

MSSFA Executive Director Report --- November 10, 2010

Executive Summary:

Lake Huron is back. You probably won't recognize it because the alewife and Chinook salmon are all but gone, however, the three basins are thriving with the return of smelt. Fish density and biomass are up substantially. Zooplankton samples show higher production this year. Bloaters are very prevalent.

Fish advisory reports are all positive with lake trout prevalent, steelhead much better and walleye increasing. Brown trout are doing well, perch fishing was good but spotty and white fish are present in good numbers. Lake Huron had good fishing for a variety of species all season but warmer than usual water and blow days made fishing more difficult from August through October.

Lake Michigan presented real challenges for fishers this year. Weather was a major factor in creating inconsistent fishing results; lots of blow days and much warmer than usual water temperatures. The salmon run was between two and four weeks later than normal and there was an absence of big fish---we may have lost the 2006 class; only analysis of the data will tell for sure later this year or next spring. The fishing was good early in the year, slowed in June and picked up in July through early August. Then the weather made getting out difficult. Charter boat captains complained that they had a very bad season compounded by the lack of big kings, blow days, warmer water driving them further out for fish and the not being able to catch lake trout during a warmer than usual October. (Denny Grinold, Lake Michigan Advisory Committee chairman, testified at the November 4th NRC meeting to extent the lake trout season through October in units MM 6-8 for 2011.) Charter boat captains complained about the creel limit of five salmon but the charter boat reporting process results did not support their position and the five fish limit will remain in 2011. (It seems that only .25% of charter trips resulted in catches of five salmon per angler.)

Proposed recommendations for gear restricted streams turned out to be the most contentious issue of the summer and fall season. I attended the DNRE public meeting in St. Joseph, MI on June 24th and listened to Jay Wesley, fisheries division biologist, explain the rationale used to determine what streams qualified for consideration and the biological basis for the recommendations. He had sound scientific reasons based on water temperature and other biological factors. The rivers most steelhead fishers access were excluded from the recommendations. Then in September, bait anglers came forward objecting to the 10.5 mile extension of artificial flies only water on the Pere Marquette River and other recommendations affecting the Black, Manistee and Pigeon Rivers. The task fell upon the Coldwater Regulations Steering Committee to debate the merits of the recommendations and come up with a proposal each group could live with. Though, MSSFA got to the table late we were able to participate and help reach consensus among the parties. We were able to eliminate the flies' only stretch on the Pere Marquette. My testimony at the NRC meeting last week is included on the next page.

NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION STATEMENT

(Michigan Steelhead & Salmon Fishermen's Association)

"My name is Dennis Eade. I am the Interim Executive Director of the Michigan Steelhead and Salmon Fishermen's Association. I support the Fisheries Division's public process; the Fish Division has provided the public with opportunities to weigh in. The process was transparent and interactive, and the division has tried to provide diverse fishing opportunities for all angling groups.

Even though I have come into this process at the eleventh hour, I have heard about... and personally witnessed the efforts of bait anglers and fly fishers to come together in an attempt to meet halfway towards each other's objectives and continue to move this process forward to a reasonable conclusion.

Not everyone is going to be happy with the final outcome of the process and within our own MSSFA membership; there is strong opposition to any restrictions on the use of bait to catch fish. That being said, it is in the best interest of all steelhead and salmon fishermen to preserve our access to streams during the traditional stream fishing season, fall, winter and spring.

The MSSFA board discussed the changes and decided to support the DNRE's prerogative to scientifically manage the stream resources for equitable access and sustainability. Our organization supports coldwater fisheries and having the division provide as many opportunities as it can for the anglers of this state. We can live with the proposal.

I would like to be perfectly clear, however, that while MSSFA supports this revised proposal, that we would have difficulty supporting any additional gear restrictions in the future without solid scientific or biological reasons and that this could become a critical point of contention between our organization and the department. We don't have any issues with the fly fishing organizations at the present time, but if there is continued pressure to include more flies only/artificial lures only water, MSSFA will strongly resist and join the vast majority of bait fishing anglers in opposition."

The DNRE Fisheries Division has been affected by budget cuts and an early release program targeted at eliminating half the current positions of those taking the early out option. Hatchery rearing space is stressed and hard choices have to be made regarding the need for a second egg taking hatchery other than the Little Manistee River/Weir to raise wild steelhead trout. The Platte River State Fish hatchery is the best place to raise the planned 20,000 wild steelhead. We are at capacity at all hatcheries now and have to prioritize fish production. I suspect brown trout production will be adversely affected as well as possibly rainbow trout.

Rebecca Humphries is leaving as Director of DNRE at the end of the year. She is moving to a regional position with Trout Unlimited. Change of administrations will undoubtedly bring more moves as the transition commences.

First issue of business for the new legislature (62 of the 110 members are brand new) will be the selection of members to serve on the Committee on Committees. Sen. Randy Richardville, French Twp., is the new Senate majority leader and Rep. James Bolger from Marshall is positioned to become speaker of the House. Both have been supporters of salmon and steelhead fishing though they have been tough on the DNRE. Richardville has his own Walleye Tournament as a fund raiser each summer so there is reason to believe we can develop a strong relationship with the majority leader in the Senate. Jase Bolger was salmon fishing with us in September and should be receptive to fishermen's issues on the house side. Sen. Arlan Meekhof from Holland will probably be selected to chair the senate's Hunting, Fishing & Outdoor Recreation standing committee.

I am also working with Deb French with Great Lakes Sport Fishing News. Besides contacting advertisers and cultivating new accounts, I have sought ways to better engage our readers with interesting news articles germane to the steelhead and salmon fishing community. For our January edition, I have interviewed Captain Tony Salerno of the Living the Dream sport fishing team to provide tournament fishermen with an inside look at how this very successful professional division team prepares for the challenge of tournament fishing. I have interviewed Karen Raterink, co-owner of Big Weenie Brand flies and meat rigs, about her efforts to save "at risk" Dachshunds who are in need of good homes. She and her husband Gary adopted "Brutus" some years ago and he became the symbol of their brand. I have also interviewed Bud Cox, Renee Davis, Steve Heintzelman and Virginia Nowicki for a tribute article on Dave Nowicki's legacy after his untimely passing. I would like to develop a list of "stringers" who can routinely send us leads for articles that would be of real interest to our readers.

Important work lies ahead. The DNRE is holding an Asian Carp Summit on November 22nd to review the proposed plan for the prevention, detection, assessment, and management of Asian Carps should they arrive in Michigan waters.

It has been an exciting and busy eight weeks and I am hopeful we can continue to make MSSFA and GLSFN influential and impactful advocates for the future of steelhead and salmon fishing in the state of Michigan.