



## Great Lakes Fishery Commission

ESTABLISHED BY CONVENTION BETWEEN CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES TO IMPROVE AND PERPETUATE FISHERY RESOURCES

**For Immediate Release**  
**February 4, 2008**

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### **RESEARCH SAYS EARLY AND CONSISTENT STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT YIELD MORE SUSTAINABLE FISHERY MANAGEMENT DECISIONS**

**ANN ARBOR, MI**—Researchers at Michigan State University have analyzed case studies of fishery management around North America to determine ways to improve inclusion of stakeholders – anyone affected by or who may affect fisheries – in decisions about Great Lakes fisheries. They examined studies as different as Texas largemouth bass management to water use planning in British Columbia, and the Mid-Atlantic coastal flounder fishery issue. They also researched how Minnesota has developed its management plans for that state’s portion of Lake Superior as a potential model for use elsewhere. The researchers found that cases where stakeholders were included early and often during decisions resulted in more sustainable decisions and thus a more stable or predictable environment for all parties involved in fisheries.

“Although more inclusive approaches to fishery management may sound rather simple and appropriate at first glance, several important impediments exist,” said Shawn Riley of Michigan State University, the study’s principal investigator. “First, decision processes that include stakeholders are often costly both in terms of finances and human resources. Few fishery agencies have been adequately staffed to handle increased demands on time that come with participatory decision-making processes. Secondly, because of its roots in commercial fisheries, fishery management as an institution long has been conducted from an economical perspective focused on efficiency and notions of sustained yield of fish populations.”

The current study, however, identified several cases around the country that provide good examples of how considerations of stakeholders can be integrated into management decisions processes. “Water use planning in British Columbia, which was really about regulated flows from hydro-electrical dams that affect salmon and other aquatic resources, was a highly structured and facilitated process that included stakeholders in issue identification as well as appropriate goals for fishery management,” said Riley. “The process was very costly in the short run, but is estimated to save money by creating more predictable management environment for utilities. At the same time, steps were put into place to insure that reproduction in salmon and other aquatic species were protected.”

Riley also examined a case within the Great Lakes Basin that was noted as exemplary. The State of Minnesota has been through several planning cycles for that state’s contribution to the Lake Superior fishery. The first plan, created in the 1990’s without much initial stakeholder participation created considerable controversy and some adversarial relationships among user groups and the resource agency.

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During the second planning cycle, which occurred over the past five years, stakeholders were involved in nearly every aspect of the plan. As a result, said Riley, “although the planning effort was costly in many ways, trust was built through the participation that should pay huge dividends to both the fishery and the relationships among users and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.”

Riley indicated that fishery management is just one of many aspects of natural resource management that are going through a transition from one where most decisions were made without much public participation, or at least participation from a limited number of users, to one of multi-disciplinary sciences and public deliberations about public resources.

Information about this and other research completion reports is available online at [www.glfc.org/pubs\\_out/communi.php](http://www.glfc.org/pubs_out/communi.php).

*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. WWW.GLFC.ORG*