

Lake Erie Committee

Thomas Edison Inn
Port Huron, Michigan
March 24-25, 2003

Executive Summary

Members: Chairman Gary Towns (MDNR), Vice Chair Mike Morencie (OMNR), Bill Culligan (NYDEC), Rick Hoopes (PFBC), Roger Knight (ODNR); Kurt Newman (MDNR).

Good news: Yellow perch abundance is marginally improved; thus the Total Allowable Catch was not decreased, at least in 2003. Sea lamprey numbers appear to be declining in response to increased control effort. The population of invading round goby appears to have decreased from an initial peak. The mayfly *Hexagenia* have recovered in the western basin. Many muskellunge are being caught in Lake St. Clair.

Bad news: Phosphorus levels and preyfish abundance have declined in the western basin. Walleye abundance is low in Lake Erie. Walleye catches are down in Lake St. Clair.

New initiatives: In addition to elaborating management responses to declines in Lake Erie percids, the LEC supports research to understand the reasons for Lake Erie's changing fortunes.

1. Priorities for Restoration Act Proposals

The LEC advised the Restoration Act Review Panel of its priorities among the proposals being considered.

2. Walleye Total Allowable Catch for 2003

The LEC continues to endorse the coordinated percid management strategy adopted by the five Lake Erie management agencies in 2000. This agreement called for a fixed TAC level of 3.4 million fish for a three-year period, unless indicators suggested further reductions were necessary to halt walleye stock declines. Clearly, stock assessment analysis this year indicates serious concerns for the longevity of the walleye stocks in Lake Erie.

The LEC recognizes the significance of these concerns for the walleye stocks. As well, the LEC recognizes that initiating a large reduction in the quota for 2003 would have a severe and sudden impact on all fisheries involved.

As such, the LEC agreed to maintain the walleye TAC for 2003 of 3.4 million fish as specified in the coordinated percid management strategy. However, the LEC wants to be clear that significant reductions must and will be made in 2004. The users should prepare for a 40 – 60% reduction in TAC in 2004, based on the findings of the Walleye Task Group. This will require substantial changes in regulations governing both the sport and commercial fisheries. The remainder of 2003 will be used to prepare all users for the anticipated reductions in 2004.

3. Yellow Perch Total Allowable Catch for 2003

The coordinated percid management strategy endorsed by the LEC in 2000 applied to yellow perch as well as walleye. The LEC is concerned about recruitment failures in 2000 and 2002, and below average recruitment in other year classes important to the fishery. Reductions in 2004 are a certainty, and further reductions in 2005 are likely.

However, the fishing is now predominated by strong 1998 and 2001 year-classes, which can support a modest increase in total harvest—especially in Management Units 2 and 3.

As such, the LEC has adopted the following 2003 TACs for yellow perch.

	RAH Mi	RAH Mea	RAH Ma	2002 TAC	2003 TAC
MU1	1.609	2.443	3.278	3.1	2.6
MU2	2.849	3.970	5.092	4.1	4.2
MU3	1.853	2.735	3.616	2.0	2.9
MU4	special strategy : Y/R not applied			0.133	0.206
Total	6.311	9.148	11.986	9.333	9.906

4. Walleye Stocking Position Statement

The LEC discussed a previous plan to develop a statement on inadvisability of walleye stocking; genetics studies suggest that there are a number of genetically discrete stocks in Lake Erie. The Lake Huron Committee is also discussing the issue of walleye stocking in the St. Marys River.

5. Asian Carp

The LEC will support regulations prohibiting possession of Asian carp, if agencies so request.

7. Research Priorities

By June, the LEC will update its research priorities, which are posted on the GLFC website.

8. LEC Sponsorship of Coordination Activities Program Preproposals

The LEC will sponsor a CAP proposal to update and implement the Lake Erie ecological model. A proposal on data management will be referred to the Council of Lake Committees for sponsorship.

9. Fish Community Objectives

Fish community objectives for Lake Erie have been published as a GLFC Special Publication (SP 03-2). Fish community objectives for Lake St. Clair have been submitted for GLFC publication.

