U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Alpena FRO Accomplishment Report

Aquatic Species Conservation and Management

Lake Whitefish Stock Delineation Planning Meeting

Project Leader McClain and Fishery Biologist Aaron Woldt traveled to Port Huron on December 3 for an interagency planning meeting to pursue Lake Huron lake whitefish stock delineation. The need for delineation of whitefish stocks has been discussed at the Lake Huron Technical Committee level and more recently identified as a need of the Modeling Subcommittee for harvest management in 1836 Treaty waters of Lake Huron as a component of 2000 Consent Decree implementation.

Planning meeting participants included biologists from Michigan DNR, Chippewa-Ottawa Resource Authority, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Saugeen First Nations, and the Service. The group clarified the need for such information and agreed to produce a grant proposal seeking funding for the work. Genetic analysis and tagging were identified as two critical components of the study.

St. Clair River lake sturgeon project completed

Fishery Biologist James Boase completed the project completion report titled "Evaluation of Lake Sturgeon Spawning Reef in the St. Clair River". The report summarized the findings of a telemetry study funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation that began in April and ended in December 2002. The report will be posted on the Alpena FRO web site located at http://midwest.fws.gov/alpena/index.htm and will be submitted for publication to peer reviewed journals.

Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Management

Metzger Marsh Summary of Findings and Recommendations Report

A final Metzger Marsh fish passage report was submitted to the Ohio Division of Wildlife on December 18. This report will be compiled with other final research reports and submitted to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE) for review as a part of the final post dike report to fulfill the requirements of the permit. A conference call between the Ohio Division of Wildlife (ODOW), managers from Ottawa NWR, COE and Biologist Wells was held on December 6 to update the COE on the status of the final research report for Metzger Marsh. Personnel at the Corps, in charge of the permit, are

newly assigned to this project and were informed about the history of this project. Deadline for the submission to the COE is March 31, 2003. Upon completion of their review, it will be determined if further involvement of the COE in the project is required. The Corps of Engineers has until July 2003 to respond to the findings of the report.

Biologist Wells is continuing to conduct a more extensive analysis of the biotic and abiotic parameters at the structure for an internal report to be submitted at a later date. Further analyses of the fish passage, larval fish samples, and minnow trap data will be included in this analysis.

Cooperation with Native Americans

Lake Huron Technical Committee Meeting

Fishery Biologist Aaron Woldt of the Alpena FRO attended the winter Lake Huron Technical Committee (LHTC) Meeting in Port Huron, MI from January 21 to 23, 2003. Woldt presented analysis of lake trout movement in Lake Huron based on recoveries of coded-wire-tags. Coded-wire-tags are microscopic tags placed in the snouts of hatchery lake trout prior to stocking. Tags are extracted from lake trout at the time of harvest.

In 1992, 1994, 1996, and 1998, 60,000 coded-wire-tagged yearling lake trout were planted at each of 6 sites (Drummond Island Refuge, Adams Point, Middle Island, Six Fathom Bank, Sturgeon Point, Point Au Barques) in the main basin of Lake Huron. Tagged lake trout are re-captured in recreational, commercial, and assessment gears by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Chippewa Ottawa Resource Authority, United States Geological Survey Biological Resource Division, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, and the USFWS.

Woldt presented GIS based maps showing the spatial distribution of tagged lake trout recaptures and the average distance moved from each stocking location. Woldt also presented trends in distance moved with lake trout age as well as descriptive statistics of movement data. The Modeling Subcommittee (MSC) of the Technical Fisheries Committee (TFC) will use these results to update the stocking movement matrix in the 1836 Treaty water statistical-catch-at-age (SCAA) models. These models are updated annually and used to set harvest limits in treaty waters as mandated by the 2000 Consent Decree—a 20 year fishery allocation agreement for 1836 Treaty waters signed by the State of Michigan, United States, Bay Mills Indian Community, Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, Little River Band of Ottawa Indians, and Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians.

