



Lake Erie Committee

REPRESENTING THE FISHERY MANAGEMENT AGENCIES OF LAKE ERIE AND LAKE ST. CLAIR

2100 Commonwealth Blvd.
Suite 100
Ann Arbor MI 48105-1563
Tel: 734-662-3209

MICHIGAN DNR

NEW YORK DEC

OHIO DNR

ONTARIO MNR

PENNSYLVANIA F&BC

For Immediate Release
March 24, 2015

Contacts:
Canada: Rich Drouin: 519-873-4611
USA: Marc Gaden: 734-669-3012

Lake Erie Committee Announces Walleye and Yellow Perch Harvest Levels for 2015

YPSILANTI, MI – Fishery managers from Michigan, New York, Ohio, Ontario and Pennsylvania—the five jurisdictions that manage the Lake Erie fishery—agreed to a total allowable catch (TAC) of 4.114 million walleye and 10.528 million pounds of yellow perch for 2015. (Walleye are allocated by number of fish; yellow perch are allocated in pounds.). These TAC recommendations represent a 3% increase in allowable catch for walleye and a 5% decrease in yellow perch.

The Lake Erie Committee's TAC recommendations are consistent with the status of Lake Erie's fish populations, taking into the account the goal of stable harvest. The Lake Erie Committee believes that both walleye and yellow perch populations are relatively stable, with some indication of improved year classes, relative to the average, of both species in 2014. The individual provincial and state governments adhere to and implement the TAC recommendations consistent with their respective regulations and management objectives.

The Lake Erie Committee operates by consensus and meets periodically to analyze and discuss detailed, lakewide biological assessments that inform their TAC recommendations. The Lake Erie Committee also supports the Lake Erie Percid Management Advisory Group, or LEPMAG, a structured process that engages commercial and recreational fishers. LEPMAG, which has existed since 2010, reflects the committee's interest in involving the fishing community in actions related to management of Lake Erie's percid fisheries.

WALLEYE

The Lake Erie Committee today recommended a 2015 walleye TAC of 4.114 million fish, compared to the similar TAC of 4.027 million fish in 2014. The TAC recommendation for 2015 reflects the goal of managing shared fish stocks sustainably while incorporating the needs of the people who harvest the fish. The 2011, 2010, 2007, and the 2003 year classes are the primary contributors to the stability of the walleye fishery and allow for the similar TAC from last year.

Scientists and field biologists from all Lake Erie jurisdictions, meeting as the Walleye Task Group, share data and reach consensus on biological conditions. The task group's walleye abundance estimates, which incorporate suggestions from LEPMAG, serve as the foundation for the Lake Erie Committee's discussions and TAC recommendations. A model, developed in conjunction with stakeholders and Michigan State University, also informs the TAC. Each Lake Erie jurisdiction is responsible for implementing their portion of the TAC.

The Province of Ontario and the states of Ohio and Michigan share the TAC based on a formula of walleye habitat within each jurisdiction in the western and central basins of the lake. Under a 2015 TAC of 4.114 million fish, Ohio will be allocated 2.103 million fish, Ontario 1.771 million fish, and Michigan 0.240 million fish. Because the majority of harvest comes from the western portion of Lake Erie, jurisdictions in the eastern end of the lake are outside the TAC area. Harvest limits in the eastern basin are established separately by Ontario, Pennsylvania, and New York and remain consistent with lakewide conditions and objectives.

YELLOW PERCH

The Lake Erie Committee recommended a 2015 binational TAC of 10.528 million pounds of yellow perch, a decrease from last year's allocation of 11.081 million pounds. The generally stable yellow perch TACs are indicative of the ongoing, stable status of yellow perch in Lake Erie. In east central basin of Lake Erie ("management unit 3"), it was noted that mixed signals between fisheries survey data and model performance occurred. Recognizing this, and to help stabilize the TAC and reduce impacts on stakeholders, the Lake Erie Committee decided to go slightly above the maximum of the recommended allowable harvest range. This was done to achieve no more than a 20% reduction in the TAC; 20% is a "stability" benchmark currently recommended to the LEC by LEPMAG for walleye. The proposed TAC, after deliberations with stakeholders through the LEPMAG process, reflects the committee's interest in maintaining stability in harvest while ensuring yellow perch sustainability.

The five jurisdictions on the lake share Lake Erie's yellow perch based on an area-based formula. Under the 2015 TAC recommendation, Ontario will receive 5.052 million pounds, Ohio 4.505 million pounds, Michigan 0.145 million pounds, New York 0.162 million pounds, and Pennsylvania 0.664 million pounds.

THE LAKE ERIE PERCID MANAGEMENT ADVISORY GROUP (LEPMAG)

The Lake Erie Percid Management Advisory Group was first convened in 2010 and serves as the primary method to incorporate stakeholder needs and objectives into the Lake Erie yellow perch and walleye decision-making process. LEPMAG consists of senior representatives from all provincial and state jurisdictions on the lake, recreational fishers, commercial fishers, and other interested organizations. Through LEPMAG, fishery managers and stakeholders work together to identify the harvest policies for Lake Erie percids that meet the needs of all stakeholders while maintaining stability in the percid fishery. Michigan State University's Quantitative Fisheries Center facilitates the LEPMAG process. Walleye are now being managed under the Walleye Management Plan, which was developed through LEPMAG and is currently undergoing final consultation with stakeholders. LEPMAG members are in the process of developing population objectives and harvest strategies for yellow perch in Lake Erie. The objectives and harvest strategies are expected to be completed in the coming years.

THE LAKE ERIE COMMITTEE

The Lake Erie Committee comprises fishery managers from Michigan, New York, Ohio, Ontario and Pennsylvania. The committee's work is facilitated by the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, a Canadian and U.S. agency on the Great Lakes. Each year the committee recommends a total allowable catch for walleye and yellow perch. Total allowable catch represents the number or weight of fish recommended to be caught by sport and commercial fishers without putting the fisheries at risk. The individual agencies implement the recommended total allowable catch.

The Lake Erie Committee today announced the creation of an *ad hoc* committee to design management strategies for data-poor fisheries, including lake whitefish and a number of other harvested species. This committee will consist of stakeholders, agency biologists, and academics. The strategies will be used to support eco-labeling initiatives in commercial fisheries and provide support for other fishery management needs. For more information, visit the Lake Erie Committee online at www.glfsc.org/lec.