out separately for review and discussion.

6.2 - Slot limits; sunsets - We discussed the fact that slots have been thrown around over the past few years and that they may be appropriate for some of the high density slow growing populations currently under the 28" minimum. Also, with experimental rules, Joe Hennessy would like to have several lakes evaluated simultaneously with an appropriate sunset, but that is as far as we got.

6.3 - Guidelines for restoration vs. trophy regulations - No discussion.

6.4 - Long Lake (28-inch minimum); bag limits - We discussed Long Lake in the context of upcoming questions for the spring hearings (reverting to the statewide 34" minimum). There was some concern, but the decision has been made to no longer manage for muskies in that system, based on the fact that we now get sufficient eggs from Green Bay and that the originators of the project promised the locals that it was a temporary arrangement. Also, the question arose: Should we have higher bag limits on 28" minimum lakes? It seemed there was general consensus to do that but it brought on further discussion about other options (e.g., slots), so my sense was that we were not quite ready to develop a formal proposal. These lakes might also be good candidates for slots or maximum length limits.

6.5 - Extend open season until end of December (Stewart). We discussed this idea in the context of allowing anglers to continue to pursue muskellunge during times when open water in December would allow it. Specifically, the open season would be extended to December 31 during periods of "open water" and/or with the additional caveat of catch and release only. We need to run this idea past Legal and Law Enforcement to get their take on it.

Specific Tasks:

- Work with Legal and Law Enforcement on these questions (re: extended season) and get back to the committee for a final proposal (Scot Stewart).
- Review concept of a list of "designated trophy lakes" (I will send out separately) (All).

Question & Answer fact sheet for regulation proposals

We didn't have much of a chance to review and discuss this document. The idea is that we would like to have a consistent document that can be used when we have proposals to increase length limits, either on specific waters or on a broader scale. The Pelican Lake proponents are looking for a PR tool they can use locally to help support the upcoming proposal. They also have a separate document (not previously attached - but here now) that they would like us to review. They would like to have the endorsement of the musky committee.

- [Musky regulation change fact sheet](#) [PDF 34KB].
- [Musky length limit](#) change FAQ [PDF 22KB].

Specific Tasks:

- Please look over these 2 documents and get comments back to me via email (All).

Harvest management system

We discussed the harvest management system currently in use, particularly as it relates to special cases where it may not be working efficiently (large waters with declining or low density

populations). I think everyone agreed that looking into this situation would be warranted. A point made after the meeting is that we should address these cases from the angler's side proactively (e.g., closing the season, etc.). A priority need for this effort is developing a population model for muskellunge and a key element of the model is having age-structured data. Thus, we need better age and growth data on our muskellunge populations. I think everyone agreed that cleithra should be the structure of choice for aging muskellunge. Joe discussed fin ray sections, which can be accurate up to a point. Aging younger fish and tagging them is another way to get at age-growth information, but that relies on "real time" growth, whereas with cleithra, etc., back-calculation allows determination of growth history. The largest fish provide the most information. One way to get cleithra is to sacrifice a minimum of 6 males and 6 females in our long-term musky lakes when they are sampled once every 8-10 years. There are 60 lakes on the list, with 21 of them being the primary foundation of the program with the longest record of data. Another change we are making is to have our creel clerks remove cleithra from harvested muskellunge seen in creel surveys. We might also want to think about re-invigorating taxidermists to contribute cleithra, although the actual source of the fish is more difficult to determine with complete accuracy. We also discussed the possibility of obtaining cleithra from tribal-speared muskellunge. This idea has been advanced to Mike Staggs for discussion with GLIFWC and potentially a charge to the Technical Working Group to develop a plan to do this.

- [Ceded Territory Musky Management](#) [PDF 20KB].

Specific Tasks:

- Forward committee concerns to Pat Schmalz and Mike Staggs for follow up with GLIFWC (Tim). Since the meeting, we have been working with GLIFWC on setting up a meeting this month (likely 3/23) to discuss these issues. Collecting cleithra is currently in our protocol; need clarification from the program on whether this should continue based on negative public/political opposition we have received in the past (Tim, Staggs, Hewett).

For more information, please contact:

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