Statistical Catch At Age Workshop

Fishery Biologist Aaron Woldt of the Alpena FRO attended a Statistical-Catch-At-Age (SCAA) workshop given by Dr. Jim Bence at Michigan State University from January 6 to 10, 2003. Dr. Bence instructed conference attendees in the use of AD Model Builder

software to build SCAA models of fish stocks. Currently, AD Model Builder based models are used and updated annually by the Modeling Subcommittee (MSC) of the Technical Fisheries Committee to set lake trout and lake whitefish harvest limits in 1836 Treaty waters as mandated by the 2000 Consent Decree—a 20 year fishery allocation agreement for 1836 Treaty waters signed by the State of Michigan, United States, Bay Mills Indian Community, Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, Little River Band of Ottawa Indians, and Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians. Dr. Bence was a founding member of the MSC and was instrumental in developing the original SCAA models used for 1836 Treaty waters.

Other topics of discussion at the workshop included model debugging, testing for model convergence, using alternative methods to estimate fishery selectivity and catchability, and methods to assess uncertainty of model estimates.

Partnerships and Accountability

Alpena FRO partner recognized for assistance

Fishery Biologist James Boase traveled to Toronto, Canada on January 14, 2003 to attend the Annual Ontario Commercial Fisherman's Association Meeting. Boase and Lloyd Mohr, biologist from Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, co-presented a letter of appreciation and signed print of a lake sturgeon to Tim and Milford Purdy of Purdy Fisheries. The award was presented during the banquet dinner attended by commercial fishers and biologists from both Canada and the U.S. The award recognized the willingness and cooperation of the Purdy Family to work with biologists from Ontario, the Service, USGS, Michigan DNR, and international researchers for the benefit of the resource. The forum was an excellent opportunity for Boase to explain how the Alpena FRO is working with commercial fishers in both Canada and the US in efforts to better understand sturgeon populations throughout the Great lakes. The workshop provided Boase an opportunity to interact with commercial fishers and lake sturgeon professionals from Ontario.

Alpena FRO Presents Partners Program at NRCS Regional Recognition Meeting

On December 10 Alpena FRO Partners for Fish and Wildlife Coordinator, Heather Enterline gave a presentation at the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Area II Recognition meeting held in Grayling, MI. Enterline presented the 2002 activities of the Service Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program at the Alpena FRO, and discussed how the Partners program and Farm Bill programs can work together to provide more options to private landowners. All of the NRCS District Conservationists in the Alpena FRO's area of responsibility were present for the presentation. The presentation was well received, and important contacts were made.

Public Use

New Look for the Alpena Fishery Resources Office Web Site

The Alpena Fishery Resources Office's web site http://midwest.fws.gov/alpena/index.htm got a new look in January when the design and content was updated. The site has information on U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service lake trout, lake sturgeon, invasive species, refuge fishery, tribal assistance, and Partners for Fish and Wildlife activities in Lake Huron and western Lake Erie. The new design is more user friendly and many of the 40 or more station reports are also available in pdf format to make printing easy. We welcome all to check it out!

Alpena FRO Staff interviewed for sturgeon story in Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

Assistant Project Leader Tracy Hill was interviewed by reporter Lee Bergquist for an article about lake sturgeon. Mr. Bergquist is a reporter for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. Bergquist was developing an article to discuss Wisconsin's upcoming lake sturgeon spearing season on Lake Winnebago. While doing some research for the article Bergquist had come across Hill's name in a Washington Post article from summer 2002. He contacted Hill to get specific information on a lake sturgeon that had been tagged by Wisconsin DNR in 1978 and had been recaptured in Lakes Huron and Erie in 1993, 1997 and 1999. Hill also provided Mr. Bergquist with the names of Michigan Department of Natural Resources biologists that could provide him with information on the lake sturgeon spearing season on Black Lake in Michigan's northern lower peninsula. Hill had an opportunity to highlight the Service's role in conservation of native aquatic species.

