



Lake Michigan Committee

REPRESENTING THE FISHERY MANAGEMENT AGENCIES OF LAKE MICHIGAN

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FISHERY AGENCIES PROPOSE CHINOOK STOCKING REDUCTION TO SUSTAIN THE LAKE MICHIGAN FISHERY

*Changes in Lake Michigan ecosystem, historic lows in forage fish
abundances, suggest needed shift in fishery policies*

ANN ARBOR, MI – Following extensive consultation with angler groups and other stakeholders, and more than three years of research and monitoring, the Lake Michigan Committee today proposed a lake-wide reduction of 62 percent in the number of Chinook salmon stocked into Lake Michigan. The stocking reduction, which is proposed to commence in spring, 2017, underscores the shared commitment to sustain Lake Michigan’s prized salmon and trout sport fishery as the lake’s ecosystem shifts. The Lake Michigan Committee comprises all state management agencies that border Lake Michigan and Michigan’s Tribal Governments signatory to the 1836 Treaty of Washington. Recommendations from the committee represent the consensus of all of its members.

Research by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and state partners indicates that natural reproduction currently accounts for more than 60 percent of all Chinook in Lake Michigan. With alewife (the key prey fish for Chinook salmon) populations at or near historic lows, the Lake Michigan Committee’s proposed strategy is intended to preserve important salmon and trout angling opportunities in each state. Changes to the lake’s food web, including the prevalence of invasive mussels, have complicated the equation by diminishing the amount of food available for alewives, which has contributed to the greatly diminished abundances of this key prey fish. Given the massive numbers of quagga mussels in Lake Michigan, prey fish are not expected to rebound any time soon to numbers that would support current stocking levels.

“Agencies must try to balance the numbers of top predator fish like Chinook salmon with the available prey in the lake by making management decisions that are within their control,” said Lake Michigan Committee Chair Jay Wesley of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. “Over the previous several years, natural resource agencies have had to contend with historic lows in the Lake Michigan prey fish base, similar to shifts that have occurred in Lake Huron. The proposed reduction balances angler opportunities throughout the region while acknowledging the contribution from natural reproduction in Michigan streams to overall predator numbers.”

“Chinook salmon are highly dependent on alewives, and data from trawl and acoustic surveys over the past three years show alewife numbers are in substantial decline,” Wesley continued. “If we are to sustain a quality salmon and trout fishery in Lake Michigan, the targeted reductions represent the best option going forward. Attempting to work toward and with a balanced predator and prey population is necessary to preserve the quality and diversity of Lake Michigan’s multi-million dollar sport fishery.”

For 2017, the Lake Michigan Committee proposes a total lake-wide stocking of 690,000 Chinook salmon, down from the current 1,800,000. The proposed reduction follows the third round of stocking reductions in 2013, when committee and state natural resource managers agreed to the current total from previous levels of 3.3 million Chinook stocked each year. In addition to supporting the 2013 stocking reductions, stakeholders and natural resource managers agreed upon the need for a comprehensive monitoring plan to help inform management decisions and the obligation to respond quickly to changing conditions.

Each Lake Michigan Committee member agency must still approve and implement the committee's recommendations. Each state agency will now work to discuss and implement changes in a manner most appropriate to their jurisdiction, and will collaborate with other Lake Michigan Committee members to assure a consistent Lake Michigan wide effort is implemented to balance predators and prey and sustain a quality salmon and trout fishery.

A comprehensive research and monitoring plan is in place to help inform Lake Michigan salmon and trout management decisions and allow fishery managers to respond quickly to changing conditions. The plan includes a suite of biological indicators comprised of long-term and short-term data collected and assessed by state, federal, tribal, and academic experts throughout the Lake Michigan basin. These biological indicators represent the best available science to promote sustainable and diverse fisheries throughout Lake Michigan.

The Lake Michigan Committee comprises fishery managers from the Chippewa-Ottawa Resource Authority, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin. The committee's work is facilitated by the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, a Canadian and U.S. agency on the Great Lakes. The committee meets regularly to share information and develop shared fishery management plans, objectives, and policies. The Lake Michigan Committee members work to implement changes in the manner most appropriate to each jurisdiction. For more information, visit the Lake Michigan Committee online at www.glfco.org/lakecom/lmc/lmchome.php.

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