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Public Input to St. Lawrence River Fisheries Community Objectives

by:

T. Brown,² S. Lapan³, and A. Mathers⁴

²Human Demensions Research Unit
Cornell University
124 Farnow Hall
Ithaca, New York 14853

³New York State Department of
Environmental Conservation
Cape Vincent Fishery Station, Box 292
Cape Vincent, NY 13618

⁴ Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources
Lake Ontario Management Unit
RR #4
Picton, Ontario K0K 2T0

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Tommy L. Brown, Human Dimensions Research Unit, Cornell University
Steven R. LaPan, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, and
Alastair Mathers, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources

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ABSTRACT

A process was developed for gaining public input for use of NYSDEC and OMNR fisheries staff in setting fish community objectives for the St. Lawrence River. The process consisted of six public meetings, three each on the New York State and Province of Ontario sides of the St. Lawrence. Attendees who preregistered were mailed information about the status of the various fisheries, and status reports also were presented at the beginning of each meeting, following which participants were asked to complete a questionnaire dealing with management preferences for various species. Questionnaires were received from 167 people. The majority of the respondents were anglers but a variety of other perspectives was represented. Respondents were primarily concerned about the management of northern pike, smallmouth bass, muskellunge and walleye. These people were willing to consider a variety of options to limit angler harvest of northern pike and smallmouth bass beyond the current regulations in order to improve the quality of the fishery. An increase in the minimum size limit for muskellunge was acceptable to an overwhelming majority of respondents. In general, there were few major differences between responses received with respect to section of the river of primary interest (Lake St. Lawrence, Middle Corridor, or Thousand Islands) or the residency of respondent (Ontario or New York).

Public Input to St. Lawrence River Fisheries Community Objectives

As part of the planning process for establishing fish community objectives for the St. Lawrence River in the year 2000, a collaboration was established between The New York State DEC's Bureau of Fisheries, fisheries staff of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, and the Human Dimensions Research Unit at Cornell University, with funding for the effort provided through the Great Lakes Fishery Commission. The purpose of the effort was to design and implement a process for obtaining public input to fisheries management objectives, to implement the public input process, which included a survey of stakeholders, and to analyze the data and prepare a report of those findings. This report summarizes the public input process and the survey results.

Methods

A public input process was developed, the focus of which was six public meetings held in July and August 2000. Three meetings were held on the New York (U.S.) side of the international border (Clayton, Ogdensburg, and Massena), and three were held on the Ontario (Canadian) side (Mallorytown, Brockville, and Morrisburg). The DEC and OMNR fisheries staff divided the St. Lawrence into three segments (Thousand Islands, Middle Corridor, and Lake St. Lawrence) because of differences that exist in the fisheries and habitats of the three reaches of the river, and also for ease in getting public input, so that residents could attend a meeting within a convenient driving distance of their homes.

The public input team attempted to design a process with the following characteristics:

1. A structured format in which everyone provided their opinions to specific management-related questions;
2. A format in which those present had good background information on the topics they were providing input on; and
3. A less formal process in which participants had the opportunity to share observations and concerns related to St. Lawrence River fisheries topics that they felt were important.

Residents of the area were notified in advance by media releases of the meetings and were asked to preregister for the meetings so that information packets could be mailed to them which contained issue papers concerning the fisheries. In addition, DEC and OMNR fisheries staff opened each meeting with presentations about the status of the important fisheries of the river. This was followed by the distribution of a questionnaire which each person present was asked to complete. No exact tally was kept but an overwhelming majority (i.e., nearly everyone present at each meeting) completed the questionnaires. After a break, an open discussion period followed in which participants could provide any input or ask any question they wished. A summary of the comments and questions raised during the open discussion is being developed (A. Mathers, OMNR, personal communication). Questionnaires were also made available to people who could not attend a particular meeting but who were interested in fisheries issues and requested a questionnaire to complete and return by mail.

Results

A total of 142 people completed questionnaires at the meeting, and 25 people returned questionnaires by mail. Four meeting respondents did not specify place of residence and two did not indicate section of the river of primary interest. One mail response contained no usable data.

