

Muskellunge Standing Team Notes

Kemp Biological Station, Minocqua, WI
August 8th, 2007, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Attending: Tim Simonson, Scot Stewart, Steve Hewett, Bob Haase, Greg Wells, Joe Weiss, Joe Kurz, Steve Gilbert, Skip Sommerfeldt, Jordan Weeks, Brian Sloss, Terry Margenau, Gary Lindenberger, Mike Donofrio, John Aschenbrenner, Martin Jennings, Lawrence Eslinger, Joe Dan Rose.

Absent: Doug Welch, Cory Painter.

1. **Lawrence Eslinger**, UW - Green Bay. Lawrence made a presentation on muskellunge population dynamics and fishery characteristics in Escanaba Lake. Lawrence is a graduate student at UWGB doing a study on population dynamics of muskellunge using data from several study lakes in northern Wisconsin (contact Lawrence for details; lawrence.eslinger@wisconsin.gov)
2. **Robert Haase**, Musky Clubs Alliance of Wisconsin. Bob provided an update on a joint cooperative study looking at identification of critical/sensitive habitat (musky spawning habitat); MCA, University of Michigan graduate student Joe Nohner, and Paul Cunningham (WDNR) are working together to locate spawning areas in several northern Wisconsin lakes sustained by natural reproduction. It is hoped that in the future, this is something that interested clubs and anglers can contribute to. For more information, contact Paul (paul.cunningham@wisconsin.gov), Bob (rmhaase@dotnet.com, or Joe (joel.nohner@wisconsin.gov).
3. **Brian Sloss**, UW – Stevens Point – Presentation on the latest results and progress with the genetics study. Graduate student Ed Murphy is finishing up his phase of the project and should be done this fall. They have found moderate to high levels of genetic diversity persisting in WI. They have also identified rough east-west groupings of lakes, with a few exceptions. The next student is set to get started and will look at refining the boundaries of genetic management zones. For more information, contact Brian (Brian.Sloss@UWSP.edu).
4. **Steve Hewett**, WDNR. Steve provided an update on VHS in Wisconsin, particularly related to current DATCP regulations and APHIS restrictions. Essentially, nothing new is known. The interim rules have not yet been replaced with permanent rules. There is no transport of fish allowed. For more information, contact Steve (Steve.hewett@wisconsin.gov).
5. **Leech Lake Study**. We discussed the Leech Lake project and agreed to continue to try to follow through with the project. There were no fish produced in our hatcheries this year due to import restrictions. The quotas for the fish for 2008 are entered in the propagation database, so it will be up to Al Kaas at this point to request the fish from Minnesota. Marty's preference is to work with fertilized eggs, in order to eliminate any differences in rearing on subsequent performance. Further, we are still waiting to see how pending federal or state rules will affect transport of fish/eggs from MN. It's also important that we come up with an agreed-upon egg disinfection protocol. Tim is working on a proposal for developing a LL brood source. It will be distributed to the committee soon for review/comments.
6. **Brood Stock Management 2007**. Things seemed to go okay this spring with hatchery crews and egg collections. There were growing pains, and at times it seemed that not enough eggs would be found. However, the crews were great dealing with the uncertainty and adapted where needed to accomplish the goals. There will continue to be growing pains until we have nailed down a set of brood lakes and have had more experience with those specific lakes. Therefore, we need to nail down the lake rotation, alternates, and "go-to" lakes when things are desperate. There were some difficulties associated with adherence to the 3 male : 1 female spawning ratio. Brian Sloss will look into the implications of 2:1 or 1:1. Bob Haase offered that volunteers could be coordinated to help with egg take.
7. **Marty Jennings**, WDNR. **PIT Tag retention**. Marty provided an update on PIT tag retention. They found good results with tag retention in adults, and worked with hatchery crews to implement PIT

tagging of adults as a routine activity with spawning crews. Marty will maintain the PIT tag database for spawned adults. Contact Marty for details (Martin.jennings@wisconsin.gov).

