LAKE ERIE COMMITTEE
WALLEYE TASK GROUP
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY REPORT
MARCH 2026

Lake Erie Committee
REPRESENTING THE FISHERY MANAGEMENT AGENCIES OF LAKE ERIE & LAKE ST. CLAIR

Introduction

This summary report highlights elements of the 2026 Walleye Task Group (WTG) annual report. The complete WTG report is available from the Great Lakes Fishery Commission's Lake Erie Committee website at http://www.glfc.org/lake-erie-committee.php, or upon request from a Lake Erie Committee, Standing Technical Committee, or WTG representative.
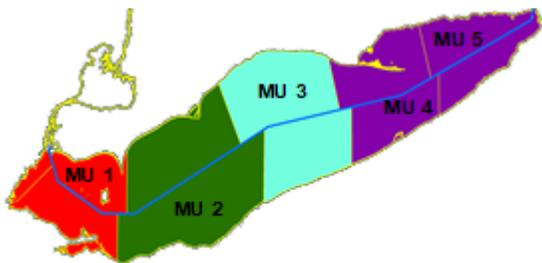

Figure 1. Lake Erie walleye management units

The WTG partitions the lake into five management units (MUs) for data analysis and managing Walleye (Figure 1). A statistical catch-at-age (SCAA) model is run for a combined west-central area (MUs 1 to 3) to produce abundance estimates that are used with reference points and a harvest control rule to generate a Recommended Allowable Harvest (RAH). The WTG assesses the status of Walleye and their resulting fisheries in MUs 4&5, but it does not generate a RAH due to uncertainties around the mixing of western and eastern basin populations.

2025 Fishery Review

The total allowable catch (TAC) for 2025 in the quota area (MUs 1 to 3) was 11.373 million fish (Table 1). This allocation represented a 11.5% decrease from the 2024 TAC. Total harvest in the quota area was 8.274 million fish, or 73% of the 2025 TAC. Harvest in the non-TAC area (MUs 4&5) was 0.909 million fish. Lake-wide Walleye harvest was estimated at 9.182 million fish. Both sport fishery (3.825 million fish) and commercial fishery (5.357 million fish) harvests were above long-term (1975-2024) averages (sport = 2.351 million fish and commercial = 2.437 million fish). Total lake-wide commercial fishery effort was 12,258 km of gill net, which decreased from 2024 and remained below the 1975-2024 average (18,486 km). Commercial effort decreased across all MUs (Table 2). Lake-wide sport effort was 3.849 million angler hours, which is below the 1975-2024 average (4.921 million angler hours). Sport effort increased in MUs 1 and 3 and decreased in MUs 2 and 4&5 (Table 3). The 2025 harvest rates in the lake-wide sport fishery (0.95 fish/hour) remained high, as did those for the commercial fishery (437.0 fish/km gill net). Sport harvest rates increased in all MUs relative to 2024. Gill net harvest rates increased in MUs 1 and 2 but decreased in MUs 3 and 4&5. In all gear types combined, age 4 (41%; 2021 year class) and age 3 (19%; 2022 year class and older) Walleye were the most commonly harvested ages lake-wide.

Table 1. Summary of walleye harvest by jurisdiction in Lake Erie, 2025.

in number of fish	TAC Area (MU-1, MU-2, MU-3)				Non-TAC Area (MU-4 & MU-5)				All Areas
	Michigan	Ohio	Ontario	Total	NY	Penn.	Ontario	Total	Total
	663,046	5,812,740	4,897,214	11,373,000	-	-	-	-	11,373,000
Share	5.83%	51.11%	43.06%	100.00%	-	-	-	-	100.00%
	172,692	2,882,454	5,218,536	8,273,682	179,299	414,294	314,920	908,513	9,182,195
Harvest %TAC	26.0%	49.6%	106.6%	72.7%					

Table 2. Ontario Walleye gillnet effort in 2025.

	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Units 4 & 5
Effort (km)	4,379	4,452	2,114	1,313
change from 2024	-26%	-35%	-26%	-11%

Table 3. Summary of sport fishery effort reported in thousands of hours for 2025.