The results are presented below and tabulated for meeting attendees by New York versus Ontario residence and by the river section of primary interest. The 24 usable mail returns are also summarized. Table 1 summarizes the responses by residence and section of the river of primary interest. Due to a few missing data cases, New York and Ontario totals do not correspond exactly to river segment totals.

Table 1. Number of attendees and mail responses by residence and section of the St. Lawrence River of primary interest.

Primary River Segment of Interest

	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence
Meeting Attendees	88	50	83	36	21
Mail Responses	8	16	13	8	2
Totals	96	66	96	44	23

Profile and General Concerns

Just over three-quarters of meeting participants were anglers, and just over half were boaters (Table 2). Almost one-quarter were cottage or second home owners. Very few business people participated in the meetings.

Over 70% of anglers fish for four important species in a given year: smallmouth bass, northern pike, walleye, and yellow perch. On average, smallmouth bass was the preferred species to fish for, followed by northern pike, walleye, and yellow perch.

Anglers indicated degree of concern about the status of each species on a 4-point scale ranging from little concern (1) to great concern (4). Species receiving mean responses within the moderate-to-great concern range were northern pike, smallmouth bass, muskellunge, and walleye (Table 3). Species with means within the some-to-moderate concern range were yellow perch, largemouth bass, lake sturgeon, crappie, American eel, and bullhead. Two species groups, bluegill-sunfish-rock bass and carp received mean ratings of less than 2.0 (some concern).

Table 2. Profile of attendees of St. Lawrence River community planning meetings

Primary River Segment of Interest

	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence	MEETING TOTALS	MAIL TOTALS
<u>Interest or perspective</u>							
Charterboat operator or guide	19.3%	18.0%	24.1%	11.1%	4.8%	18.8%	0%
Marina owner	1.1	0	1.2	0	0	0.7	8.3
Restaurant, motel, other business	4.5	2.0	3.6	5.6	4.8	4.3	8.3
Angler	81.8	68.0	73.5	83.3	81.0	77.1	95.8
Boater	59.1	42.0	51.8	52.8	61.9	53.6	75.0
Cottage/second home owner	28.4	16.0	31.3	11.1	14.3	23.6	25.0
<u>Percent fishing for each species in a typical year:</u>							
Smallmouth bass	86.4%	82.0%	83.1%	86.1%	95.2%	85.7%	95.8%
Northern pike	83.0	72.0	84.3	86.1	52.4	80.0	91.7
Walleye	78.4	60.0	66.3	80.6	76.2	71.4	87.5
Yellow perch	78.4	62.0	69.9	77.8	81.0	73.6	91.7
Largemouth bass	43.2	52.0	51.8	41.7	33.3	46.4	62.5
Muskellunge	45.5	28.0	43.4	41.7	14.3	38.6	45.8
Bluegill, sunfish, or rock bass	33.0	12.0	30.1	22.2	19.0	26.4	25.0
Bullhead	34.1	28.0	25.3	41.7	38.1	31.4	41.7
Crappie	19.3	28.0	20.5	27.8	19.0	22.1	20.8
Carp	4.5	10.0	2.4	11.1	14.3	6.4	4.2
<u>Percent ranking each species their favorite to fish for</u>							
Smallmouth bass	34.1%	14.0%	31.3%	25.0%	19.0%	27.9%	29.2%
Northern pike	18.2	22.0	20.5	22.2	9.5	19.3	25.0
Walleye	17.0	12.0	9.6	13.9	38.1	15.0	20.8
Yellow perch	12.5	12.0	10.8	16.7	14.3	12.9	12.5
Largemouth bass	4.5	6.0	9.6	0	0	5.7	4.4
Muskellunge	4.5	6.0	6.0	5.6	0	5.0	4.2
Bluegill, sunfish, or rock bass	1.1	0	1.2	0	0	0.7	0
Bullhead	1.1	0	1.2	0	0	0.7	4.2
Crappie	0	0	1.2	2.8	0	1.4	0
Carp	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Species preference means (5-Point scale; 1=favorite)</u>							
Smallmouth bass	2.65	3.04	2.67	2.81	2.90	2.74	2.04
Northern pike	3.01	3.18	2.88	2.89	3.95	3.04	2.74
Walleye	3.14	3.72	3.70	3.03	2.52	3.35	3.13
Yellow perch	3.27	3.92	3.54	3.53	3.05	3.46	3.35
Largemouth bass	4.34	4.00	4.02	4.36	4.62	4.20	3.91
Muskellunge	4.18	4.34	4.12	4.31	4.67	4.25	4.17
Bluegill, sunfish, or rock bass	4.57	4.82	4.57	4.78	4.76	4.65	4.74
Bullhead	4.61	4.72	4.70	4.58	4.62	4.66	4.39
Crappie	4.73	4.66	4.73	4.64	4.71	4.71	4.78
Carp	4.95	4.90	4.98	4.89	4.86	4.94	4.96

