

Coldwater Regulations Committee Meeting
Ralph A. MacMullen Conference Center
2/23/11

In attendance: Jim Dexter, Brian Gunderman, Tracy Kolb, Christian LeSage, Todd Kalish, Tom Goniea, Tammy Newcomb, Todd Grischke, Todd Wills, David Borgeson Sr., Bryan Burroughs, Jim Bos, John Walters, Josh Greenberg, Marvin Roberson, Thomas Buhr, Linn Duling, Dennis Eade, Leonard Pietila, Steve Mondrella, Don Wright, Jim Bedford, Joe Boomgaard, Steve Hutchins

Note taker: Todd Wills

1. OPEN DISCUSSION: Jim Dexter

Fisheries Division update:

Jim D. provided the update on behalf of Chief Kelley Smith, would couldn't make today's meeting due to another commitment. Fisheries Division lost 20 of its staff to the early retirement offered last fall, and will only be able to fill 10 of those positions (5 have been filled to date). The additional loss of staff leaves the Division with a total of 50 unfilled positions. This year's budget is neutral compared to last year; 2 years ago the Division took a 10% reduction (\$3 million) in its budget.

Trout Committee meeting:

Jim D. asked the members of the Committee who were present at the Division's annual Trout Committee meeting if they found it worthwhile to attend. All agreed that it was very informative.

Agenda for the upcoming year:

Jim D. noted that the Coolwater Regulations Committee is holding parallel meetings, and is about 18 months away from where the Coldwater Regulations Committee is now. They have some very difficult issues on their agenda, including northern pike and spearing regulations.

Jim D. asked those in attendance how often they would like to meet this year, and what issues they would like to address. Jim noted that Kelley suggested meeting twice (June and September). Everyone agreed with this suggestion; Jim will set up a Doodle poll to determine the best date. The Committee also agreed to hold one meeting outside (further north) of Lansing, preferably at the RAM Center.

Jim D. provided a list of potential meeting topics that he and Kelley brainstormed. The group agreed that Committee work should support Fisheries Division priorities. A round-table discussion of potential issues also included:

Marvin Roberson: 10-fish bag limit in for brook trout in the Upper Peninsula (Jim D. noted that this issue is currently not be pushed, but if it comes up again it will be back at the table).

Bryan Burroughs: Brought forward several suggestions. First, matching regulations types with angling pressure and harvest dynamics of waters. For example, we know that Type 1 regulations are often adequate, (even though they don't protect fish through their first spawning) because they are typically applied to streams with low angling pressure stream. Regulations need to be applied in accordance to how much angling pressure and harvest there is; we need to determine how angling pressure and harvest varies geographically (also relates to 10-fish bag limit for brook trout in the U.P.).

Second, the Committee should have a discussion on the length of seasonal closures, and whether or not are they working (or necessary). How many more people would go out if closure season was shortened? Is there anything else we can do to tweak regulation types 1-4? Third, there is a need for basic demographic information on trout anglers (who they are, what their preferences are, etc). If we don't know the balance of trout angler preferences, how can we apply the "pain" of different special regulation types to the minority of anglers?

Steve Hutchins: Several suggestions; first, discussion of steelhead regulations (defining them as migratory rainbow trout and separating the bag and minimum size limits (MSLs) from other trout and salmon species). Second: Chumming (lower steelhead bag limits would be more palatable than current Fisheries Order (FO) 245 that outlaws broadcasting of eggs, especially because most die-hard steelhead anglers are catch and release proponents). Third: Analysis of flows at hydropower dams (there seems to be a lot of recent fluctuations).

Jim D. noted that Kelley has made it a priority to review FO 245 this year. If it is changed, it will have to go through the NRC process for the Director's signature. Any changes will not go into effect this year.

David Borgeson Sr.: Supports discussion of chumming. Also supports looking at MSLs for rainbow trout and steelhead.

Don Wright: Noted that many issues identified on the list provided by Jim D. tie back to gear restriction discussions. Is there the possibility that discussion of gear restrictions can be revisited?

Jim D. noted that the list of topics was harvested from previous discussion notes. There are always options to revisit issues that have been recently acted upon, but the Division will be apprehensive to do so within in a short time frame (less than 5 years). This time frame provides the opportunity for citizen feedback on what is or is not working.

Thomas Buhr: Trout stocking policy, but noted that it is not appropriate for this Committee (will email Jim D. with his concerns instead).

Jim Bedford: In favor of discussing 1) more protection for Little Manistee River steelhead since it is our broodstock source, and 2) seasonal protection for steelhead (fall

steelhead should have more protection than spring steelhead because of the expanded season, there is precedent for this from states on the west coast). Also noted that Fisheries Division's regulations are not that complicated compared to other states.