10. Task Group Charges

The Standing Technical Committee and its technical groups will suggest revisions to their charges for LEC consideration. For example, the Coordinated Percid Management Strategy needs to be extended, there are membership changes, decision analysis needs to be incorporated, whitefish and burbot need to be considered independently, and the walleye task group needs to support the June meeting of the LEC. Agencies need to streamline their review processes for task group business.

11. Comment Session Protocol

The Lake Erie Committee valued and appreciated the comments offered at its meeting by representatives of stakeholder groups and individuals regarding the 2003 walleye and yellow perch TACs. The comments were discussed during the executive session and were considered during the TAC deliberation process.

The LEC discussed the need for a comment session protocol.

12. Officers

Rick Hoopes (PFBC) will chair the LEC through the 2005 LEC meeting. Mike Morencie (OMNR) will serve as Vice Chair.

**Attachment to Item 10 of the
Lake Erie Committee Executive Summary**

2003-2004 Charges

Walleye Task Group:

1. Continue analyses supporting development and refinement of a multi-year harvest strategy and evaluate long-term effects of different management strategies on sustainability of walleye as part of the Coordinated Percid Management Strategy.
2. Maintain and update centralized time series required for population modeling, including tagging, fishing harvest and effort by grid, growth rate, maturity schedule and agency or interagency abundance indices.
3. Assemble various data (harvest and effort, index fishing, tagging, etc.) for development of a spatially explicit database describing the Lake Erie walleye resource to search for evidence of stock discreteness and contributions to lakewide fisheries.
4. Develop catch-at-age analysis for Eastern Basin walleye in cooperation with studies underway by Pat Sullivan, Ed Rutherford, and Brian Shuter.
5. Examine spawning stock biomass trends and develop biological reference points as part of the decision analysis process. Address alternate yield methods other than Fopt , yield-per-recruit that may need to be implemented after the current CPMS.

Co-Chairs: **Brian Locke (OMNR) and Mike Thomas (MDNR)**

Other Members: **Megan Belore (OMNR), Luca Cargnelli (OMNR), Andy Cook (OMNR), Don Einhouse (NYSDEC), Bob Haas (MDNR), Dan Isermann (ODNR), Tim Johnson (OMNR), Kevin Kayle (ODNR), Roger Kenyon (PFBC), Roger Knight (ODNR), Don MacLennan (OMNR), Phil Ryan (OMNR), Mark Turner (ODNR), Chris Vandergoot (ODNR), and Beth Wright (OMNR).**

2003-2004 Charges

Yellow Perch Task Group:

- 1) Maintain centralized time series of data sets required for population models including:
 - a) fishery harvest, effort, age composition and biological parameters.
 - b) survey indices of adult abundance, size at age, and biological parameters.
 - c) recruitment indices and biological parameters of juvenile yellow perch.

- 2) Support a sustainable harvest policy by:
 - a) examining exploitation strategies.
 - b) recommending a range of allowable harvest for 2003 (RAH) for each management unit.
 - c) contributing to the Coordinated Percid Management Strategy (CPMS).
 - d) supporting Decision Analysis strategies for yellow perch management.

- 3) Contribute to lakewide genetic research on Lake Erie yellow perch stocks.

- 4) Examine the issues of Eastern Basin (MU4) sub-populations and explore whether there is support for re-defining boundaries within MU4 to manage as separate stocks.

Co-Chairs: **Andy Cook (OMNR) and Roger Kenyon (PFBC)**

Other Members: **Megan Belore (OMNR), Don Einhouse (NYSDEC), Travis Hartman (ODNR), Kevin Kayle (ODNR), Carey Knight (ODNR), Brian Locke (OMNR), Phil Ryan (OMNR), Bob Sutherland (OMNR), Mike Thomas (MDNR), and Elizabeth Wright (OMNR)**

2003-2004 Charges

Forage Task Group:

1. Continue to describe the status and trends of forage fish species and invertebrates in 2002/2003 for each basin of Lake Erie.
2. Continue the development of an experimental design to facilitate forage fish assessment and standardized interagency reporting.
3. In Eastern Lake Erie continue the fisheries acoustics assessment of the pelagic forage fish community, incorporating new methods in survey design and analysis as necessary to refine this program. Fisheries acoustic surveys should also be explored in other portions of Lake Erie to address un-met needs for assessment of the pelagic forage fish community.
4. Continue the interagency lower-trophic food web monitoring program that produces annual indices of trophic conditions which can be included with the FTG's annual description of forage status.