Table 3. Mean degree of concern, by species (1=little concern; 4+great concern).

Primary River Segment of Interest

	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence	MEETING TOTALS	MAIL TOTALS
Smallmouth bass	3.55	3.28	3.46	3.53	3.20	3.44	3.70
Northern pike	3.64	3.33	3.63	3.73	2.78	3.53	3.73
Walleye	3.24	3.17	2.96	3.66	3.45	3.20	3.45
Yellow perch	3.01	2.61	2.66	3.23	3.05	2.86	3.17
Largemouth bass	2.90	2.61	2.73	2.90	2.65	2.76	3.24
Muskellunge	3.15	3.44	3.33	3.21	3.06	3.26	3.43
Bluegill, sunfish, or rock bass	2.01	1.80	1.75	2.46	1.75	1.93	1.74
Bullhead	2.16	2.18	1.95	2.57	2.07	2.13	1.86
Crappie	2.16	2.32	2.05	2.50	2.31	2.21	2.47
Carp	1.39	1.66	1.37	1.56	1.64	1.46	1.11
Lake sturgeon	2.63	2.54	2.43	2.79	3.06	2.62	3.06
American eel	2.12	2.10	2.12	1.96	2.41	2.13	1.94

Bass Management

The vast majority of anglers gave positive responses to several potential changes in bass management. Over 75% of respondents favored in principle limiting the bass harvest beyond current regulations in order to improve the quality of the bass fishery (Table 4), and specifically were willing to support a 3 bass per day creel limit in principle if it increased the abundance of bass of all sizes (Table 5). Almost as many (73.2%) were willing to support a 14 inch minimum size limit in principle if it increased the number of large bass available by 20% (Table 6). Finally, over 88% would support changing the opening day of bass season in New York from the third to fourth Saturday in June (Table 7).

Table 4. Percent willing to have bass harvest limited beyond current regulations in order to improve the quality of the bass fishery.

	Primary River Segment of Interest						
	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence	MEETING TOTALS	MAIL TOTALS
Yes	71.3	82.6	78.8	72.2	75.0	76.5	83.3
No	21.8	15.2	15.0	25.0	20.0	18.4	12.5
No opinion	4.5	0.8	3.7	0.7	0.7	5.1	4.2

Table 5. Percent willing to support a 3 bass per day creel limit in principle if it increased the abundance of bass of all sizes.

	Primary River Segment of Interest					MEETING TOTALS	MAIL TOTALS
	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence		
Yes	77.0	79.6	79.5	75.0	85.0	79.1	75.0
No	18.4	18.4	16.9	22.2	10.0	17.3	25.0
No opinion	4.6	2.0	3.6	2.8	5.0	3.6	0

Table 6. Percent willing to support a 14 inch minimum size limit in principle if it increased the number of large bass available by 20%.

	Primary River Segment of Interest					MEETING TOTALS	MAIL TOTALS
	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence		
Yes	64.4	85.4	73.5	68.6	80.0	73.2	70.8
No	31.0	10.4	22.9	22.2	20.0	22.5	29.2
No opinion	4.6	4.2	3.6	8.6	0	4.3	0

Table 7. Percent who would support changing opening day of bass season in New York from the third to fourth Saturday in June.