8. **GL Spotted Muskellunge Program** – No eggs were taken and there are no fish being reared from the 2007 year-class. There are some yearlings that were held over from last year and are currently in ponds at Wild Rose. We discussed the disposition of those yearlings. These fish are all destined for Green Bay or the Fox River due to VHS concerns; they will not be stocked in any inland lakes. However, we still want to develop inland sources of GL fish, and a short list of lakes was identified: Elkhart Lake, Little Green Lake, Random Lake, Legend Lake (Menominee County). These lakes will likely be stocked with some of the fish that are being reared under contract by Fleming College in Ontario. They are rearing the offspring of 5 families of fish and, pending the import rules, may be coming in November.
9. **Rule Proposals** – The team reviewed and discussed several rule proposals.

Resolutions/Advisory Questions from 2007 hearings:

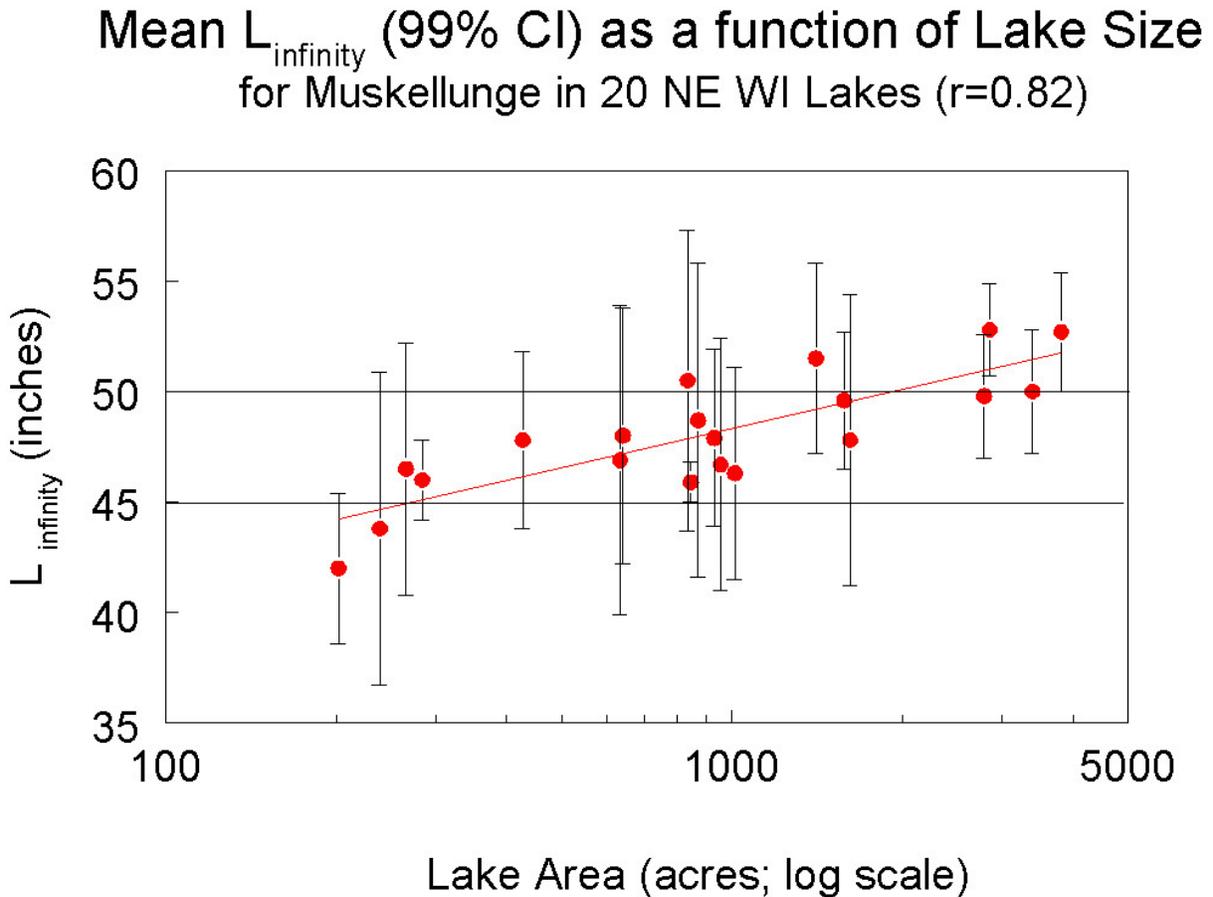
- 54" minimum length limit/Lower Fox, Green Bay - NER does not anticipate forwarding this year due to vacancy.
- Extended Southern Zone season – This proposal would extend to season through the end of December each year south of US Highway 10. This was supported as an advisory question; we recommended advancement.
- Quick-set rigs/Live Bait – This proposal would require the use of treble hooks only on live bait longer than 8", and stipulates that the hook must be set immediately upon indication of a bite. This proposal was supported as an advisory question, and, although it will be somewhat difficult to fully enforce – i.e., immediately set the hook upon indication of a bite - we recommended advancement.

