



Lake Michigan Committee

REPRESENTING THE FISHERY MANAGEMENT AGENCIES OF LAKE MICHIGAN

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PROPOSED SALMON STOCKING REDUCTIONS ANNOUNCED FOR LAKE MICHIGAN

ANN ARBOR, MI—Following more than a year of consultation with angler groups and other stakeholders, the Lake Michigan Committee (LMC) has proposed a new management strategy for Lake Michigan salmon. Beginning in spring of 2013, the LMC recommends that Chinook salmon stocking in Lake Michigan be reduced to one-half of current stocking levels. With salmon egg collections to begin in September, 2012, fisheries management agencies are now developing plans to decrease fingerling production targets to levels supporting reduced stocking, for a minimum of three years. The LMC comprises representatives from each of the state fisheries management agencies in Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and the Chippewa Ottawa Resource Authority (CORA). The Great Lakes Fishery Commission (GLFC) facilitates the committee’s activities.

The proposed Chinook salmon reduction is in response to recent increases in natural reproduction of Chinook and declines in the forage base. Recent studies have shown that approximately 55% of Chinook salmon in Lake Michigan is produced naturally, and prey fish (e.g., alewife) are currently at or near historic low levels, conditions similar to those leading to the collapse of prey fish populations in Lake Huron. The planned stocking reductions are intended to maintain a quality Chinook salmon fishery, while reducing the predation on the forage population.

While Chinook salmon are highly dependent on alewives, all Great Lakes salmonids use those forage fish to varying degrees. Balancing predator and prey populations by reducing predation pressure is necessary to stabilize the ecosystem as well as to preserve the quality and diversity of the multi-billion-dollar sport fishery. The LMC’s approach gained widespread support from all agencies and their constituents throughout the decision-making process. Along with the proposed reductions, an adopted monitoring plan should allow management agencies to react quickly if conditions change.

Each LMC member agency must still approve and implement the committee’s recommendations. Under the proposed agreement, the 3.3 million Chinook salmon annually stocked into Lake Michigan would be reduced by 1.6 million fish, for a total of 1.7 million fish to be stocked. Of the reduced stocking, Michigan would shoulder the largest reduction, stocking 1.1 million fewer fish, since Michigan streams currently contribute the majority of the natural reproduction. Wisconsin would reduce its stocking by 440,000 fish, while Illinois and Indiana would reduce by 20,000 and 25,000 fish, respectively. The CORA tribes do not stock Chinook salmon. This proposed stocking reduction should still provide for fall spawning runs for stream and nearshore anglers. Each agency will work with their respective management teams to implement these changes in the manner most appropriate to each jurisdiction.

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