

COLDWATER TASK GROUP EXECUTIVE SUMMARY REPORT MARCH 2023

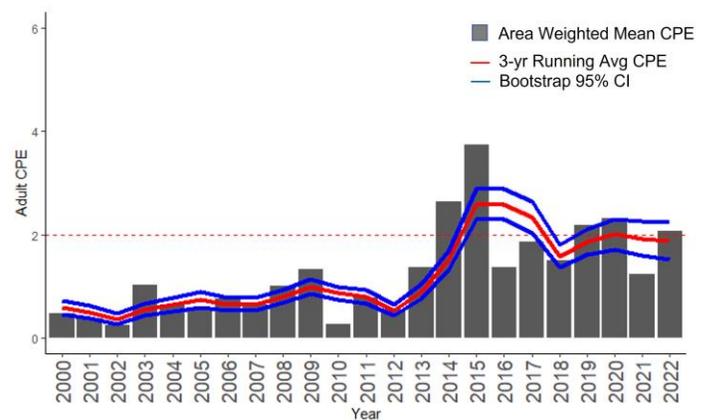


Introduction

This year's Lake Erie Committee (LEC) Coldwater Task Group (CWTG) has produced an Executive Summary Report encapsulating information from the CWTG annual report. Three charges were addressed by the CWTG during 2022-2023: (1) Report on the status of the cold-water fish community, (2) Participation in the Integrated Management of Sea Lamprey Process on Lake Erie, outline and prescribe the needs of the Lake Erie Sea Lamprey management program, and (3) Maintenance of an electronic database of Lake Erie salmonid stocking information. The complete report is available from the Great Lakes Fishery Commission's Lake Erie Committee Coldwater Task Group website at <http://www.glfc.org/lake-erie-committee.php> or upon request from an LEC or CWTG representative.

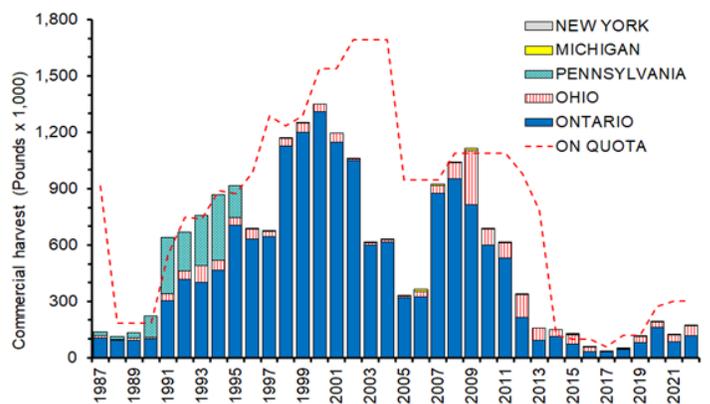
Lake Trout

A total of 344 lake trout were collected in the Coldwater Assessment Survey in 2022. Adult (age 5+) relative abundance increased to 2.1 fish per lift, above the target of 2.0 described in the 2021 Lake Trout Management Plan. There were 17 age classes and six strains captured in 2022. Lake trout ages 7, 12, and 13 were the dominate cohorts. Lake trout older than age-10 continue to increase in abundance and comprised 56% of the total catch. Finger Lakes and Lake Champlain strains comprised the majority of the population. The Partnership Survey caught 22 lake trout in 2022. The Partnership abundance of 0.37 fish/lift decreased from 2021 (0.92 fish/lift) and is below the time series mean (0.44 fish/lift).



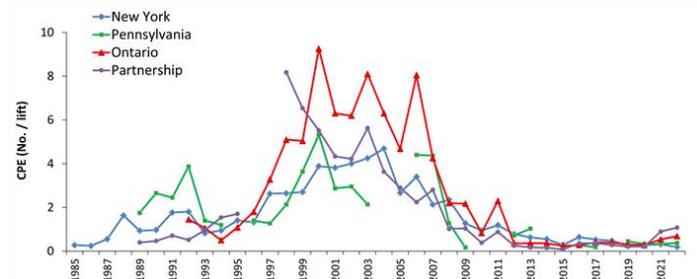
Lake Whitefish

Lake whitefish harvest in 2022 was 170,393 pounds, distributed between Ontario (69%), Ohio (31%), Pennsylvania and New York (<1%). Harvest increased 40% from 2021 and remains low compared to previous decades. Gill net fishery age composition ranged from ages 3 to 19 with ages 3, 4, and 7 representing the majority of the harvest. Lake whitefish status indicators were highly variable among surveys and fisheries in 2022 ranging from low to high. Assessment surveys caught lake whitefish from ages 1 to 29, with age compositions that partially overlapped the 2022 gill net fishery. Bottom trawl and gill net surveys forecast low to moderate recruitment of age 3 lake whitefish from the 2020 cohort in 2023. Continued conservative management and research is encouraged to support lake whitefish population growth and sustainability.