	Primary River Segment of Interest					MEETING TOTALS	MAIL TOTALS
	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence		
Yes	83.7	95.8	84.1	97.1	90.0	88.3	87.5
No	15.1	2.1	14.6	2.2	5.0	10.2	12.5
No opinion	1.2	2.1	0.7	0	5.0	1.5	0

Pike Management

Over 80% of participants indicated a willingness to have northern pike harvest limited beyond current regulations (Table 8). Over 80% would support in principle a two pike per day creel limit if this action increased the abundance of pike by 30% (Table 9), and over 80% would support in principle a 24 inch minimum size limit if it increased the number of pike greater than 24 inches by 20% (Table 10). However, although a slight majority was willing to shift the closing day of pike season from March 15 to March 31 so that season dates for New York and Ontario would correspond, 34% opposed this change (Table 11). An equal number of New York participants favored and opposed this measure; support was much higher in Ontario. Only 35% of participants most concerned with the middle corridor of the river supported the change.

Table 8. Percent willing to have northern pike harvest limited beyond current regulations in order to improve the quality of the pike fishery.

	Primary River Segment of Interest					MEETING TOTALS	MAIL TOTALS
	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence		
Yes	83.7	85.7	88.0	82.9	75.0	84.8	87.0
No	12.8	12.2	10.8	14.3	15.0	12.3	13.0
No opinion	3.5	2.0	1.2	2.9	10.0	2.9	0

Table 9. Percent willing to support a 2 pike per day creel limit in principle if it increased the abundance of pike by 30%.

	Primary River Segment of Interest					MEETING TOTALS	MAIL TOTALS
	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence		
Yes	80.5	79.6	81.9	75.0	85.0	80.6	83.3
No	14.9	18.4	16.9	22.2	0	15.8	16.7
No opinion	4.6	2.0	1.2	2.8	15.0	3.6	0

Table 10. Percent willing to support a 24 inch minimum size limit in principle if it increased the number of large pike greater than 24 inches by 20%.

	Primary River Segment of Interest					MEETING TOTALS	MAIL TOTALS
	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence		
Yes	81.4	89.8	86.6	83.3	80.0	84.8	83.3
No	12.8	6.1	12.2	8.3	5.0	10.1	16.7
No opinion	5.8	4.1	1.2	8.3	15.0	5.1	0

Table 11. Percent who would support changing the closing day of pike season in New York from March 15 to March 31 to have common dates with Ontario.

	Primary River Segment of Interest					MEETING TOTALS	MAIL TOTALS
	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence		
Yes	45.9	72.3	65.4	35.3	55.0	56.3	66.7
No	45.9	14.9	29.6	50.0	25.0	34.1	25.0
No opinion	8.2	12.8	4.9	14.7	20.0	9.6	8.3

The final question on pike management noted that changes to pike spawning and nursery habitats in wetlands along the river may be adversely affecting the pike population, and asked participants if they would support agency efforts to build dikes to manipulate water levels in specific wetlands to benefit pike and a number of other species, knowing this would restrict boating access to these areas. An overwhelming 87% indicated support for this measure (Table 12).

Table 12. Percent who would support agency efforts to build dikes to manipulate water levels in specific wetlands to benefit pike and a number of other species, knowing this would restrict boating access to these areas.

	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	<u>Primary River Segment of Interest</u>			MEETING TOTALS	MAIL TOTALS
			Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence		
Yes	87.4	86.0	92.2	82.4	76.2	87.1	91.7
No	5.0	9.3	5.2	17.6	4.8	8.3	8.3
No opinion	4.6	4.7	2.6	0	19.0	4.5	0

Muskellunge Management

A single question on muskellunge management asked for preferences for three alternative minimum size limits: the current 44 inch, a 48 inch, and a 54 inch limit. The results varied considerably by both jurisdiction and section of the river. Nearly 80% of Ontario residents supported the 54 inch limit. A plurality of New York residents, but only 39%, supported the 54 inch limit (Table 13). Combining the 48 and 54 length options, over 70% of New York residents supported at least a 48 inch limit. Three-fourths of the Lake St. Lawrence participants supported the 54 inch limit.

Table 13. Percent who would support various minimum size limits for muskellunge.

