

Lake Michigan Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting

Tuesday, April 26, 2011 --- MUCC Headquarters, Lansing, MI

Attendees:

Denny Grinold, Jim Dexter, Todd Grischke, Jim Bedford, Jim Bos, Tom Hamilton, Keith Wils, Al Dood, Chuck Pistis, Linn Duling, Jim Schramm, John Robertson, Jim Fenner, Ron Westrate, Jim VanderMass, Dennis Eade, Scott Carey, Frank Krist, Chris Hettinger, John Steymeier, Bill Winowiechi, Jay Wesley, Todd Kalish, Randy Claramunt, Brian Breidert, Mike Ratter, Mike Ryan, Joe Mitchell, Jeff Guerra, Paul Jensen
Mike Jones –Iyob joined meeting in PM.

Meeting called to order: 10 AM by Denny Grinold –Chair.
Looked at last meeting minutes accepted as written.

Self Introductions-as listed in attendees

Fisheries Division Update-Jim Dexter

Rodney Stokes MDNR Director—has announced that Mindy Cook—Deputy Director is retiring effective Friday 04-29-11. Fisheries Chief Kelly Smith has been asked to fill her position. Jim Dexter has been selected to replace Kelly for the next one to two months.

Hopefully everyone returns to their positions by July 4th. Todd Grischke acting as Lake Huron Basin Coordinator. Liz Haye filling same position for Lake Erie.

Department staffing down to less than 150 full time positions. There are 6 positions (in the pipeline) currently being filled. Further refills depend on budgets. Department spending additional dollars on the license sales system, which could provide some funding alternatives.

Advisor reports:

Jim Bedford—Grand River-steelhead--normal spring—although better than last year.

Jim Bos-Pere Marquette River--fishery good-Coho observed spawning until end of March-- same time as Steelhead

Tom Hamilton-Steelhead fishing sporadic-spawning Walleye harassment-fishing pressure heavy on White River.—Hard on fishery.—River providing “tourism” opportunity.

Keith Wils-Big Bay de Noc perch thick in garden Bay-lots of cormorants-“kids” were dipping Perch with dip nets until DNR showed up. Swartz case disappointing –fines reduced from \$16K to \$3K. Jensen Case (no relation to Scribe) attempting to move from Delta County court to tribal court. Might need to organize sports groups to boycott casinos.

Jim Fenner-slow start in Ludington –few boats that are out taking a few Brown Trout.

Very good planting of Brown's at the carferry dock.

Chuck Pistis –reported a 28 lb Brown caught at Grand Haven.

Ron Westrate-lots of Coho –South Haven / Saugatuck-seeing empty stomachs—reports of Chinook –earlier than usual.

Dennis Eade-out of Holland—same as Ron's report. Fishing good when you can get out.

Empty stomachs.

Scott Carry-sporadic smelt runs-good Steelhead-more Browns than ever seen—3 to 7 lbs.

Frank Krist-Lake Huron has been pretty slow. Some fish in south- Browns /walleye.

Lake Trout opens May 1st.

Chris Hettinger- Betsie River had good push of fish. Few boats offshore—Catching was so good had to call in more fisherman .Matching catch to licenses. Platte had more Walleyes than Steelhead.

Brown trout good

Bill Winowiecki-Traverse Bay small trout. Jigging –two whitefish 6 trips—

Paul Jensen-.merged with neighbors (other State licensed fishery in Muskegon) . More fishing with fewer boats—lowered our carbon footprint. Fishery has been good.

Mike Ryan-Indiana /lots of Coho-Kings up to 18 lbs. Good whitefish fishery. Most Coho in several years.

Tremendous whitefish fishery off the piers. DNR looking at limits.

Mike Ratter-Indiana –East Chicago stacked up with Coho. Indiana shoals good Coho fishery. Easy limits. Big lake past the R2 bell –Lakers eating Gobies—some smelt and alewife. Not gorged.

Brian Bridert -Indiana-traditional no forage. Best fishery in 10 years. Limits in an hour and a half common.

Lake Trout –18 Lbs. –north of New Buffalo.

Jim Dexter-Michigan bag limit for whitefish –12.

Joe Mitchell-Stream fishery St Joe/Dowagiac best in last 10 years

Brian Bridert-passed over 5000 fish at South Bend.fish ladder

–best in last 4 years.

Jay Wesley—8800 Steelhead passed at Berrien.

Denny Grinold –Grand Haven –perch fishing good. Fishing in snowstorm following “Deadliest Catch” lead-had to break ice off the gear.—Water was 38.7 top to bottom.—Not much action-three boats out trolling Sunday – one boat thought they had a bite!!!.

