

COLDWATER TASK GROUP EXECUTIVE SUMMARY REPORT MARCH 2026



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 2025: (1) Report on the status of the cold-water fish community, (2) Participate 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) Maintain 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.glfrc.org/lake-erie-committee.php> or upon request from an LEC or CWTG representative.

Lake Trout

A total of 230 lake trout were collected in the Coldwater Assessment Survey in 2025. Adult (age 5+) relative abundance in all nets increased to 1.40 fish per lift, below the target of 2.0 described in the 2021 Lake Trout Management Plan. There were 22 age classes and four strains captured in 2025. Lake trout ages 4, and 5 were the dominate cohorts. Ages 3,10,13,15,16, and 17 also contributed. Lake trout older than age-10 continue to increase in contribution and comprised 50% of the total catch. Finger Lakes and Lake Champlain strains comprised the majority of the population. Slate Island strain, last stocked in 2021, contributed strongly as 5-year old fish. The Partnership Survey changed design in 2024 targeting waters less than 30m in depth and no longer fished the Pennsylvania Ridge.

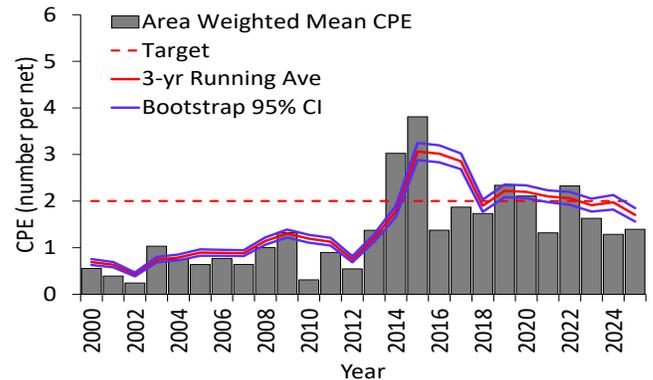
Lake Whitefish

Lake whitefish harvest in 2025 was 167,855 pounds, distributed between Ontario (85%), Ohio (15%), and Pennsylvania (<1%). Harvest increased by 107% from 2024 but remains low compared to previous decades. Gillnet fishery age composition ranged from ages 2 to 24 with ages 6, 10, 5, and 4 representing the majority of the harvest. Relative to recent decades, lake whitefish survey and fishery status indicators in 2025 were moderate or better. Assessment surveys caught lake whitefish from ages 1 to 24, with age compositions that partially overlapped the 2025 gill net fishery. Bottom trawl and gillnet survey indices forecast modest to good recruitment of age 3 lake whitefish in 2026 and 2027.

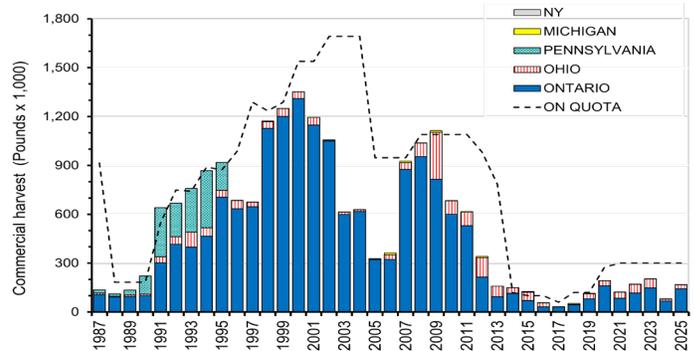
Burbot

Total commercial catch of burbot in Lake Erie in 2025 was 2,950 pounds. All was incidental. Burbot abundance and biomass indices from annual assessment surveys reached a time series low in 2019. Since then, catch rates in the Coldwater Assessment Survey have increased annually. The 2025 burbot catch rate 1.67 fish/lift, approached the time series average and was the highest catch rate since 2008. Burbot from this survey ranged in age from 2 to 19 with 5-yr old fish being most abundant. Round goby was the dominant prey item in burbot diets in 2025, while smelt were observed less frequently.

