

# Lake Ontario Fisheries Advisory Panel

**Date:** January 17, 2023  
**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 2022/23. Given the season we would specifically like to hear about tributary fishing.
3. Discussion on 2023 stocking numbers
4. Lake Ontario public outreach
  - Discuss what information anglers would like to receive from DEC during public outreach activities
  - Discuss options for conducting public outreach
  - Discuss ways we can reach tributary anglers and recreational anglers
5. DEC fisheries management updates
  - DEC plans for the Niagara Expo
  - Update on Cares Act funding for the charter boat industry

# Meeting notes

## **Attendance**

### DEC staff attendance

<b>Position</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Present or absent</b>
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

<b>Management area</b>	<b>Lake or tributary</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Present or absent</b>
West	Lake	Vince Pierleoni	Present
West	Lake	Bob Songin	Present
West	Tributary	Frank Campbell	Present
West	Tributary	Ron Bierstine	Present
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	Absent
East central	Lake	Mike Wilkinson	Present
East central	Tributary	AJ Sinicropi	Present
East central	Tributary	Andy Bliss	Present
East	Lake	Tom Burke	Present
East	Lake	Mike Howard	Present
East	Tributary	Jason Hamilton	Absent
East	Tributary	Vacant	N/A
At large	N/A	Joe Yeager	Present

## **Angler perspectives on the fishery**

- Given the time of year the discussion focused primarily on the tributary fishery in fall 2022 and early winter 2023.
- Enhanced base flows

- Enhanced base flows in Eighteenmile Creek, Oak Orchard Creek, and Sandy Creek (Monroe Co.) from the New York State Barge Canal were beneficial for the fall fishing season.
- Atlantic salmon
  - Atlantic salmon fishing was very good this year in Sandy Creek (Monroe Co.), Oak Orchard Creek, and Salmon River. Numbers were higher than normal in Oak Orchard Creek and Salmon River. This is the first return from the recent stocking in Sandy Creek.
- Brown trout
  - Brown trout fishing in Sandy Creek (Monroe Co.) was better than recent years but still lower than some of the great years 5 or more years ago.
  - Brown trout fishing in Eighteenmile Creek and Oak Orchard Creek was similar to Sandy Creek – good but not great.
  - A lot of anglers are fishing browns in the Niagara River and are catching good numbers, but fish are small.
  - Irondequoit Creek seemed to have low numbers of lake run browns this fall.
  - Small streams had low flows this fall and few brown trout were present.
- Steelhead
  - Low steelhead numbers were reported in most streams during October, but numbers improved in November and December.
  - There seems to be a lot of smaller sized steelhead (20-24 inch) and some large steelhead but not a lot of medium sized fish.
  - Steelhead fishing has been good in the Niagara River when water level/color was good.
- Chinook salmon
  - The Chinook fishing in the Salmon River was good this year.
  - Oak Orchard Creek and Eighteenmile Creek also had good Chinook fishing, but returns were spread out over a longer than normal period of time.
  - The Niagara River had good Chinook fishing, but the run was later than normal.
  - The Black River had good Chinook fishing.
- Coho salmon
  - Coho returns were good at Eighteenmile Creek, Oak Orchard Creek, Salmon River, and Black River.
- Lake trout
  - Lake trout fishing has been good in the Niagara River with consistent catches.
- DEC Lake Ontario tributary creel survey
  - DEC staff reported that angler observations matched well with preliminary data from the tributary creel survey.

## **2023 stocking numbers**

- New York and Ontario agreed to a 10% increase in Chinook salmon stocking for 2023.
- Since 2016, New York and Ontario have been adaptively managing the number of salmon and trout stocked into Lake Ontario based on the status of the prey fish population and growth and condition of Chinook salmon.
- The decision to increase stocking in 2023 was based on the predicted Alewife biomass and the average weight of age-3 Chinook salmon.
  - Age-2 and older alewife biomass increased in 2022 and is predicted to remain at similar levels in 2023 and 2024 (See [Weidel et al. 2022](#) for more information).
  - The average weight of an age-3 Chinook salmon (measured in the open lake fishery during August) was 20.7 pounds and was above the minimum target of 18.4 pounds specified in the Lake Ontario Fish Community Objectives.
- New York Plans to stock a total of 985,180 Chinook salmon in 2023, which is an increase of approximately 90,000 over 2022.
- DEC is allocating the additional Chinook salmon based on an even distribution among the stocking sites identified in the [Lake Ontario salmon and trout stocking strategy](#) (not including Salmon River). The Salmon River stocking number will be the same as 2022. Salmon River serves as the hatchery broodstock and is stocked with higher numbers (300,000) of Chinook salmon than the other stocking locations (Table 1).
- DEC staff and LOFAP members think the cooperative pen-rearing programs at each stocking site have the capacity to hold all the additional fish in pens.

**Table 1.** 2023 Chinook salmon stocking numbers

<b><u>2023 Chinook salmon stocking numbers</u></b>	
<b>Location</b>	<b>Number stocked</b>
Niagara River	89,930
Eighteenmile Creek (Olcott)	126,330
Oak Orchard Creek	126,330
Genesee River	126,330
Oswego River	126,330
Salmon River	300,000
Sackets Harbor (Black River)	89,930

## **Public outreach**

- DEC previously conducted a series of “State of the Lake” public meetings. These meetings provided a venue for DEC to transfer information to the public but did not provide a good venue for having discussions and learning.

- DEC is considering different ways to approach public outreach and asked LOFAP for input on what information anglers were interested in and what methods would be best to engage with the public.
- LOFAP members indicated that anglers were interested in discussing topics that were likely to impact their fishing quality, for example, sea lamprey, cormorants, stocking numbers, fisheries management actions, preyfish population status, long-term fisheries management plans, and issues of emerging concern.
- LOFAP members supported moving away from “State of the Lake” meetings. Members thought the presentations were too voluminous, difficult for some people to understand and did not always cover areas of interest to the anglers.
- Panel members recommended continuing to have targeted meetings with angling groups (e.g., Lake Ontario Charter Boat Association, Lake Ontario Trout and Salmon Association, and Eastern Lake Ontario Salmon and Trout Association).
- The group discussed ways to expand outreach to recreational anglers and tributary anglers, which are largely unorganized.
- Recommendations included
  - Continuing to host the DEC open house at the Niagara Expo.
  - Considering adding one or more open house style meetings at other sport shows.
  - Meeting with TU chapters.
  - Engaging with fishing-oriented podcasts.
  - Developing more targeted material to send out via newsletter and social media. These should be short ‘news flash’ type items that are easily digestible and targeted on a single topic.
  - Considering focused web-based meetings. These meetings would be focused on a single topic and used to get angler input and answer questions.

### **DEC management updates**

- DEC staff will be hosting an open house at the Niagara Expo. This was done in 2020 and was a very successful way to interact with a broad spectrum of anglers.
- The CARES Act allocated \$1.9 million dollars to mitigate COVID-19 impacts to the for-hire Charter fishing and commercial fishing industry in New York’s Great Lakes.
- These funds are administered by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).
- Approximately \$170,000 was dispersed to individual applicants to mitigate impacts to individual charter businesses.
- The remaining funds will be used to implement a marketing program for Great Lakes charter fishing. The program will be implemented in Lake Erie by the Eastern Lake Erie Charter Boat Association. The program in Lake

Ontario will be implemented by Destination Niagara USA, in cooperation with the Lake Ontario Charter Boat Association and the Lake Ontario Sportfishing Promotion Council.