Coho Stocking-Chris Hettinger

Platte River returns—are a big stake in the overall fishery. Walleye stocking in Platte Lake may be the problem. 70K each year 2003/4/5. Last Spring / Summer no Walleye fishery. Planting cycle expired and the Southern Lake Michigan fishery exploded. How many walleyes eating \$2.00 stocked Coho.?? Dexter pointed out a 2008 program where ½ the plant stocked at hatchery and the other half stocked below the Lake to miss Walleye pressure. Study indicated hatchery return was better. Todd Kalish pointed out that walleye fishery at Platte Lake popular and that cutting stocking was a big concern. Chris Hettinger stated that it's a well-known fact that the Platte Lake Improvement Assoc. are salmon haters and very pro walleye.

Jim Dexter pointed out that the walleye plants were an alternative to the Brown plants that didn't appear successful. Chris Hettinger indicated that the Platte Bay fishery for Browns was a great fishery.. Dexter again reminded that it was good in Platte Bay –not Platte Lake. Brian Breidert asked if there were Gobies in Platte Lake. Todd Kalish indicated Gobies had showed up in recent survey work. Chuck Pistis recalled the Pere Marquette River planting issues and the predation of walleyes on Salmon and Steelhead. Still lingering questions on how the two species co-exist. Jim Fenner alluded to some question on how the walleyes got there. Tom Hamilton (who sits on the Mason County Walleye Board) stated that their policy was not to plant walleyes where they don't belong. Todd Grischke related the Lake Huron situation where USGS is reporting stocked Salmon in the bellies of Walleyes. Jim Dexter commented that there are a number of areas where predation is still an issue. Chris Hettinger again reminded that the Platte River is the brood river for Coho—does it make sense that we have \$2.00 Salmon smolts swim thru Platte Lake. Jay Wesley commented that the Muskegon River and Muskegon Lake share a similar situation of walleyes eating Salmon smolts. Tom Hamilton stated that the White River had never been stocked and has a good Walleye fishery. Jim Dexter indicated he will bring back more info. once an on going study is done. Timetable for hatchery study year from this fall report possible. John Robertson reminded that we have been talking about downstream predation since the early 60's. Muskegon River is a traditional Walleye stream. We need to continue to look at this more. “Big fish –eat small fish!!!”

Sea Lamprey Funding

Response was a good representation of stakeholders. Good results from the pressure. Budget numbers were upheld. Sea lamprey control is foundation of maintaining a fishery. As Chairman of Advisors to the Great Lakes Fishery Commission he extended a “Thank You !!” to all who assisted on behalf of the GLFC.

Cormorant Funding

Cormorant control funded by earmarks. Dept. of Agriculture looking at GLRI as a funding source. Earmark restrictions will cause program-funding issues. A contact list was handed out to provide address's to politicians or agencies that could provide influence on providing / restoring funding. Keith Wils attended a cormorant killing class where it was pointed out that 35 % favor extirpation however, 65% oppose. Denny Grinold related that ever since a cormorant was featured as a poster child on fish consumption advisory the public perception of the problem has been clouded. Denny Grinold expressed concern that the States Fish & Game Fund budget has a \$100k line item for cormorant control. He feels it's a federal issue and should be funded by the Federal budget. Jim Fenner explained that he didn't want to pick a fight—however we have to do cormorant control. And need to continue spending dollars. Bill Winowecki mentioned migratory hunting. Jim Bos indicated we need to keep the pressure on. Keith Wils mentioned bird hunting in Big Bay. Jim Fenner expressed concerns that the total cost for funding program is expensive and extensive with 22 states involved—he again emphasized if we need state funds use them. Lynn Duling indicated that discussion he had with Kelly indicated that the dollars were from the hatchery budget, which now appears to be from somewhere else. Chuck Pistis pointed out that this situation is a close parallel to the ACOE funding and dredging—locals need to find alternatives. Jim Dexter related that ACOE is no longer benefiting from earmark funds. Jim Fenner indicates that in some areas locals were enacting sales tax to fund dredging in areas of Florida. Tom Hamilton pointed out that no earmarks are what we voted for—so we reap what we sew

Avian Notification Harassment Group--- Jim Dexter

Jim explained the notification protocol and how the contact string works. If there is known activity that is not indicated we need to make DNR aware. Frank Krist indicated that he was not aware and questioned how it was working in his area. Todd Grischke indicated that DNR people are communicating the message. Coordinator appeared to not be contacting Krist's people. Jim Fenner expressed concerns on Brown stocking protocol in Ludington. New stocking at car ferry site was very successful. Coordination with the Feds is important to insure better plant success. The boat launch planting site is not the best area in Ludington. Chuck Pistis pointed out that they come back to where they are planted so sites should be carefully considered. Bill Winowiecki asked if the harassment can work on both the state and federal level plantings?. Jim Dexter replied yes asked that any info. and /or concerns are shared and that working with Federal partners needs coordination.

