

Lake Erie Committee

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

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Catch Limits Set for Lake Erie Walleye and Yellow Perch for 2007

YPSILANTI, MI – Lake Erie fishery managers from Michigan, New York, Ohio, Ontario and Pennsylvania agreed today to a 2007 total allowable catch (TAC) of 5.36 million walleye and 11.389 million pounds of yellow perch¹. Both the walleye and yellow perch TACs represent a decrease in allowable harvest from 2006. The managers, meeting as the Lake Erie Committee, noted that weak walleye and yellow perch year classes in 2002, 2004, and 2006 necessitated the lower harvest in 2007 to protect the fishery.

WALLEYE

The Lake Erie Committee agreed to an international TAC for walleye in 2007 of 5.36 million fish. This compares to a TAC of 9.886 million fish in 2006. The Committee's Walleye Task Group—comprising scientists and field biologists—reported that walleye hatches have been poor in 2002, 2004, and 2006 and, based on these reports, recommended the TAC reduction to maintain and protect the remaining stocks. This reduction reflects the consensus of the committee that the two-year-old walleye population needs to be protected from harvest to maintain spawning stock for the future. Actual walleye harvest in 2006 was 5.93 million fish.

Lake Erie agencies together monitor the status of walleye spawning and set walleye TACs to ensure the future of the fishery. Based on the data collected and interpreted together by the Canadian and U.S. jurisdictions on Lake Erie, the reduced 2007 TAC will allow the agencies to adhere to their objectives of ensuring harvest while protecting future spawning.

Under the 2007 TAC of 5.36 million fish, Ohio will be entitled to 2.755 million fish, Ontario 2.321 million fish, and Michigan 0.284 million fish. The TAC is established by the Lake Erie Committee and is allocated to Ohio, Michigan and Ontario by an area-based sharing formula of walleye habitat within each jurisdiction in the western and central basins of the lake. The walleye fisheries of eastern Lake Erie remain outside the allowable catch management area.

YELLOW PERCH

Like walleye, yellow perch spawning was poor in previous years such that the committee agreed to a reduction in allocation to 11.389 million pounds in 2007 from 16.48 million pounds in 2006. An area-based sharing formula determines the allocation of these fish among the five jurisdictions on the lake. For 2007, Ontario's share is about 5.585 million pounds, Ohio's allocation is about 4.921 million pounds, and Michigan's allocation is about 0.136 million pounds. New York and Pennsylvania should receive approximately 0.076 million pounds and 0.671 million pounds respectively. In 2006, actual yellow perch harvest was 11.10 million pounds, the highest level of harvest in more than a decade. The committee also announced its intention to complete a yellow perch management plan in 2007.

¹ Walleye are allocated by number of fish; yellow perch are allocated in pounds.

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BASIS FOR TAC DECISIONS

“Walleye and yellow perch abundances in Lake Erie are highly variable from year to year, resulting in annual changes to the total allowable catch to adjust to real conditions” said Lake Erie Committee chair Roger Knight of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. “The committee’s primary goals are to ensure that sport and commercial fishers have access to the resource and that the resource is managed so that it will be available for the future.”

“The Lake Erie Committee advises fishers to expect reductions in the 2008 TAC for both walleye and yellow perch based on weak year classes produced in 2002, 2004, and 2006,” Knight added. “The Lake Erie Committee recognizes that highly variable recruitment patterns in recent years, as well as uncertain future recruitment for both walleye and yellow perch, pose tremendous hardships on both commercial and recreational fishers. The committee will continue to explore management options to minimize these hardships while still recognizing our resource stewardship responsibilities in achieving both biologically and sociologically sound objectives for lakewide fisheries.”

Concluded Knight: “We are very pleased with the cooperation among the jurisdictions on the lake and with the dialogue that has taken place between the management agencies and the affected stakeholders. Stakeholder input helps us to weigh various management strategies and we will continue to look for appropriate methods of including stakeholder needs into our decision-making. The committee is committed to considering ways to incorporate human dimension aspects into the quota-setting process.”

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 sets the total allowable catch for walleye and yellow perch. Total allowable catch represents the number of fish that can be caught by sport and commercial fishers without putting the stocks at risk. The individual agencies are responsible for implementing and adhering to total allowable catch decisions through their respective regulatory processes. For more information, visit the Lake Erie Committee online at www.glfc.org/lec