

MSSFA Executive Director Report --- August 8, 2011

The Lake Michigan Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee meeting was held in late April. Dave Clapp, head of the DNR's Great Lakes Research Station in Charlevoix, discussed the annual lake-wide analysis that considers more than 10 measures, like salmon size and weight or density, among others. The analysis for 2010 showed 13 red flags out of 15 possible for long-term indicators, seven out of 15 for short term indicators.

"That's a lot of flags," Clapp said. "It definitely has our attention. It's a warning." May and June fishing did not provide reassurance, as the fish were smaller than last year and stomachs were empty when caught. Late June fishing was slow but anglers are marking bait fish. July and August have proved that the huge year class of young alewives survived last winter and are producing larger Chinook. Last Saturday, fellow Steelheader Jim VanBrocklin of the Holland Chapter caught a 27 lb. Chinook to win big fish awards for both the 333 Tournament Trail event and the Big Red Classic Fishing Tournament held in Holland over the weekend. We are catching bigger fish on Lake Michigan, but not near as many as the last few years.

The Lake Huron Citizens Advisory Committee is busy considering how to best stock Lake Huron to continue to improve its come back as a viable fishery after the salmon population crash in 2004. Walleye and perch continue to make a strong come back and dedicated fishing hours are now targeted at walleye as the species of choice on Lake Huron. Northern Lake Huron is producing some smelt and alewives are present as forage for Chinook. Catch rate for Walleye is going through the roof. The large walleye population is adjusting to the forage base limitations and eating gobies. Chinooks are still being caught in the northern upper portion of the lake as are Atlantic salmon. Steelhead is on the rebound as well and the Lake Michigan Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee did approve the recommendation of sending more Lake Michigan steelhead to Lake Huron this year to assist in stocking this important prey fish.

The members of the advisory committee questioned the wisdom of planting additional Chinook in a fishery that hasn't shown its ability to support them. The DNR is cautiously considering whether to modify planting strategy for Chinook and is preparing a "white paper" on the subject due July 1st and a presentation to the Lake Huron Technical Committee of the GLSFC on July 12th. Public meetings are being planned later this summer but committee members cautioned that the public may not be as well educated on the ramifications of this decision as the stakeholders on the committee, and DNR should strongly consider the input of the committee in finalizing its decision. The final recommendation to the Division Chief and hatchery staff is due October 1st.

Gary Whelan, MDNR Hatcheries Manager, presented an overview of the progress and remaining challenges of raising cisco and Atlantic salmon in the State's hatcheries and concluded that we can rear 7" Atlantics in production volume at the Platte River Hatchery, but that "we are ways away from producing production run size cisco; at least five years away."

Acting Fisheries Chief, Jim Dexter, reported that interviews to fill the basin coordinators positions for Lake Erie and Lake Huron are underway. He also reported that the Sportsmen's Caucus, composed of state legislators, has offered to assist in developing legislation to help the Michigan sportsmen.

The Cold Water Regulations Steering Committee met in late June and revised its terms of reference to rename itself "The Cold Water Resources Steering Committee". The committee is free to talk about any issues affecting the cold water streams and provide input to the Department on steelhead, brook trout, terms of reference, regulations, slot limits, circle hooks, etc., and membership will be limited to one person per organization.

Upper Manistee River Use Survey has been finalized, with locations for gathering feedback identified as well as dates to conduct surveys from July through September. The Department is attempting to ascertain the effect of enforcing gear restrictions in the areas that could impact camper usage of state campgrounds.

Research Program Manager, Tammy Newcomb, provided an excellent slide presentation on the temperature effects on steelhead thriving in the Great Lakes --- Steelhead 101. If you think Par is getting your golf ball down in regulation, you need to hear Tammy's presentation. It makes for an interesting program for a chapter meeting. It also clearly demonstrates why Senate Bill 248 could have a damaging affect on the ability to purchase and protect valuable property on which there are tributaries and small cut away drainages. These areas are critical to the natural reproduction of steelhead in our streams.

On July 25th I was invited to join Gov. Rick Snyder, his son Jeff, Bill Rustem, Senior Advisor and Erin McDonough, Executive Director of M.U.C.C. on a Lake Michigan fishing charter from Grand Haven on Capt. Denny Grinold's boat "Old Grin" with first mate John Robertson, retired Fisheries Chief. What a great experience and opportunity to explain the impact invasive species are having on our Great Lakes. We talked about quagga mussels and the impact they are having on the food web. Spiny Water fleas coated our lines all morning as we caught four fish of which the biggest was a nine pound Steelhead caught by the Governor. The governor not only had a great time he had a renewed appreciation for the importance of our 7.1 billion dollar sport fishing industry. The take away is, the Michigan Steelheaders are considered an important and influential voice of fishers across the state when it comes to fishery issues. The governor acknowledged that and welcomes our involvement in helping the MDNR and legislators manage these resources.

Great Lakes Sport Fishing News continues to add new advertisers to our existing advertiser base and has refocused on the need to provide timely and relevant articles of interest to our members across the state and adjoining states. In this issue, there are five articles featuring how chapters are providing youngsters with the opportunity to learn how to fish and experience the joy of fishing. The MISH Challenge was another successful event for the five chapters that participated and the exposure on Michigan Out of Doors TV enhances our MSSFA's standing in the sport fishing community.

Finally, we are excited to be working with a group of steelhead and salmon anglers in the Petoskey area who have contacted us about forming the "Tip of the Mitt" Steelheader Chapter in Northern Michigan. They have ten potential members and both Greg and I have committed to join their new chapter as associate members. I am sure they will get Rick to join as well. We plan a kick off meeting in Petoskey on September 13th where I plan to speak, answer questions and encourage them to reach out to other anglers in their area to join as well. We have also been working with Al Campbell in reactivating the AuSable Chapter and he has been talking with Greg on getting the membership applications processed. Hopefully, I be able to meet with their group when we have the next Cold Water Resources Committee Meeting in Grayling.

#