

Lake Ontario Fisheries Advisory Panel

Meeting 2

Date: October 5, 2022
Location: Holiday Inn - Webster, NY
Time 5:30 PM – 8:30 PM

Agenda

1. Welcome/Pizza
2. Angler perspectives on the fishery
 - Members to share their perspectives on fishing in 2022
3. DEC fisheries management highlights
 - 2022 open lake creel survey
 - 2022 spring preysurvey
 - Sea lamprey control
 - Lake Ontario Atlantic salmon fisheries management plan
 - Cormorant control
4. Approach to Lake Ontario stocking decisions
 - Review of the current process
 - Why we need a new process
 - Timeline for 2023 stocking decision
 - Brief overview of how DEC/OMNRF would like to approach setting stocking targets going forward

Meeting Notes

Attendance

DEC staff attendance

Position	Name	Present or absent
Fisheries Bureau Chief	Steve Hurst	Present
Lake Ontario Unit Leader	Chris Legard	Present
Region 6 Fisheries Manager	Jana Lantry	Present
Region 7 Fisheries Manager	Scott Prindle	Present
Region 8 Fisheries Manager	Web Pearsall	Present
Region 9 Fisheries Manager	Mike Clancy	Present
Lake Ontario Unit Biologist	Mike Connerton	Present
Lake Ontario Unit Biologist	Jessica Goretzke	Present

Other DEC staff present

None

LOFAP Member Attendance

Management area	Lake or tributary	Name	Present or absent
West	Lake	Vince Pierleoni	Present
West	Lake	Bob Songin	Present
West	Tributary	Frank Campbell	Present
West	Tributary	Ron Bierstine	Absent
West central	Lake	Jerry Felluca	Present
West central	Lake	Rob Westcott	Present
West central	Tributary	Scott Feltrinelli	Present
West central	Tributary	Jesse Hollenbeck	Present
East central	Lake	Brian Garrett	Present
East central	Lake	Mike Wilkinson	Present
East central	Tributary	AJ Sinicropi	Absent
East central	Tributary	Andy Bliss	Present
East	Lake	Tom Burke	Present
East	Lake	Vacant	N/A
East	Tributary	Vacant	N/A
East	Tributary	Vacant	N/A
At large	N/A	Joe Yeager	Present

Panel Member Feedback on the 2022 Fishing Season

- Brown trout fishing was good in all lake areas.
- Chinook fishing started good in the spring but declined and was poor in late summer with poor staging fisheries reported in all lake areas. Panel members generally felt that Chinook fishing was below average this year.
- High numbers of age-1 Chinook were reported in all lake areas.
- Lake trout fishing was good in the east central area when Chinook were not available.
- Chinook fishing has been poor in the Niagara River and fishing effort is low compared to previous years.
- Several Lake Ontario tributaries have had low water levels and low numbers of fish have been returning to tributaries during September. Early returns were poor at Niagara River, Eighteenmile Creek, Oak Orchard Creek, Sandy Creek, and Genesee River.
- The Salmon River had a good return of fish in late September/early October.
- High numbers of Chinook jacks were reported in several tributaries.
- Extremely high numbers of sea lamprey were reported in all lake areas.

DEC Fisheries Management Highlights

- Open lake creel survey
 - Mike Connerton provided an update on the preliminary 2022 open lake creel survey results.
 - DEC staff and panel members had a lengthy discussion about the creel survey methods, results, how results compare to angler observations, different ways the results could be displayed, and ways the survey could be improved.
- Spring prefish survey
 - Jessica Goretzke provided an update on the spring prefish survey results. A full report is available on [the Great Lakes Fishery Commission website](#).
- Sea lamprey control
 - Sea lamprey control in the Great Lakes is coordinated by the Great Lakes Fishery Commission and implemented by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO).
 - All sea lamprey control treatments in Lake Ontario are done by DFO.
 - DFO was unable to conduct any treatments in Lake Ontario during 2020 due to travel restrictions from COVID-19.
 - DFO treated streams in the Province of Ontario in 2021 but was unable to travel to New York to conduct treatments.
 - DEC partnered with USFWS Lake Champlain sea lamprey control unit to conduct treatments on four streams in New York 2021.
 - However, nine streams scheduled for treatment in 2020 and 2021 were not treated.
 - DFO conducted all 9 treatments in May and August 2022.
 - Missed treatments in 2020 and 2021 resulted in extremely high numbers of adult sea lamprey in Lake Ontario in 2022. Sea lamprey numbers are likely to remain high for a few years while sea lamprey control treatments catch up to pre-pandemic levels.
- Atlantic salmon fisheries management plan
 - DEC's draft Lake Ontario Atlantic salmon fisheries management plan was put out for public comment this summer.
 - Public comments were generally split between anglers who did not want DEC to pursue Atlantic salmon management and anglers who wanted DEC to make a greater

- investment in Atlantic salmon management.
- DEC is developing a formal response to public comments and a final plan that should be available in late fall.
- Cormorant control
 - DEC partnered with the U.S. Department of Agriculture to conduct cormorant hazing at some Lake Ontario stocking sites in 2022 and plans to continue the program in 2023.

Approach to Stocking Decisions

- DEC and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (OMNRF) review and agree upon lakewide stocking targets annually
- From 2016-2020, uncertainty about the future alewife population and predator prey balance led the agencies to implement a series of stocking reductions for Chinook salmon and lake trout
- In 2021 the agencies agreed to a small stocking increase
- Stocking decisions from 2016-2021 were based on variety of indicators including the average weight of Chinook salmon, lakewide alewife biomass, alewife age structure, and in recent years included the predicted alewife biomass.
- Moving forward DEC and OMNRF plan to develop a formal process for how stocking decisions are made that will include specific predator prey balance indicators and threshold values that will guide when stocking adjustments should be made.
- DEC staff and panel members discussed how the new approach to stocking decisions will be developed and some of the potential predator prey balance indicators that may be included.
- The decision on 2023 stocking levels will be made in November based on a set of interim predator prey balance indicators as the new process is still being developed.