	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	<u>Primary River Segment of Interest</u>			MEETING TOTALS	MAIL TOTALS
			Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence		
54 inch	39.3	79.6	56.8	42.9	75.0	55.9	56.5
48 inch	32.1	12.2	21.0	37.1	15.0	24.3	26.1
44 inch	20.2	2.0	13.6	14.3	5.0	12.5	13.0
No opinion	8.3	6.1	8.6	5.7	5.0	7.4	4.3

Walleye and Yellow Perch Management

Single parallel questions on walleye and yellow perch stated that management data indicate the current status of these populations to be favorable and asked participants the extent to which they agreed, for the segment of the river emphasized at the meeting participants attended for walleye, and in general for yellow perch.

The response for walleye was mixed--a slight plurality of each segment (New York, Ontario, each of the three river segments) agreed, but the plurality was just slightly over one-third of all participants (it was 45% for Lake St. Lawrence participants) (Table 14).

Larger pluralities agreed with the statement as applied to yellow perch populations, overall, and by each segment, with the exception of the Middle Corridor, where 31% both agreed and disagreed with the statement (Table 15). A slight majority (52%) of Ontario residents agreed with the statement.

Table 14. Percent believing walleye populations are favorable to anglers in section of the river where the meetings were held.

	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	<u>Primary River Segment of Interest</u>			MEETING TOTALS	MAIL TOTALS
			Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence		
Agree	37.2	36.2	35.4	35.3	45.0	36.8	22.7
Unsure	36.0	25.5	34.1	29.4	30.0	32.4	36.4
Disagree	20.9	19.1	20.7	26.5	10.0	20.6	36.4
No opinion	5.8	19.1	9.8	8.8	15.0	10.3	4.5

Table 15. Percent believing yellow perch populations are favorable to anglers in section of the river where the meetings were held.

	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	<u>Primary River Segment of Interest</u>			MEETING TOTALS	MAIL TOTALS
			Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence		
Agree	43.0	52.1	57.3	31.4	25.0	46.0	25.0
Unsure	17.4	18.8	17.1	22.9	10.0	17.5	16.7
Disagree	34.9	10.4	18.3	31.4	50.0	26.3	54.2
No opinion	4.7	18.8	7.3	14.3	15.0	10.2	4.2

Panfish Management

Over two-thirds of participants oppose the sale of hook-and-line caught yellow perch or panfish, while only 24% support the sale (Table 16). Ontario residents and those concerned about the Middle Corridor of the river were opposed in greatest proportions.

A plurality, but only one-third of participants indicated they were generally satisfied with the current status of the bluegill and pumpkinseed sunfish, and rock bass fisheries (Table 17). Yet, only 12% were dissatisfied; 25% indicated they were unsure, and almost 29% had no opinion.

Similarly, about equal proportions were satisfied and dissatisfied with the status of the crappie fishery (16% and 17% respectively). About one-third indicated they were unsure, and about one-third had no opinion (Table 18).

Table 16. Opinion regarding the sale of hook-and-line caught yellow perch or panfish (percent)

	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	<u>Primary River Segment of Interest</u>			MEETING TOTALS	MAIL TOTALS
			Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence		
Support	29.1	17.4	28.9	6.1	36.8	24.4	4.2
Do not support	62.8	78.3	63.9	87.9	52.6	68.1	79.2
No opinion	8.1	4.3	7.2	6.1	10.5	26.3	16.7

Table 17. Satisfaction with the current status of the bluegill and pumpkinseed, sunfish, and rock bass fisheries (percent).

	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	<u>Primary River Segment of Interest</u>			MEETING TOTALS	MAIL TOTALS
			Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence		
Generally satisfied	29.1	40.4	37.3	23.5	36.8	33.8	37.5
Unsure	26.7	23.4	22.9	29.4	26.3	25.0	16.7
Dissatisfied	15.1	8.5	14.5	11.8	5.3	12.5	29.2
No opinion	29.1	27.7	25.3	35.3	31.6	28.7	16.7

Table 18. Satisfaction with the current status of the crappie fishery.

	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	<u>Primary River Segment of Interest</u>			MEETING TOTALS	MAIL TOTALS
			Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence		
Generally satisfied	16.5	17.0	19.3	18.2	0	16.3	8.3
Unsure	35.3	25.5	32.5	27.3	36.8	31.9	37.5
Dissatisfied	14.1	23.4	13.3	21.2	26.3	17.0	25.0
No opinion	34.1	34.0	34.9	33.3	36.8	34.8	29.2

Management of Uncommon or Unique Species

Participants were asked to what extent they support programs that focus on uncommon or unique species such as pugnose shiner, mooneye, and sand darters. Almost 58% indicated strong

or moderate support, while about 20% indicated they did not support these programs, and 21% had no opinion (Table 19).