Platte River Alternative Steelhead Stocking--- Todd Kalish

Back up egg take facility for Steelhead on the Platte River. Seeking opinion of stocking and the reallocation of fish stocks. 12,500 fish from largest stocking locations (Muskegon, Grand, Manistee, St. Joe approx. 3000 each site) and remainder from other sites to reach a 20,000 stocking number. Stocking will be at the hatchery. Hoping for return of 1000 / 1500 fish. Recommended in-equitable distribution by Huron and Michigan committee's. Platte Lake Association. TFC, Lake Michigan Basin Committee. John Stegmeyer questioned returns to Little Manistee-- heard that 2000 last year was exceeded by 1000 more this year. So 3000 returns better run.

Mass Marking--- Denny Grinold

Is now being used heavily by New York state and others are phasing in. Taking the mystery out of natural /planted controversy. Fin clips and coated wire tags (CWT) clearly indicated sources and areas of successful plants.

Steelhead Bag Limits--- Jim Dexter

All Chinook are CWT. No planned study currently exists. Cold water regulations committee. has moved on to facilitate improvement in Steelhead stocks. Looking at differential bag limits. Concentrate harvest on the stocked fish. Managing Steelhead for the river fishery. Primary emphasis has always been on the rivers. Differential bag limits will need the mass marking of all planted fish. Jim Bedford indicates western states already there. Giving wild fish extra help—could still catch trophy fish. He also asked if we are marking Steelhead? Jim Dexter indicated no funding. We are spending \$270K to mark Michigan salmon. CWT have a purchase cost of \$80.00 per thousand tags. Brian Breidert mentioned that lots of info gathered from the mass marking technology. Another big benefit is no one actually handles the fish. Scott Carey asked if all Salmon tagged? Jim Dexter responded all CWT and adipose fin clipped. Chuck Pistis asked if charter boats reporting clips—rest of committee strongly responded that there was no more room on the form!!!! Randy Claramunt indicated that we have had a mass marking with OTC marking-, however we need to carefully organize studies to make sure the results are valid.

Red Flags Analysis--- Randy Claramunt

Refreshing to hear about a diverse fishery even though the species interact. The diversity factor also spreads to the prey fish populations. Red Flags is a joint effort to monitor making progress towards fish community objectives. Decision levels exist on a Level 1 /level 2 scenario. Data from Lake Michigan predator prey community. Triggers exist on the distribution of outcomes around a mean. RFA makes recommendations to Lake Committee when ever parameters vary to cause a red flag. 2009 data predicted that the 2010 prey fish levels should increase. Returns predicted lower returns of predators based on prey. Management decisions can be influenced by the working group, however decision analysis and stake holder inputs also provide a major component.

Catch abundance, recruitment, much more complexity in the model. Catch rates in the charter industry increased –model predicted decline. Lowest number of Chinook salmon returned to wiers in 2010. Things outside the range tripped abundance flag.

Natural reproduction drives the system. OTC marking is estimating over 50% are wild fish. No direct relationship between number stocked and the number caught. Alewife reproduction appears to be increasing. And increases the variability. Wild estimate changes thru time. Maturation schedules are not clearly understood. Growth indicators not changing like they have in the past. Lake Michigan is changing rapidly. Acoustic survey and trawl survey point in different directions. 2010 was the 2nd biggest year class in the last decade for alewife. Predator is the best prey collection method we use.

We want a lot of fish at decent size- not the radical extremes. Top down is manageable –bottom up is difficult. Larger predators can consume a bigger prey item. Either salmon have lost efficiency at catching bigger prey – or—the amount of big prey has reduced.

Bottom up influences. Bloaters were 15% of Salmon diet in 1990's. We see none now.

Abundance of alternative prey is down—another bottom up. Fish health issues are trending positive. Sick fish at wiers at record low. Thiamine levels are back to good ranges. Are salmon eating something other than alewives.??? Maybe Gobies and Sculpins. The number of eggs produced by the salmon population is in the trillions, so high mortality due to thiamine issues still produces huge numbers of fish. Smaller prey although less nutrient are more numerous –so easier to catch with less expenditure of energy. The system is changing very rapidly. Concerns that 2010 alewife year class will provide forage, however the sustainability is in question, although that may buy us some time in dealing with the inherent variability of the system.

Structured Decision Making ---Jim Dexter

A process that will more fully engage constituents. Evaluation of risk and uncertainty.

Allow to discuss and refine management objectives. Will give stakeholders input as to the overall scope of the decision making process. Process in the past may have given the stakeholders less opportunity to provide input. Provides transparency and collaboration.