Steve Mondrella: Suggested that waiting for 5 years to revisit the issue of gear restrictions might be too long, since it is currently a hot topic with concerns in the angling community about the whole package, including the new waters added.

ACTION: Jim D. will report these suggestions back to Kelley and will run them back through group at a later time to determine their priority.

Articles of interest:

Jim D. led a discussion on articles that he distributed to the group earlier and briefly covered the public review process and role of the Natural Resources Commission. In summary:

- The concepts in the articles can be applied to any adverse issue
- The discussion of incorporating recommendations into decisions is highly relevant; fisheries biologists can make recommendations, but the Division needs to incorporate public comment into its final decisions
- Sometimes angler values align with science, sometimes they don't; when they don't negotiations are the next step
- Even with complete and accurate science, issues remain divisive
- From this point forward, the Division will have discussions with its various citizens advisory committees in advance of having them with staff (in order to identify issues that need to be brought forward to Division staff for further action)

All agreed that the last regulations review process built relationships that didn't exist before by bringing a personal face to the many different organizations at the table. Some discussion ensued regarding whether or not the focus of the Committee is on regulations only, or if environmental issues are an option as well. Jim D. noted that any change in focus would have to be taken up with Kelley and that traditionally the focus of the Committee has been regulations (Jim D. has developing terms of reference for the Committee on his to-do list). Tammy Newcomb added that issues can still be brought forward through the Committee even though they might not be related to regulations. This venue is a good way to identify issues that might not be on the Department's or Division's radar.

ACTION: Jim D. will develop terms of reference for Committee members and participation.

2. COLLABORATION EFFORTS AND UPDATE FOR THE UPPER MANISTEE RIVER "USE" SURVEY: Todd Kalish

Jim D. provided the following background information: During the recent regulations review process, Fisheries Division received a variety of recommendations for extending

special regulations on Upper Manistee River to County Road 612, which would add ~9 miles of special regulations water. Forest Management Division had concerns that this would negatively affect its two state forest campgrounds (SFCGs) in the area. Fisheries Division signed a memorandum of agreement to assess what effect implementing gear restrictions would have on use of the SFCGs.

Todd K. has been charged with moving this effort forward, and noted that a kick-off meeting to develop an evaluation plan will be held in early March in Grayling. In preparation for the meeting, Fisheries Division needs to know what level of effort folks will be able to dedicate to this issue (neither Fisheries or Forest Management divisions can dedicate a large effort). Bryan B. said that Trout Unlimited can bring on AmeriCorp intern to dedicate to this issue (and possibly others).

Todd K. stated that the first meeting will be to delineate the study area (past the two SFCGs?), define access points (where they survey will occur), and how to conduct it (will it be post cards, interviews, or both?). He will ask Tracy Kolb to help by providing a random stratified design for the survey. Survey questions will also need to be carefully crafted so that they do not bias the results; we need to determine what questions will be asked (e.g., demographics, values; how will restrictive fishing regulations effect your use of SFCGs?).

Brian B. noted that he would like to conduct a similar survey on Pigeon River, and stated that Michigan Trout magazine would like to list and promote all SFCGs that are on or within close proximity to trout streams. To do so, he would need a list of these SFCGs within 1-1½ months to meet printing deadlines. Jim D. stated that the Division can facilitate the transfer of this information.

Todd K. noted that the Division will also be conducting a creel census on the Pere Marquette River with a primary purpose to assess angler use of the fishery resource. This census can also provide baseline information for gear restrictions.

Steve H. asked if the Division can use volunteer angler or census data. Todd K. noted that we use volunteer data in some instances (e.g. steelhead from the Orsini Hatchery on the Betsie River), but we need to be cognizant of how it fits into our overall management efforts because there are always quality assurance and control concerns. The Division gets better data when it is collected by a creel clerk. Tammy N. also noted that the Division has a history with volunteer creel, and it hasn't worked well.

Don W. inquired about the potential to obtain trout angler demographics with the point of sale (POS) license system. Todd G. said it's possible, but difficult and inefficient because the POS license system is a big target for these types of requests. The intent of the system is to sell licenses and not to provide answers to survey questions; accordingly, it is very expensive to change the system's software to ask such questions.