Over 80% of meeting participants indicated strong or moderate support for lake sturgeon, and only 10% indicated they did not support the program (Table 209). A smaller majority (54%) indicated support for fisheries management efforts for the American eel, while 34% did not support these efforts (Table 21).

Table 19. Extent of support for uncommon or unique species such as pugnose shiner, mooneye, and sand darters (percent).

	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	<u>Primary River Segment of Interest</u>			MEETING TOTALS	MAIL TOTALS
			Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence		
Strongly support	26.7	37.5	29.3	20.0	52.6	30.1	26.1
Moderately support	33.7	20.8	22.0	42.9	31.6	28.7	26.1
Do not support	17.4	25.0	24.4	14.3	10.5	19.9	21.7
No opinion	22.1	16.7	24.4	22.9	5.3	21.3	26.1

Table 20. Extent of support for lake sturgeon management efforts (percent).

	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	<u>Primary River Segment of Interest</u>			MEETING TOTALS	MAIL TOTALS
			Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence		
Strongly support	44.8	61.7	46.3	48.6	66.7	50.0	54.2
Moderately support	34.5	29.8	28.8	42.9	28.6	32.4	29.2
Do not support	16.1	0	15.0	2.9	4.8	10.3	8.3
No opinion	4.6	8.5	10.0	5.7	0	7.4	8.3

Table 21. Extent of support for American eel management efforts (percent).

	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	<u>Primary River Segment of Interest</u>			MEETING TOTALS	MAIL TOTALS
			Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence		
Strongly support	25.0	41.7	32.1	27.8	33.3	31.2	37.5
Moderately support	23.9	20.8	19.8	33.3	19.0	23.2	20.8
Do not support	40.9	22.9	38.3	27.8	28.6	34.1	25.0
No opinion	10.2	14.6	9.9	11.1	19.0	11.6	16.7

Information and Education

Participants were asked to rate the quality of information presented in the discussion papers mailed to those who pre-registered for the meeting, and the information provided in the opening presentations at each meeting. This information was analyzed by meeting site as well as by New York/Ontario and by section of the river.

Almost one-third of meeting participants did not receive the discussion papers in the mail (32.5% in New York; 30.8% in Ontario; 31.9% overall). The ratings of those who did receive the papers in advance are shown in Table 22. Better than half rated the papers as very informative; nearly 40% rated them as somewhat informative, and only 5% rated them as not very informative. The quality of the information presented at the meetings was rated a slightly lower than that of the discussion papers, but still, 95% rated the information presented as very informative or somewhat informative (Table 23).

Table 22. Rating of quality of information contained in discussion papers (percent).

	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	<u>Primary River Segment of Interest</u>			MEETING TOTALS	MAIL TOTALS
			Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence		
Very informative	50.0	63.0	58.8	45.5	66.7	56.2	57.1
Somewhat informative	42.3	37.0	39.1	40.8	33.3	38.8	42.9
Not very informative	7.7	0	2.1	13.7	0	5.0	0

Table 23. Rating of quality of information presented at meetings (percent).

	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	<u>Primary River Segment of Interest</u>			MEETING TOTALS	MAIL TOTALS
			Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence		
Very informative	37.6	56.3	36.3	41.7	80.0	44.1	40.0
Somewhat informative	56.5	39.6	60.0	47.2	20.0	50.7	50.0
Not very informative	5.9	4.2	3.8	11.1	0	5.1	10.0

Summary

Questionnaires regarding fisheries management objectives for the upper St. Lawrence River were received from 167 people. The majority of the respondents were anglers but a variety of other perspectives was represented. Respondents were primarily concerned about the management of northern pike, smallmouth bass, muskellunge and walleye. These people were willing to consider a variety of options to limit angler harvest of northern pike and smallmouth bass beyond the current regulations in order to improve the quality of the fishery. An increase in the minimum size limit for muskellunge was acceptable to an overwhelming majority of respondents. In general, there were few major differences between responses received with respect to section of the river of primary interest (Lake St. Lawrence, Middle Corridor, or Thousand Islands) or the residency of respondent (Ontario or New York).

