



Lake Huron Committee

REPRESENTING THE FISHERY MANAGEMENT AGENCIES OF LAKE HURON

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Lake Huron Committee Environmental Priorities

As detailed in a *Joint Strategic Plan for Management of Great Lakes Fisheries* ([Joint Strategic Plan](#)), degradation of water quality, destruction of physical habitat, Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS), contaminants, and loss of ecosystem components essential to the well-being of fish remain a major cause of impairment to Great Lakes fish communities and fisheries. While many of these impairments are inter-related or associated with other basinwide issues, for example, AIS continue to modify habitat, negatively impact food webs, and impair production of valuable fish populations, the LHC believes that identification of **specific actions in critical locations** designed to increase fish production will help the LHC make measurable progress towards achievement of their [Fish Community Objectives](#) and [Environmental Objectives](#).

Strategic procedures identified in the Joint Strategic Plan direct lake committees to identify environmental issues that may impede achievement of their Fish Community Objectives and to work within governmental initiatives, such as the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, that provide opportunities for achieving, refining, and assessing progress toward environmental and fish community objectives. In 2016, the Council of Lake Committees (CLC) adopted its [Environmental Principles for Sustainable Fisheries in the Great Lakes Basin](#) to help guide individual lake committees as they identified and prioritized environmental issues that impede achievement of their Fish-Community Objectives. The CLC recognized that diverse functional habitats are required for sustainable fish production; protection and improvement of fish habitat should occur systematically, cumulatively, and collaboratively; fishery value should be accommodated in decisions that affect functional habitats, and manageable sources of anthropogenic stress are pathways for addressing impediments to functional fish habitats. Using the above strategic guidance, the Lake Huron Committee (LHC) developed a short-list of high priority environmental and habitat impediments and recommended actions that are critical for achievement of the Fish-Community Objectives for Lake Huron.

The Lake Huron Technical Committee conducted a technical inventory and assessment of functional habitats, as they relate to production of fish stocks of common concern, identified impediments to production of those fish stocks that provide broad benefits to fisheries, and recommended actions to address these impediments. The technical inventory and assessment was then prioritized based upon the LHC's determination of potential fishery benefits, considering several factors, including fish species and population importance, types of actions proposed, and certainty in proposed actions and outcomes. The prioritization process resulted in a short-list of high priority regional and site-specific actions that, if achieved, would move the LHC closer to achievement of its Fish Community Objectives. The environmental priorities chosen by the LHC for the next 5-year period should improve the production potential of fish stocks of common concern, including walleye, lake whitefish, lake sturgeon, lake trout, salmonines, and esocids, as these priorities are addressed. The LHC considered priority actions across a broad range of action categories including dam management/fish passage, coastal wetland restoration/reconnection, reef restoration

including removal/control of invasive species, tributary connectivity/fish passage, in-stream habitat and hydrologic restoration, and water quality. The LHC's environmental priorities are limited to those important actions that could be undertaken over the near term (5 years) and include:

Dam management/fish passage restoration is critical for providing access of adult species of common concern, including lake sturgeon and walleye, to reproductive and nursery habitat across the Lake Huron Basin, while ensuring that AIS impacts are minimized.

- Terminal barriers are impacting the ability of the LHC agencies to achieve Fish Community Objectives and are compromising the production of priority species that support recreational, commercial, and tribal fisheries throughout the basin.
- Specific locations where dam management, and/or lack of selective fish passage, are limiting production of priority species includes:
 - The Tittabawassee River, MI (DOW Dam)
 - The Saugeen River (Denny's Dam)

Reef restoration of degraded reef habitats, including evaluation and assessment of conditions, removal/control of invasive species and mitigating impacts of sedimentation on reefs, which provide critical spawning and nursery areas for multiple species of common concern across Lake Huron, are necessary for the achievement and maintenance of self-sustaining populations of lake whitefish, cisco, lake trout, and walleye.

- Specific focal areas to implement reef restoration actions in Lake Huron include:
 - The Fishing Islands, ON
 - The Mary Ward Shoals, ON
 - The Thunder Bay Reefs, MI
 - The Saginaw Bay Reefs, MI
 - The Northern Main Basin region, MI/ON
- Implementation of actions to address aquatic invasive species impacts on physical and biological structure of reefs, spawning habitat augmentation, sedimentation, and connected nursery habitat restoration is critical to restore functional habitat and enhance fish production.

Coastal wetland habitat restoration/reconnection which will provide critical spawning and nursery habitats for multiple species of common concern across Lake Huron, including esocids and walleye.

- Continued invasive species (phragmites) control in wetland habitats along the coastline of Lake Huron, Georgian Bay and the North Channel.
- Specific focal areas for coastal wetland reconnection and restoration include locations in Saginaw Bay.

In-stream habitat restoration and enhancement is critical for providing suitable reproductive habitat for multiple species of common concern, particularly lake sturgeon and walleye.

- Specific focal areas for in-stream habitat evaluation and restoration include locations near Port Severn at Bayview Dam, Mississagi River, Whitefish River, and Kirk Creek in McGregor Bay.

The identified environmental priorities are intended as recommendations to help influence and align the work of funding organizations and habitat practitioners with Lake Huron's binational Fish Community and Environmental Objectives. The priorities will be updated as new information

becomes available. The LHC envisions an adaptive approach for tracking progress on environmental priority implementation and future updates to the environmental priorities.

Adopted by the Lake Huron Committee on May 4, 2021.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Tom Gorenflo".

Tom Gorenflo
Chair, Lake Huron Committee