	Unit 1 - MI	Unit 1 - OH	Unit 2 - OH	Unit 3 - OH	Units 4&5- PA	Units 4&5- NY
Effort (1000s hrs)	256	1,641	783	658	298	213
change from 2024	3%	21%	-17%	1%	-2%	1%

Catch-at-Age Abundance Estimate and Projected 2026 and 2027 Recruitment

Based on the 2026 SCAA model, the 2025 population estimate was 80.6 million age 2 and older Walleye (Figure 2). The abundance of age 2 (2023 year class) fish was estimated to be 18.7 million and was 2nd most abundant year class in 2025, with age 4 (2021 year class) being the most abundant. Using the 2025 SCAA model, the number of age 2 recruits entering the population in 2026 (2024 year class) and 2027 (2025 year class) were projected to be 4.8 million and 22.5 million fish, respectively. The projected abundance of age 2 and older Walleye in the MU 1 to 3 population is 57.6 million Walleye in 2026 (Table 4). Age 2 Walleye from the 2024 cohort (4.8 million fish) are projected to account for only 8% of the population in 2026, with the 2021 cohort (13.4 million; age 5) and 2023 cohort (13.1 million; age 3) being the most abundant year classes. The projected spawning stock biomass (SSB) for 2026 and 2027 is 70.900 and 54.168 million kilograms, respectively (Table 4).
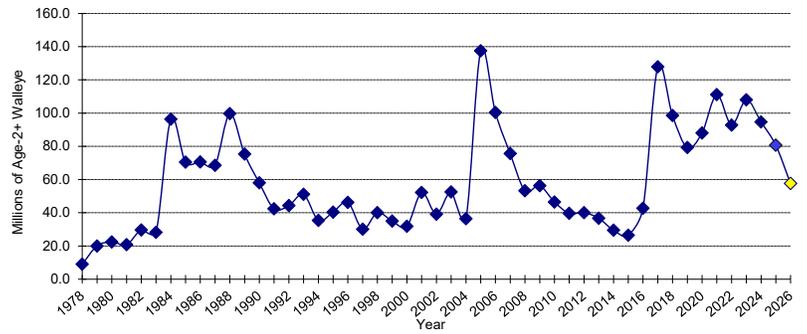

Figure 2. Population estimates of Lake Erie Walleye ages 2 and older from 1978 to 2025 (blue points), and the projection for 2026 (yellow point), from the WTG's SCAA model.

2026 Harvest Strategy and Recommended Allowable Harvest (RAH)

Beginning in 2015, the current Walleye management plan was implemented and includes the WTG's SCAA model and a probabilistic harvest control rule (HCR). The HCR was updated for 2026 when the process that calculates the target fishing rate was changed to correct errors in the former process (see WTG report). The updated HCR sets the target fishing rate at 80% of the instantaneous fishing mortality rate at maximum sustainable yield (F_{msy}), with an accompanying limit reference point that will reduce the target fishing rate beginning at 20% of the unfished spawning stock biomass ($20\%SSB_0$). A probabilistic control rule, P-star (P*), was set at 0.05 and was incorporated to ensure that SSB in 2027 is not below the 20% SSB_0 threshold after fishing in 2026. In addition, there is a limitation of TAC variation from one year to the next of ± 20% to implement a measure of fishery stability. Using results from the 2026 SCAA model, the harvest policy, and selectivity estimates from the current fisheries, a mean RAH of 8.617 million fish was calculated for 2026, with a range of 7.063 to 10.171 million fish (Table 4). The mean RAH for 2026 is 24% less than the 2024 TAC, which means the ± 20% TAC constraint is invoked when calculating the TAC range. The TAC range for 2026 based on the SCAA model, the harvest policy, and the ± 20% TAC constraint from the previous year is 9.098 to 10.171 million fish.

Table 4. Estimated harvest of Lake Erie walleye for 2026, and population projection for 2027 when fishing with 80% F_{msy}. The 2026 and 2027 projected spawning stock biomass values are from the ADMB-2026 recruitment-integrated model. The range in the RAH was calculated using ± one standard deviation from the mean RAH.

SSB_0=   53.765   million kilograms
20% SSB_0=   10.753   million kilograms
F_{msy} =   0.270

Age	2026 Stock Size (millions of fish) Mean	80% F_{msy} F	Sel(age)	Rate Functions (F)	(S)	(u)	2026 RAH (millions of fish) Min.	Mean	Max.	Projected 2027 Stock Size (millions) Mean
2	4.778		0.257	0.056	0.687	0.046	0.166	0.221	0.276	22.538
3	13.098		0.894	0.193	0.599	0.151	1.624	1.978	2.332	3.282
4	10.159		1.000	0.216	0.585	0.167	1.403	1.699	1.994	7.842
5	13.447		0.942	0.204	0.592	0.158	1.752	2.131	2.510	5.944
6	3.358		0.885	0.191	0.600	0.150	0.410	0.503	0.595	7.966
7+	12.762		0.975	0.211	0.588	0.163	1.707	2.086	2.464	9.521
Total (2+)	57.602	0.216				0.150	7.063	8.617	10.171	57.093
Total (3+)	52.824						6.897	8.396	9.895	34.555
SSB	70.900	mil. kgs								54.168 mil. kgs

probability of 2027 spawning stock biomass being less than 20% SSB_0 =   0.000%