Stakeholders will hopefully build ownership in the process. Starting with spring meetings. This one with Michigan and Indiana and the next meeting will be June 2 in Wisconsin and Illinois. This fall representatives will meet in Indiana on Nov 5 to come to meeting and to report back on what we have learned. Denny Grinold will represent MCBA / LMCFAC. Dennis Eade will represent Michigan Steelheaders, John Robertson MUCC.

Decision Analysis-Structured Decision Making--- Mike Jones

Introduced Iyob who has contributed much to the effort.

The right decision to stock in Lake Michigan is no simple matter.

Chinook stocking has ranged over a 8 fold variation.

Two reasons to stock –control invasive alewives population reducing negative effects and provide for a sports fishery.

Chinook stocked versus alewife biomass produced a negative relationship in the early days. Latter data shows no relationship between salmon stocked and alewife biomass. Data shows that stocking more salmon did not result in catching more salmon. The management tools that we have are stocking, sea lamprey control, harvest regulations.

All three management tools are “pretty darn blunt instruments”. Natural reproduction has a large influence on the outcome. Decisions are made in a real world using system models. If I do this –I expect this to happen.

Observation models rate the consequences of prior actions. The 1st thing—what do we hope to achieve—2nd what choices do we have—3rd systems model basis for predictions. We need to be careful about certainty.

Rocket science and fishery science have very different levels of difficulty. Goal is to bring constituents into the choice making process. Assumptions can change the game. change our action –up date our model--

2000 / 2001 started decision analysis on salmon stocking.

2005 presented some facts to LMC.

Iyob working on modeling and connecting with stakeholder process.

Technical work and stakeholder engagement are both important.

Management Objectives of Stocking Salmon:

Preserve sport fishery

Maintain ecosystem balance

Maximize harvest and rates (cpe)

Limit catches

Maximize sport fish potential

Diversity of opportunity (species and types of activity)

Balance sport, commercial, tribal

Maximize sustainable benefits

Consistent management objectives

Protection of forage bio-mass

Maximize use of natural reproduction

Avoid loss of native species

Minimize collapse

Management Options for Stocking Salmon.

Stocking (+/-)

Fish—quality of stocked fish

Species composition –(stocked)

Restoration activities – (habitat)

Where stocked fish go –(where, who, when)
Maximize reproduction thru protection of wild fish
Optimize species/ seasonal opportunity- (drowned river mouths)
Feedback policy—triggers could be numerous and varied.

Data available over last 40 years. Feed into model looking forward. Introspective and prospective. Alewife recruitment continues to decline. Historic data big factor. How good are predators at finding prey. Search rates appear to be lower than we originally thought. Same number of predators want to eat a declining prey base. Natural reproduction influenced by alewife biomass. Very limited evidence of density dependency issues. A whole series of mathematical calculations determine a scenario of different outputs. Models run thousands of times to determine outcomes. No matter what possibility you choose there are probabilities of bad outcome. Feedback policies tend to make more sense. Intention at Nov meeting is to present more technical detail. Every time you run the model you use a random number generator to adjust the parameters.
“There is no silver bullet here for this fishery that insulates you from risk.”-(M.Jones)

Jim Dexter-Lake Michigan and Lake Huron are no longer viewed as one lake for fishery management purposes.

Lake Huron – Todd Grischke

Lakes were managed as a system together. Sea Grant workshops held to collect and receive information. No longer the same system. Observations made during workshops were based on the Turning Point feedback. Seeing 30 /40 % anglers not fishing for Chinook. 70 / 80 % targeting walleye. 11 index ports reported 3100 salmon caught last year. Pelagic prey base is gone. Gobies dominate in-shore. Anglers ready for change. Process for management of Lake Huron needs to speed up. Planning series of public out reach efforts up the coast to get the information in front of stakeholders. Frank Krist mentioned that southern portion of Lake 300,000 Chinook plants –30 fish returned.. Central part of Lake similar numbers. Walleye, perch, fishery coming back. Todd mentioned the three options as outlined by Mike Jones and how they have affected Lake Huron. Tom Hamilton commented on how the changes in the Lakes have been reacted to favorably by the DNR with a new direction and a positive note and that the fishery is working to make Midwest tourism popular. We are lucky to live in Michigan.

Chair Grinold—commented on Myerson article. Topic coined by John Robertson –“Salmon Experiment”. Good article detailing a complex story.

Jim Fenner asked the chair on what it viewed to be the goal on cormorant control and what actions should be taken. Reply was these funds should be requested to be put in the regular appropriation in future budgets.

Next meeting in Spring Lake at the Old Boys Brewhouse on October 20. The chair volunteered fish to be supplied by the “local” commercial fishermen.

Adjourned—3:30 PM

