



Lake Erie Committee

REPRESENTING THE FISHERY MANAGEMENT AGENCIES OF LAKE ERIE AND LAKE ST. CLAIR

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Lake Erie Committee Recommends Increased Yellow Perch and Walleye Allowable Catches for 2017

YPSILANTI, MI – Fishery managers from Michigan, New York, Ohio, Ontario and Pennsylvania—the five jurisdictions that manage the Lake Erie fishery—agreed to a total allowable catch (TAC) of 10.375 million pounds of yellow perch and 5.924 million walleye for 2017. (Yellow perch are allocated in pounds and walleye are allocated by number of fish.) These TAC recommendations represent a 13% increase for yellow perch and a 20% increase for walleye. Specific allocations of both species are presented below by jurisdiction.

The Lake Erie Committee’s TAC recommendations are produced after extensive, lakewide biological assessments, analyses, discussions, and consultations with stakeholders. The recommendations are consistent with the status of Lake Erie’s fish populations, taking into the account the goal of stable harvest.

Overall, the Lake Erie Committee believes that yellow perch populations are stable, though stock status varies by basin and, thus, the TAC varies across management units. In contrast, walleye populations are managed as a single stock and are increasing lakewide. These conditions support the recommended increases to the yellow perch and walleye TACs. The individual provincial and state governments adhere to and implement the TAC recommendations consistent with their respective regulations and management objectives.

The Lake Erie Committee operates by consensus and relies on biological assessments to inform their TAC recommendations. The Lake Erie Committee also supports the Lake Erie Percid Management Advisory Group, or LEPMAG, a structured process that engages commercial and recreational fishers. LEPMAG, which has existed since 2010, reflects the committee’s interest in involving the fishing community in actions related to management of Lake Erie’s percid fisheries.

YELLOW PERCH

The proposed yellow perch TAC is the result of deliberations among the jurisdictions and with stakeholders through the LEPMAG process. Based on science and those deliberations, the Lake Erie Committee today recommended a 2017 TAC of 10.375 million pounds of yellow perch, a 13% increase from last year’s allocation of 9.208 million pounds.

The five jurisdictions on the lake share Lake Erie’s yellow perch under an area-based formula. Pursuant to the 2017 TAC recommendation, Ontario will receive 4.868 million pounds, Ohio 4.525 million pounds, Michigan 0.279 million pounds, New York 0.093 million pounds, and Pennsylvania 0.611 million pounds.

The yellow perch fishery is divided into “management units,” which generally correspond to the eastern, central, and western basins of Lake Erie. The Lake Erie Committee has strived to maintain harvest stability while still responding to changing trends in each management unit. The proposed TAC represents nuances among the management units in abundance and biomass.

WALLEYE

The Lake Erie Committee today set a 2017 walleye TAC of 5.924 million fish, a 20% increase over the 2016 TAC of 4.937 million fish. The increased TAC recommendation reflects the strength of the walleye population and the committee's goal to manage the lakewide fish stock sustainably while integrating stakeholder input into the process. Positive recruitment during the previous few years will translate into increasing walleye abundance over the coming years. Consistent with the committee's Walleye Management Plan, this optimistic outlook for walleye allows for the maximum increase in the TAC for 2017.

The Province of Ontario and the states of Ohio and Michigan share the TAC based on a formula of walleye habitat within each jurisdiction in the western and central basins of the lake. Under a 2017 TAC of 5.924 million fish, Ohio will be entitled to 3.028 million fish, Ontario 2.551 million fish, and Michigan 0.345 million fish. Jurisdictions in the eastern end of the lake are outside of the TAC area and harvest limits there are set consistent with lakewide conditions and objectives.

As with yellow perch, the walleye TAC recommendation is the result of extensive discussions among scientists, managers, and stakeholders. Scientists and field biologists from all Lake Erie jurisdictions, meeting as the Walleye Task Group, share data and reach consensus on biological conditions. The task group's walleye abundance estimates, which incorporate suggestions from LEPMAG, serve as the foundation for the Lake Erie Committee's discussions and TAC recommendations. Also like yellow perch, each Lake Erie jurisdiction is responsible for implementing its portion of the TAC.

THE LAKE ERIE PERCID MANAGEMENT ADVISORY GROUP (LEPMAG)

The Lake Erie Percid Management Advisory Group was first convened in 2010 and serves as the primary method to incorporate stakeholder needs and objectives into the Lake Erie yellow perch and walleye decision-making process. LEPMAG consists of senior representatives from all provincial and state jurisdictions on the lake, recreational fishers, commercial fishers, and other interested organizations. Through LEPMAG, fishery managers and stakeholders work together to identify the harvest policies for Lake Erie percids that meet the needs of all stakeholders while maintaining stability in the percid fishery. Michigan State University's Quantitative Fisheries Center facilitates the LEPMAG process. Walleye are now being managed under the Walleye Management Plan, which was developed through LEPMAG and formally adopted by the Lake Erie Committee in December, 2015. LEPMAG members are in the process of developing population objectives and harvest strategies for yellow perch in Lake Erie. The objectives and harvest strategies are expected to be completed in the coming years.

THE LAKE ERIE COMMITTEE AND TACs

The Lake Erie Committee comprises fishery managers from Michigan, New York, Ohio, Ontario and Pennsylvania. The committee's work is facilitated by the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, a Canadian and U.S. agency on the Great Lakes. Each year the committee recommends a TAC for walleye and yellow perch. The TAC represents the number or weight of fish recommended to be caught by sport and commercial fishers without putting the fisheries at risk. The individual agencies implement the recommended total allowable catch.