3. MASS MARKING OF STEELHEAD: POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REGULATING BAG LIMITS: Jim Dexter

Jim D. stated that former Fisheries Division Chief John Robertson wanted mass marking of steelhead across the Great Lakes years ago (to protect wild fish), but the issue never gained traction with any of the other state agencies in the region. Now, mass marking technology exists (it has been in the works for about 10 years) and occurs thanks to cooperation with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The technology has been tested on lake trout; this year all Chinook salmon stocked into the Great Lakes will be mass marked (coded wire tag and adipose fin clip). The potential to mass mark steelhead exists (adipose clip at minimum, if not coded wire tag). In addition to the opportunity to distinguish stocked vs. wild fish, mass marking technology provides accurate measurements and exact counts of all fish that go onto the stocking truck with no human interaction.

The potential to mass mark steelhead provides the opportunity to evaluate bag limits (e.g., if all fish were clipped, we could have a regulation that puts the harvest on hatchery fish, thereby protecting wild fish with a reduced bag limit or increased bag limit on hatchery fish). The bottom line is that it allows us to promote survival of wild fish. The Division needs to know where its constituents would like to go with this.

The entire group agreed that mass marking is one of the most positive things that can be done to gain knowledge and influence salmonid management. There was agreement that marking all steelhead, developing a constituency for wild fish, and differential regulations (in some form or another, yet to be determined) are all good ideas.

Jim D. provided the following logistical information: if we mass mark steelhead, it will not occur until the summer or fall of 2012. The Committee and Division will have time to work through marking, logistic, financial, and regulation issues. Coded wire tags for Chinook salmon cost about \$260,000; tags for steelhead will probably run about \$100,000 plus \$50,000 to cover USFWS staff time. Differential bag limits will probably be up for discussion at the fall Committee meeting; Jim D. will bring back some generalities from Fisheries Division staff about what the biology tells us.

CONDUCTING CREEL SURVEYS: WHAT ARE THE COSTS/BENEFIT?: Tracy Kolb

Jim D. invited Tracy to talk to the group because of past discussions regarding the need for creel data, particularly the interest of various partner organizations in conducting creel surveys. The goal of Tracy's talk is to provide basic information on the cost of a creel survey and what type of information comes out of it. This presentation will give the Committee food for thought if it wants to move down the road of pursuing funding for collection of creel data.

Tracy noted that much of information about Fisheries Division's angler census program will be hypothetical because we don't have the resources for full implementation right now. The point of the program is to track angler catch (released and harvested), total effort, catch rates; collect bio-data (size of catch and marks); and interface with anglers

(collect basic demographic data as well as answers to specialized questions). Results from the program can be partitioned by season, month, or gear to tease out the effects of different regulations.

Tracy provided a list of past creels and ports/creels that are currently active. Fisheries Division Basin Teams prioritize creel needs for inland waters within management units; most of these are directed at stocking evaluations (for cost:benefit analysis). The Division is required to do some Great Lakes creels as part of the 2000 Consent Decree. Because of time and staff shortages, the creel program is trying to be more opportunistic (i.e., working within our constraints while maximizing our ability to cover water bodies). Tracy is also investigating the use of new technologies to improve data collection (vehicle/trailer counters at launch ramps, trail cameras, etc).

Tracy also commented that there is no doubt about the ability of volunteers to collect the necessary data, but the random survey schedule is brutal (requires working days/nights/weekends) and must be strictly adhered to. Otherwise, the data cannot be used.

MICHIGAN'S INLAND TROUT RESEARCH: A FUTURE PERSPECTIVE: Tammy Newcomb.

Tammy gave a presentation discussing the past, present, and future of coldwater research in Michigan. Pioneering research has been occurring in Michigan since the 1930's and has greatly improved our ability to manage Michigan's coldwater resources. Although budget constraints have required the closure of research facilities, these are only place; the staff expertise to conduct coldwater research remains within the Division. Tammy discussed how evaluation and assessment projects are solicited, assessed, and funded, and provided a list of current studies that are of interest to the Committee. Committee members are invited to use this forum to provide information on potential research needs.

SIGNS FOR GRS

Jim D. noted that Kelley has had discussions with Committee members regarding signage for great restricted stream segments, and would like to know where this issue stands. Several organizations represented by Committee members have been involved, but need to know what kind of signs and format will be acceptable to the Division before they can be printed. The organizations will pay for and install signs on gear restricted stream segments; the Committee suggests adding signs only in circumstances where there are changes to existing regulations.

ACTION: Jim D. will work with local fisheries staff to come up with a sign format and stretch-specific language. Brian Burroughs and Thomas Buhr will serve as Committee contacts to find a venue for printing.

DECIDE FUTURE MEETING DATE: All

ACTION: Jim D. will send out a Doodle poll to the Committee to assess dates for the June meeting.

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