

STUDY PERFORMANCE REPORT

State: Michigan

Project No.: F-81-R-6

Study No.: 230462

Title: Charter boat fishing effort, harvest, and harvest rate in the Michigan waters of the Great Lakes

Period Covered: October 1, 2004 - September 30, 2005

Study Objectives: To obtain a continuous annual record of charter boat fishing effort, harvest and harvest rate directed towards the major sport-fish in the Michigan waters of the Great Lakes. To determine the ratio of resident to non-resident charter anglers. To provide a measure of sea lamprey occurrence on lake trout and Chinook salmon to the USFWS.

Summary: This report presents results from the 2004 charter angling season. Similar data are being collected for the 2005 season; these will be summarized in next year's report.

In March of 2004, MDNR Charlevoix Fisheries Research Station personnel mailed harvest forms, instructions on how to fill-out and mail the forms, and grid maps of the Great Lakes, to all charter fishing operators who possessed a license to fish the Michigan waters of the Great Lakes and their major tributaries. State of Michigan Public Act 451 (Act 22) requires all charter operators to record their daily fishing effort and harvest on these forms and return them to the department on a monthly basis. During the 2004 data collection season, Charlevoix staff sent post card or certified mail notification to delinquent charter operators and found that 96% of all charter operators complied with State-mandated reporting requirements by the end of the season. Study results were disseminated as follows: a written report of harvest, summarized by Great Lake, was mailed to all charter operators in 2005 (as mandated by Michigan State Public Act 451); detailed harvest results were presented at meetings of charter organizations and Citizen Advisory Groups; and data were posted on the MDNR website.

In 2004, a total of 66,845 charter anglers participated in 16,100 excursions on the Michigan waters of Lakes Michigan, Huron, Erie, Superior, and the St. Clair system, including the major tributaries, and spent 391,035 angler hours fishing. There was a 12% drop in charter anglers, 10% drop in excursion number and 13% drop in angler hours from 2003 to 2004. Charter operators reported a total of 157,239 fish harvested from the Michigan waters of the Great Lakes and its major tributaries in 2004. The most numerous species in the 2004 harvest was Chinook salmon (74,962), followed by lake trout (24,245), yellow perch (19,470), and walleye (17,329). Relative to 2003, 2004 Chinook salmon harvest numbers increased by 14%. For all other species, 2004 harvest numbers decreased. In 2004, sea lamprey incidence on Chinook salmon decreased in both Lake Michigan and Lake Huron compared to 2003, whereas sea lamprey occurrence on lake trout increased in Lakes Michigan, Huron and Superior.

Findings: Jobs 1 through 4 were scheduled for 2004-05 and progress is reported below.

Job 1. Distribute data forms.—In March 2004, Charlevoix personnel mailed charter report forms, instructions on how to fill-out and mail the forms, and grid maps of the Great Lakes to approximately 500 charter operators. With these mailings, personnel reminded operators that they were required by law to complete the form every time they fished and that the report must be mailed to Charlevoix MDNR by the tenth day of the following month.

Job 2. Data entry and compliance.—As charter report forms arrived at the Charlevoix Station in 2004, personnel checked the forms for completeness. If incomplete, they returned the forms to charter operators with an explanation and request for completion. In some cases, Charlevoix personnel did not receive report forms by the due date; therefore, they sent post-card notices to delinquent charter boat operators requesting that the form be sent. The first notice was sent after an operator was delinquent for 10 days; the second after 30 days. If the first two notices did not elicit a response, Charlevoix personnel sent a final notice through certified mail, which stated that it would be the last notice. By the end of December 2004, 96% of all charter operators had complied with the law. During the 2005 season, the second monthly notice to charter anglers was discontinued.

Charlevoix staff continued close coordination with Law Enforcement to identify reasons for noncompliance. This enabled Charlevoix staff to identify those operators who failed to submit forms for acceptable reasons (e.g. stopped fishing during the middle of the season); therefore reducing the percentage of noncompliant operators. Furthermore, the coordination effort enabled Charlevoix staff to identify and add operators who were absent from the database, improving the accuracy of effort and harvest totals for the following year. MDNR's Law Enforcement Division handled all remaining delinquent cases, where loss of inspection certificates was more probable.

Job 3. Quality control and education.—Between October 1, 2004 and September 30, 2005, program personnel made presentations at Sea Grant charter and fisheries workshops, MDNR Citizen's Advisory Meetings, and other public and agency meetings. These workshops and meetings provided an opportunity to (1) share local and lake-wide fishing data; (2) educate charter operators about the importance of accurate and timely data reporting, (3) explain how to interpret results and how the data are used to address fisheries management concerns; (3) address questions and get feedback about the program; and (4) promote positive and trusting relationships between the public and the MDNR. Furthermore, Charlevoix personnel emphasized the importance of accurate reporting throughout the entire season via telephone conversations with charter operators.

Job 4. Compile data and write annual reports.—Data are summarized in the attached report (Thayer 2005). Copies of this report, as mandated by law, were mailed to all charter operators during 2005. The report, as well as summary tables for individual ports, is also available on the MDNR website.

Thayer, S.A. 2005. Charter Boat Fishing Effort and Harvest from the Michigan Waters of the Great Lakes, 2004. Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Charlevoix.

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