Leadership in Science and Technology

Internet access upgrade at Alpena FRO

Administrative Technician Debra Turner has completed the first step in upgrading the internet service at the Alpena FRO offices.

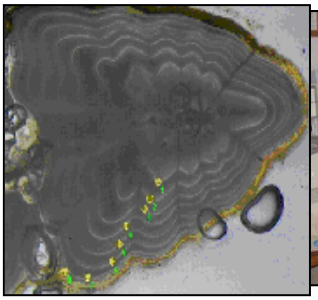
With the current dial-up modem process, communications are extremely time-consuming. A large portion of each workday is spent waiting on the transfer in and out of files and communications. Numerous disconnections happen each workday.

Cable and satellite providers were contacted and technical information regarding their services was obtained. These options, with recommendations from the Alpena FRO, were forwarded to the regional office. The decision was made to go with cable.

The cable company was contacted regarding installation. Technicians from the company arrived for an overview of the Alpena FRO offices and where the cable would be

installed. A router was purchased and sent to the regional office for security software installation. The cable installation has been scheduled for early February.

Fish Ageing Workshop



Fish and Wildlife Biologist Adam Kowalski attended a fish ageing workshop at the Department of Natural Resources Fisheries Research Station in Charleviox, Michigan on January 16 and 17, 2003. The focus of the workshop was a new imaging program being used to age fish. State, Federal, and Tribal biologists attended the workshop. Attendees were shown how to age scales, spines, and otoliths using image pro plus software. Students were given hands on experience with the software. The workshop ended with a discussion on benefits of forming a unified system for ageing fish of all species of concern across agencies.

Gill net Construction

Throughout the months of December 2002 and January 2003, Fishery Biologists Aaron Woldt and Adam Kowalski have been working to build and repair station gill nets in preparation for the 2003 field season. The Alpena FRO maintains a stock of nylon, multifilament, graded-mesh (2" to 6") gill nets for use in its yearly lake trout and lake whitefish surveys in 1836 Treaty waters. Graded-mesh, nylon gill nets are the standard assessment tool for Great Lakes' lake trout and lake whitefish used by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Chippewa Ottawa Resource Authority, United States Geological Survey Biological Resource Division, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, and the USFWS. Woldt inventoried all station net building supplies, and Woldt and Kowalski acquired all other materials needed to build 8 new 900-foot long boxes of 2" to 6" graded-mesh nets. Woldt found and contracted a local net builder to construct 8 new boxes of net, and that work has been completed. Woldt and Kowalski assisted the contractor, as needed, in the building of these nets. The contractor is also mending and instructing Kowalski to mend nets used during 2002. Mending consists of patching holes in net mesh and replacing the lead core lead line on each net. Currently, 2 boxes of net have been mended. When work is complete, 12 new/mended boxes of net will be available for 2003 survey work.

Workforce Management

Staff reorganization at the Alpena FRO

After consultation with Regional Office Fishery supervisors, the Alpena FRO has decided to relocate Fishery Biologist Susan Wells from the Ottawa NWR to the home office in Alpena. Biologist Wells has been located at the refuge since 1998 to provide on-site monitoring of the fish passage structure at the Metzger Marsh Wetland Restoration Project. The Corps of Engineers (COE) permit required the Service to conduct surveys at the structure to evaluate the fishery benefits of the restoration project. The permit expires

on March 31, 2003 and a Report of Findings and Recommendations will be provided to the COE.

Although work will continue at the site and within the restored marsh to further evaluate fishery benefits, it was decided that our primary responsibility has ended relative to intensive on-site monitoring and can now be handled with periodic survey work completed out of the Alpena office.

Project Leader McClain and Assistant Project Leader Hill met with Biologist Wells on January 13 to discuss the decision and begin the process of making the move. A tentative moving date of April 6 has been established.

Accomplishment Archive