ST. LAWRENCE RIVER FISHERIES MANAGEMENT SURVEY

**Sponsored by:
New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) and
Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR)**

Your input to managing the fisheries of the St. Lawrence River will be greatly appreciated by fisheries managers in New York State and the Province of Ontario. Please complete this questionnaire and hand it in as requested.

4. Did you pre-register for this meeting? Yes No
5. You are a resident of (check one): New York State Province of Ontario
6. Your interest in St. Lawrence River fisheries comes from what perspectives (check all that apply):
- marina owner charterboat operator or guide restaurant, motel, or other business
angler boater cottage or second home owner
other: _____

4. What portion of the St. Lawrence is of primary interest to you? (Check one:)
- Thousand Islands (Kingston/Cape Vincent to Chippewa Bay/Mallorytown Landing)
Middle Corridor (Chippewa Bay/Mallorytown Landing to Iroquois Dam/Lock)
Lake St. Lawrence (Iroquois Dam/Lock to Moses-Saunders Power Dam)

- A. Please RANK below your 3 favorite species to fish for in the St. Lawrence (1=favorite, 2=second favorite, 3=third favorite).

___ largemouth bass ___ smallmouth bass ___ walleye
___ northern pike ___ muskellunge ___ bluegill, sunfish, or rock bass
___ crappie ___ yellow perch
___ bullhead ___ carp
___ other (list:) _____

- B. Now place an X beside any additional species in the list above that you fish the St. Lawrence River for in a typical year.

Please circle the number below that best indicates your degree of concern about the status of each species. A Little concern means that to the best of your knowledge, the fishery, or the status of the population, is in good shape for each of the species listed.

	<u>Little or No concern</u>	<u>Some Concern</u>	<u>Moderate Concern</u>	<u>Great Concern</u>	<u>No Opinion</u>
a. largemouth bass	1	2	3	4	9
b. smallmouth bass	1	2	3	4	9
c. crappie	1	2	3	4	9
d. sunfish, rock bass	1	2	3	4	9
e. walleye	1	2	3	4	9
f. northern pike	1	2	3	4	9
g. muskellunge	1	2	3	4	9
h. yellow perch	1	2	3	4	9
i. bullhead	1	2	3	4	9
j. carp	1	2	3	4	9
k. lake sturgeon	1	2	3	4	9
l. American eel	1	2	3	4	9
m. Other (list)_____	1	2	3	4	9

Comments: _____

Bass Management:

We would like your input on management direction and possible change to bass regulations. Current regulations allow anglers to keep a daily limit of six bass in Ontario and five bass in New York. Ontario waters of the St. Lawrence River have no minimum size limit for bass, whereas a 12 inch minimum size limit is in effect for New York. Bass season opens the fourth Saturday in June in Ontario, and on the third Saturday in June in New York. Please note that additional public consultation would be required prior to changing the current regulations.

7. Would you be willing to have your bass harvest limited beyond the current regulations in order to improve the quality (increased size/abundance) of the bass fishery?

Yes No No opinion

In principle, would you support a three (3) bass per day creel limit if it increased the abundance of bass of all sizes?

Yes No No opinion

In principle, would you support a 14 inch minimum size limit if it increased the number of large bass available by 20%?

Yes No No opinion

In principle, would you support changing the opening day of bass season in New York from the third Saturday in June to the fourth Saturday in June, so that the bass season would open on the same date on both the New York and Ontario portions of the St. Lawrence?

Yes No No opinion

Northern Pike Management:

We would like your input on management direction and possible changes to the pike regulations. Current St. Lawrence River regulations allow anglers to keep a daily limit of six northern pike in Ontario and five pike in New York. In Ontario waters there is no minimum size limit for pike, whereas a 22 inch minimum size limit is in effect in New York waters. The season for northern pike opens on the same day in New York and Ontario waters (the first Saturday in May), but closes on different dates (March 15 in New York; March 31 in Ontario). Please note that additional public consultation would be required prior to changing the regulations.