Co-Chairs: **Tim Johnson (OMNR) and Betsy Trometer (USFWS).**

Other Members: **Mike Bur (USGS), Luca Cargnelli (OMNR), John Deller (ODNR), Don Einhouse (NYSDEC), Bob Haas (MDNR), Jim Markham (NYSDEC), Chuck Murray (PFBC), Lars Rudstam (Cornell U.), Phil Ryan (OMNR), Jeff Tyson (ODNR), and Larry Witzel (OMNR).**

2003-2004 Charges

Coldwater Task Group:

1. Coordinate annual standardized lake trout assessment among all eastern basin agencies and report upon the status of lake trout rehabilitation.
2. Continue to assess the whitefish population age structure, growth, diet, seasonal distribution and other population parameters.
3. Continue to assess the burbot population age structure, growth, diet, seasonal distribution and other population parameters.
4. Continue to participate in the IMSL process on Lake Erie to outline and prescribe the needs of the Lake Erie sea lamprey management program.
5. Maintain an annual interagency electronic database of Lake Erie salmonid stocking and current projections for the STC, GLFC and Lake Erie agency data depositories.
6. Report on the status of rainbow trout in Lake Erie, including stocking numbers, strains being stocked, academic and resource agency research interests, and related population parameters, including growth, diet and exploitation.
7. Monitor current status of Lake Herring. Review ecology and history of this species and assess potential for recovery.
8. Improve description of diet for cold-water top predators.

[Recommended new charge from Phil 9. Develop a Coordinated Activities Proposal to help re-establish "LEEM" as a two year project. Year one should be used to upgrade software and provide a software training workshop for East Basin personnel. Year two should be used to provide training workshops for Central and West Basin personnel.]

Co-Chairs: Jim Markham (NYSDEC) and Phil Ryan (OMNR)

Other Members: Mike Bur (USGS), Andy Cook (OMNR), John Fitzsimons (DFO), Jim Francis (MDNR), John Heinrich (USFWS), Dan Isermann (ODNR), Kevin Kayle (ODNR), Brian Locke (OMNR), Tom MacDougall (OMNR), Chuck Murray (PFBC), Martin Stapanian (USGS), Paul Sullivan (DFO), Elizabeth Trometer (USFWS), and Elizabeth Wright (OMNR).

2003-2004 Charges

Habitat Task Group:

1. Document habitat related projects (e.g. critical information collection, habitat rehabilitation projects, habitat quantification, etc.) being conducted or proposed by LEC agency members and partners in the Lake Erie Basin.
2. Develop strategy to work with Lake Erie LaMP as vehicle to resolve environmental issues, etc. beyond mandates of fisheries agencies.
3. Develop strategy and support for Lake Erie GIS development and deployment. Provide assistance to ad hoc member Mark MacKay during development of GIS and assist with training of Lake Erie Committee personnel in use of GIS database.

Chair: Phil Ryan [*or new employee*] (OMNR).

Other members: Bob Haas (MDNR), Roger Kenyon (PFBC), Mark MacKay [ad hoc for GIS project] (MDNR), Jim Markham (NYS DEC), Jeff Tyson (ODNR), and Elizabeth Wright (OMNR).

2003-2004 Charges

Standing Technical Committee:

1. Set up program for Annual LEC meeting in late March, 2004.
2. Assist with collection and summarization of historical information on walleye quota management, including sharing formulas, for Lake Erie covering period from late 1960's to present. Review geographical descriptions of management units and develop accurate GIS data layers to use in future management decision making.
3. Maintain lists of Task Group charges and membership.

Chair: **Roger Kenyon (PFBC)**

Other Members: **Don Einhouse (NYSDEC), Bob Haas (MDNR), Kevin Kayle (ODNR), and Brian Locke (OMNR).**

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Walleye Task Group

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