New Proposals for 2008 hearings:

- Extend the 40" minimum/Lower Black River – We recommended advancement. In terms of housekeeping, we need to ensure that tributaries up to the first dam or lake are included in the proposed reach as well as the existing upstream reach to include the entire stretch of the Black River.
- 50" minimum length limit/Bone Lake, Polk County – In the absence of specific growth data from Bone Lake, it was felt that the available inferential information indicates sufficient growth potential for the population. For a lake of this size, the average ultimate length should reach 49.9" (Figure 1). Therefore, we recommended advancement.
- 50" minimum length limit/Enterprise Lake - In the absence of specific growth data from Enterprise Lake, it was felt that the available information (i.e., historic catches of fish approaching 50") indicates sufficient growth potential for the population. For a lake of this size, the average ultimate length should reach 46.6" (Figure 1). Therefore, we recommended advancement.
- No Minimum length limit, 34" to 40" protected slot/Nine Waters NW WI – The committee clearly recommended replacement of the 28" minimum category with the "no minimum" length limit, but there was considerable discussion about inclusion of the slot, particularly for the 3 larger waters. In general, the committee felt that the "no minimum" was the best choice to replace the 28" minimum. Six of the nine waters proposed are less than 154 acres, and most felt that we should not actively manage those waters for muskellunge; enacting a protected slot may imply otherwise or create unrealistic expectations. However, for the 3 larger waters, most with a long history of having musky fisheries, there was some disagreement. The 3 larger waters may be suited for a

protected slot because occasionally larger fish are captured there (2 of the 3 larger waters had RSD-38 values of > 0%). More analysis is needed. Ideally, the no minimum is designed to reduce densities and increase growth – the three larger waters have a greatest chance of achieving this goal, so having a slot waiting to protect those fish may make some sense, rather than coming back with a new rule down the road. There was complete agreement that the smaller waters have little chance of meeting this expectation. However, the recommendation of the committee was to replace the 28” minimum with a “no minimum” category, thus moving all 9 waters to “no minimum”.

Figure 1. Relationship between lake area and ultimate length of muskellunge (L_{∞}) for 20 WI lakes.



10. **Musky angler survey (2009-2011)** – We need to start working now on funding and a contract with either UWSP or Science Services to repeat this survey. This will probably be funded and conducted next biennium. While the survey should be consistent with previous efforts, we would like to add a few questions dealing with contemporary issues. If you have any topics that you feel should be added, please let me know.
11. **Next meeting.** We usually meet in February, with a primary topic being stocking guidance. Another topic that was suggested for discussion was delayed mortality/tournaments.

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