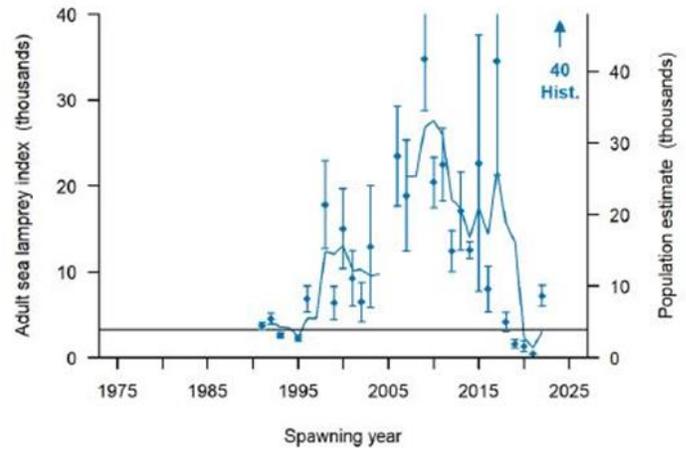
Burbot

Total commercial harvest of burbot in Lake Erie in 2022 was 1,911 pounds. All was incidental. Burbot abundance and biomass indices from annual assessment surveys remained at low levels, continuing a downward trend since the early-2000s. The burbot catch rate in the Interagency Coldwater Assessment Survey averaged 0.46 fish/lift and in the Ontario Partnership Assessment Survey averaged 1.08 fish/lift. Burbot in the Coldwater Assessment Survey and Partnership ranged in age from 2 to 21 and mean age was 7 years. Rainbow smelt was the dominant prey item in burbot diets.



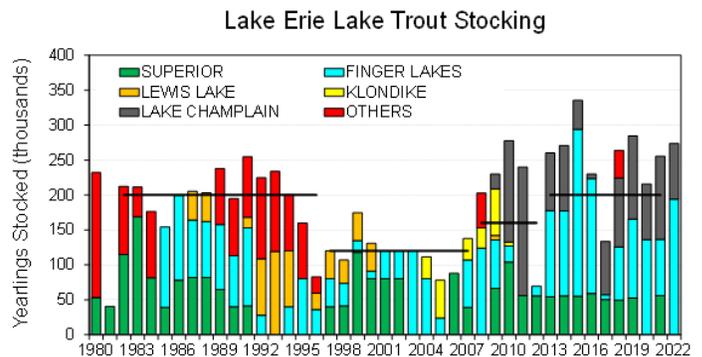
Sea Lamprey

The A1-A3 wounding rate on lake trout over 532 mm was 4.0 wounds per 100 fish in 2022. This was below the target rate of 5.0 wounds per 100 fish for the second year in a row and for only the third time in the previous 26 years. Large lake trout over 736 mm continue to be the preferred targets for sea lamprey in Lake Erie. The Index of Adult Sea Lamprey Abundance (7,200) represents an increase from last year however the three year average-index is below the target of 3,300 for the third year in a row. Lampricide treatments were not completed in 2020 due to Covid-19. Stream barrier assessments were conducted on seven tributaries in 2022. All barriers assessed were found to be effective in limiting sea lamprey infestations.



Lake Erie Salmonid Stocking

A total of 2,197,448 yearling salmonids were stocked in Lake Erie in 2022, which was slightly below the long-term average (1990-2021). Lake trout stocking was just shy of the 280,000 goal, and two different strains were stocked in 2022. By species, there were 273,766 yearling lake trout stocked in the east and central basins of Lake Erie, 75,082 brown trout stocked in Pennsylvania waters, and 1,848,600 rainbow/steelhead trout stocked across all five State and Provincial jurisdictional waters.



Steelhead

The summary of steelhead stocking in Lake Erie by jurisdictional waters for 2022 is: Pennsylvania (1,079,958; 58%), Ohio (470,912; 26%), New York (189,835; 10%), Ontario (43,225; 2%), and Michigan (64,670; 4%). Total steelhead stocking in 2022 (1.85 million) was slightly above the long-term average. Annual stocking numbers have been consistently in the 1.7-2.0 million fish range since 1993. The summer open lake steelhead harvest was estimated at 22,231 steelhead across New York, Pennsylvania and Ohio and near the long-term average harvest of 23,503. Tributary angler surveys, representing the majority (>90%) of the targeted fishery effort for steelhead, found average catch rates of 0.44 fish/hour in 2021-22 in New York tributaries, which are among the highest in the country. Steelhead catch rates in Partnership index gill net surveys (0.13 fish/lift) were low relative to the 23-year time series.