Would you be willing to have your northern pike harvest limited beyond the current regulations in order to improve the quality (increased size/abundance) of the pike fishery?

Yes No No opinion

In principle, would you support a two (2) pike per day creel limit if it increased the abundance of pike by 30%?

Yes No No opinion

In principle, would you support a 24 inch minimum size limit if it increased the number of large pike (greater than 24 inches) available by 20%?

Yes No No opinion

Would you support changing the closing day of pike season in New York from March 15 to March 31 so that the season dates would be the same for both the New York and Ontario portions of the St. Lawrence?

Yes No No opinion

Changes to northern pike spawning and nursery habitats in wetlands along the river may be adversely affecting the pike population. Would you support government agency efforts to build dikes to manipulate water levels in specific wetlands to benefit northern pike and many other fish and wildlife species, knowing that this would restrict boating access to these areas?

Yes No No opinion

Muskellunge Management:

16. The St. Lawrence River has been identified as one of a few water bodies capable of producing muskellunge of world record size. In order to increase the opportunity for fish to survive to record size, a 54 inch (1372 mm) minimum size limit is being proposed for muskellunge. Please check the box that most accurately reflects your view:

I support a 54 inch minimum size limit.

I support a 48 inch minimum size limit.

I support maintaining the current 44 inch minimum size limit.

No opinion.

Walleye Management

17. OMNR/NYSDEC assessment data suggest that the status of the walleye population has improved in the past 20 years, and is favorable for anglers. What is your level of agreement with this statement for the portion of the St. Lawrence River emphasized at this meeting?

Agree Unsure Disagree No opinion

Specific suggestions: _____

Yellow Perch Management:

18. OMNR/NYSDEC assessment data suggest that the current status of the yellow perch population is favorable for anglers. What is your level of agreement with this statement?

Agree Unsure Disagree No opinion

Specific suggestions: _____

Panfish Management:

New York anglers are permitted to sell anywhere in New York any hook-and-line-caught fish from the St. Lawrence River that do not have minimum length and possession limits (primarily yellow perch and panfish). Ontario anglers can not sell any hook-and-line caught fish in the St. Lawrence River upstream of the Robert H. Saunders Generating Station at Cornwall.

19. What is your opinion regarding the sale of hook-and-line caught yellow perch or panfish?

I support the sale of hook and line-caught fish

I do not support the continued sale of hook and line-caught fish

No opinion

20. What is your level of satisfaction with the current status of the bluegill and pumpkinseed sunfish, and rock bass fisheries?

Generally satisfied

Unsure

Dissatisfied

No opinion

Comments: _____

21. What is your level of satisfaction with the current status of the crappie fishery?

Generally satisfied

Unsure

Dissatisfied

No opinion

Comments: _____

Management of Uncommon or Unique Species

OMNR and NYSDEC are actively involved in programs that focus on uncommon or unique fish species that are not sportfish, such as pugnose shiner, mooneye, and sand darters. To what extent do you support St. Lawrence River fisheries management efforts for non-sportfish species?

Strongly support

Moderately support

Do not support

No opinion

NYSDEC and OMNR are actively involved in programs that seek to increase the abundance of lake sturgeon in the St. Lawrence River and its tributaries, including spawning habitat improvements and stocking. To what extent do you support St. Lawrence River fisheries management efforts for lake sturgeon?

- Strongly support
- Moderately support
- Do not support
- No opinion

American eel are a unique species that has declined dramatically in the St. Lawrence River in the past 15 years. NYSDEC and OMNR are actively cooperating with other state, provincial and federal agencies in an effort to secure the future of American eels in the St. Lawrence River. To what extent do you support St. Lawrence River fisheries management efforts for American eel?

- Strongly support
- Moderately support
- Do not support
- No opinion

Information and Education

25. How would you rate the quality of information provided in the discussion papers sent to those who pre-registered for today=s meeting?

- Very informative Somewhat informative Not very informative
- Did not receive or get an opportunity to read

Comments: _____

7. How would you rate the quality of information provided in the opening presentations at today=s meeting?

- Very informative Somewhat informative Not very informative

Comments: _____

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE AND COOPERATION. YOU MAY USE THE BACK OF THIS QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ANY REMAINING COMMENTS YOU WISH TO MAKE.