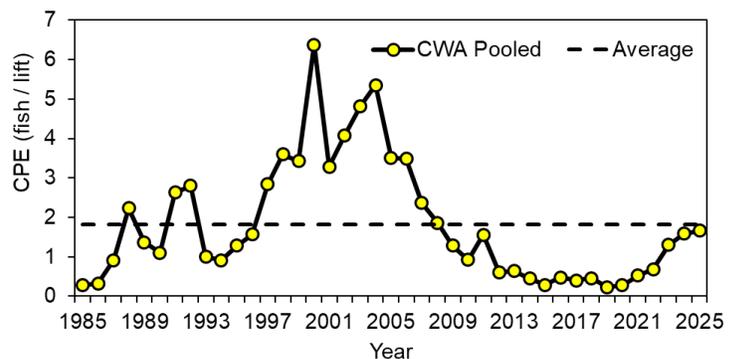
LT relative adult abundance



LWF commercial harvest



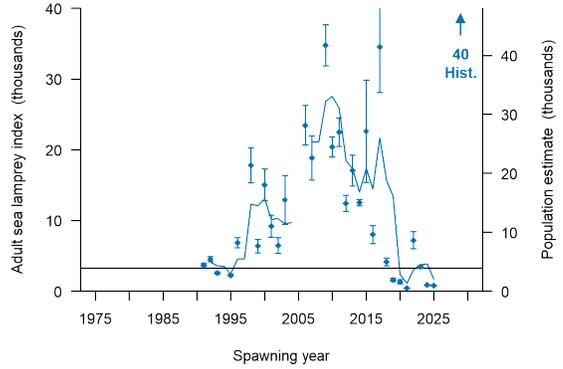
BUR relative abundance



Sea Lamprey

The A1-A3 (fresh) wounding rate on lake trout over 532 mm was 5.6 wounds per 100 fish in 2025. This is above the target rate of 5.0 wounds per 100 fish. Large lake trout continue to be the preferred targets for sea lamprey in Lake Erie. The Index of Adult Sea Lamprey Abundance (800) represents a decrease from last year and the three-year running average of the index (1700) was below the target of 3,300. Six tributary streams received lampricide treatments in 2025, three in Canada and three in the US.

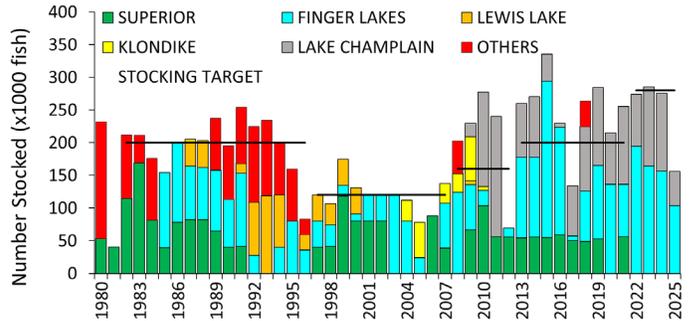
SL indices of status



Lake Erie Salmonid Stocking

A total of 1,449,300 yearling salmonids were stocked in Lake Erie in 2025, which was below the long-term average (1990-2024). Lake trout stocking was below the goal of 280,000 goal, and two different strains were stocked in 2025. By species, there were 155,944 yearling lake trout stocked in the east basin of Lake Erie, 41,944 brown trout stocked in Pennsylvania waters, and 1,251,412 rainbow/steelhead trout stocked across all five State and Provincial jurisdictional waters.

LT stocking



Steelhead

The summary of steelhead stocking in Lake Erie by jurisdictional waters for 2025 is: Pennsylvania (497,648; 39.8%), Ohio (464,538; 37.1%), New York (191,150; 15.3%), Michigan (49,785; 3.8%), and Ontario (48,291; 4%). Total steelhead stocking in 2025 (1.45 million) was below the long-term average. Annual stocking numbers have been consistently in the 1.5-2.0 million fish range since 1993. The summer open lake steelhead harvest was estimated at 9,563 steelhead across New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Michigan which was below the long-term average harvest of 22,019. Tributary angler surveys, represented the majority (>90%) of the targeted fishery effort for steelhead. Catch rates remain high and there are planned creel surveys in the future in most jurisdictions.

Salmonid stocking

