



Lake Erie Committee

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

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For Immediate Release
March 28, 2014

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Lake Erie Committee Recommends 2014 Yellow Perch and Walleye Catch Levels

WINDSOR, ON – The Lake Erie Committee, composed of senior fishery managers from Michigan, New York, Ohio, Ontario, and Pennsylvania, met in Windsor Ontario this week and recommended a 2014 total allowable catch (TAC) of 11.081 million pounds of yellow perch and 4.027 million walleye¹. These recommended harvest levels represent a modest decrease in allowable yellow perch harvest and a modest increase in walleye harvest for 2014.

TAC recommendations are developed after thorough lakewide biological assessments, analysis, discussions, and consultations with stakeholders. The Lake Erie Committee, which operates by consensus, also supports the Lake Erie Percid Management Advisory Group, or LEPMAG, as a mechanism to consider the status of walleye and yellow perch and to discuss harvest strategies with affected stakeholders, such as commercial and recreational fishers. This structured stakeholder engagement reflects the committee's interest in involving the fishing community in actions related to management of Lake Erie's percid fisheries.

The Lake Erie Committee recommends TACs that are consistent with the status of Lake Erie's fish population while maintaining stable harvest levels, as informed through the LEPMAG process. The individual provincial and state governments adhere to and implement the TAC recommendations consistent with their respective regulations and management objectives.

YELLOW PERCH

The Lake Erie Committee recommended a 2014 binational TAC of 11.081 million pounds of yellow perch, a 9% decrease from last year's allocation of 12.237 million pounds. The proposed harvest level is based on biological assessments—conducted and analyzed by biologists from all jurisdictions on Lake Erie—that showed a moderate decline in yellow perch biomass in the lake. Lake Erie Committee members together concluded that the harvestable stocks of yellow perch will be lower in 2014 than last year, necessitating a reduced TAC. The proposed TAC, after deliberations with stakeholders through the LEPMAG process, reflects the committee's interest in maintaining stability in harvest while ensuring yellow perch sustainability.

The five jurisdictions on the lake share Lake Erie's yellow perch based on an area-based formula. Under the 2014 TAC recommendation, Ontario will receive 5.409 million pounds, Ohio 4.418 million pounds, Michigan 0.145 million pounds, New York 0.259 million pounds, and Pennsylvania 0.850 million pounds. Scientists and field biologists from all jurisdictions meet annually and on an ongoing basis to analyze fisheries and agency data in order to estimate population levels and recommend the annual TAC.

¹ Yellow perch are allocated in pounds; walleye are allocated by number of fish.

WALLEYE

Informed by a harvest policy recently developed in consultation with LEPMAG members, and on a new population assessment model developed in conjunction with stakeholders and Michigan State University, the Lake Erie Committee today set a 2014 walleye TAC of 4.027 million fish, compared to the TAC of 3.356 million fish in 2013. The increased TAC recommendation for 2014 reflects the committee's goal to manage the lakewide fish stocks sustainably while integrating stakeholder input into the process. Walleye hatches have been generally poor in recent years, though some year classes, particularly those in 2010 and 2003 have been moderate to exceptional, contributing to the stability of the walleye fishery and allowing for an increased TAC over last year.

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 2014 TAC of 4.027 million fish, Ohio will be entitled to 2.058 million fish, Ontario 1.734 million fish, and Michigan 0.235 million fish. Because the majority of harvest comes from the western portion of Lake Erie, jurisdictions in the eastern end of the lake are outside the TAC area. Harvest limits in the eastern basin are established separately by Ontario, Pennsylvania, and New York and remain consistent with lakewide conditions and objectives.

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. Like yellow perch, each Lake Erie jurisdiction is responsible for implementing their portion of the TAC.

THE LAKE ERIE PERCID MANAGEMENT ADVISORY GROUP (LEPMAG)

The Lake Erie Percid Management Advisor 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 percid 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 fully managed through the recommendations and population objectives developed through LEPMAG. This will be documented by the LEC as they draft and complete the revised Walleye Management Plan this year. The main focus of LEPMAG will now shift to developing population objectives and harvest strategy development for yellow perch in Lake Erie. This process is expected to take approximately two years.

THE LAKE ERIE COMMITTEE

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 total allowable catch for walleye and yellow perch. Total allowable catch 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. For more information, visit the Lake Erie Committee online at www.glfc.org/lec.