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FROM PROJECTS TO PRACTICE: GREAT LAKES FISHERY COMMISSION MOBILIZES SCIENCE TO MEET MANAGEMENT NEEDS

Ann Arbor, MI – The Great Lakes Fishery Commission is launching an updated Science Transfer Program with the expressed goal of mobilizing science to meet the current and future needs of fishery managers. The commission has a long history of using cutting-edge science to restore native Great Lakes fishes, manage fish stocks of interest to the United States and Canada, and address the invasive sea lamprey. The commission also plays a pivotal role in facilitating cooperative, cross-border fisheries management. The new Science Transfer Program will build on these existing successes and further improve and protect the world-class Great Lakes fishery – a resource that is valued at \$7 billion annually.

The Convention on Great Lakes Fisheries, a 1954 treaty established between Canada and the United States, created the Great Lakes Fishery Commission and authorized the commission's science program. The science program funds projects under three major categories: fisheries research, sea lamprey research, and science transfer. The commission funds research conducted by scientific and technical personnel in universities, private consulting firms, and federal, provincial, state, and tribal agencies.

To facilitate the transfer of science to those who will put it to use, the commission established a Science Transfer Program. The updated Science Transfer Program seeks to: (1) identify science and science products that will inform management needs; and (2) make the results of these accessible to managers for decision-making. A Science Transfer Board, comprising commissioners, fishery managers, scientists, and sea lamprey control agents, will annually conduct strategic evaluations of priority Great Lakes fishery management needs and identify available science (both commission-funded and external) to meet those needs. Members of the board, primarily through interactions with the Great Lakes fishery community, will stay alert throughout the year to identify emerging management needs – a process called a “horizon scan.” Prior to meeting, top management priorities from the horizon scan will be written up as one page issue statements for the board to consider for development into projects.

Commission vice-chair David Ullrich expressed his enthusiasm about the commission's newest science program: “The breadth and quality of our research is world-class. The jurisdictions in the Great Lakes basin have developed a fisheries management framework that is highly successful and studied world-wide for its cooperative spirit and effectiveness. Our goal, with the Science Transfer Program, is to strengthen

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the bridge between the scientific and management communities. We know research and management go hand-in-hand, and the Science Transfer Program will help facilitate that essential relationship.”

“We anticipate that the Science Transfer Program will further our efforts to rapidly and effectively operationalize our science by promoting the two-way transfer of knowledge among Great Lakes fishery scientists and managers,” said Missy Treml, co-chair of the Science Transfer Board and Fisheries Research Policy Manager for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. “We expect these interactions to prioritize information transfer, reduce management uncertainties, and enhance the process for making informed management decisions for the betterment of the Great Lakes fishery.”

The use of acoustic telemetry in the Great Lakes basin provides a good example of science transfer. Acoustic telemetry uses innovative technology to construct a time-stamped route of travel for individual fish – much like an E-Z Pass in a car. A new project initiated by the board will identify some of the barriers to knowledge transfer and adoption of telemetry science by fisheries managers. This project will also develop implementation tools to help managers apply telemetry science in ways that will inform their management actions. The telemetry project comes in response to calls from management agencies for an understanding of the limitations and advantages of using novel telemetry technology to address pressing fishery issues.

“In the six years or so that acoustic telemetry research has been used in the Great Lakes, it is already providing unique insight into fish behavior relative to seasonal migration, population structure, and habitat use,” said Andy Todd, a member of the Science Transfer Board and the Lake Ontario manager for the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry. “Managers are anxious to determine how best to apply this new information to action. The project initiated by the new Science Transfer Program will give us just the information we need to do so in a practical manner.”

The Science Transfer Board held its inaugural meeting in the fall of 2015 and its first spring meeting earlier this month, where it considered topics ranging from velocity barriers for sea lamprey to economic valuation of the Great Lakes fishery. The Board will meet twice annually, in the spring and fall. For more information about the commission’s research programs, visit: <http://www.glfrc.org/research/>.

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The Great Lakes Fishery Commission is an international organization established by the United States and Canada through the 1954 Convention on Great Lakes Fisheries. The Commission has the responsibility to support fisheries research, control the invasive sea lamprey in the Great Lakes, and facilitate implementation of A Joint Strategic Plan for Management of Great Lakes Fisheries, a provincial, state, and tribal fisheries management agreement.