

1980-1990 Michigan Fisheries A Foundation for the Future

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

The purpose of this report is to document the performance of Michigan's fishery resources and the Fisheries Division during the 1980's. It provides a measure of the impacts of changes in the Division's structure and direction that have occurred during the decade. It ties deeds to dollars. One frame work for measuring that performance is compliance with the Division's goals which are to:

**Protect and maintain healthy aquatic environments and fish communities and rehabilitate those now degraded;*

**secure assured public access and appropriate facilities on all waters which support or have the potential to support significant public fisheries;*

**provide diverse fishing opportunities within geographic areas and maximize the value to fishermen of recreational fishing;*

**permit and encourage economically efficient and stable commercial fisheries which do not conflict with recreational fisheries;*

**insure a significant role in our commercial fisheries for those Indian tribes with recognized fishing rights;*

**recover the cost of management from resource beneficiaries; and*

**foster and contribute to public and scientific understanding of fish, fishing, and fishery management.*

The Fisheries Division pursues these goals through five programs -- recreational fisheries, commercial and Indian treaty fisheries, Great Lakes fishery resources, inland fishery resources, and fish production -- guided by Division management.

Programs and activities are examined and the Division's performance evaluated by examining the Division's response to our public's interests, our operational efficiency, the quality and growth of our fisheries and our progress in habitat protection and restoration.

We think the accomplishments documented in this report reveal the kind of resource stewardship and the "*quality fishing*" initiatives that our public and our leadership expect.

Even more significant than this assessment of our past performance is the potential value this document has to guide us through the meaningful changes which will be so necessary in the 1990's.

During the 1980's the Division was strengthened by several initiatives involving goal-oriented management, one being a major internal effort. The changes in the Division perspective and that of its people were not abrupt, but in retrospect these changes in perspective may be the most important thing to happen to us since salmon were introduced. The Division now routinely speaks of its vision and expectations for a lake, river, or for the Great Lakes. We prepare status reports following all survey work that compare waters' status to not only the past but to our long range expectations for the future. Management prescriptions are prepared to address problems that block the way to better fishing and periodic evaluation measures our progress toward our expectations.

The Division has played a strong role in Great Lakes fisheries matters during the '80s, much of it in the forum provided by meetings and coordination of the Great Lakes Fishery Commission.

During the 1980's, we have seen a recovery of lake trout in most of our waters of Lake Superior where lake trout stocks are now over 90-95% wild, naturally produced fish and are at strong levels of abundance. During the 1980's, all of our waters enjoyed record levels of whitefish harvest, a decade of whitefish production unmatched in this century.

Perch reached record abundance and perch fishing flourished in Lake Michigan and strengthened in Lake Huron's Saginaw Bay late in the decade.

The abundance of bloater chubs reached record highs in Lake Michigan in the 1980's, retreating from the brink of extinction they faced in the mid-1970's.

In March of 1985, an Indian Fishing Agreement was reached that did much to diffuse an explosive fishing conflict in waters governed by the treaty of 1836. The tribes agreed to concentrate their commercial fishing in the extreme northern parts of lakes Michigan and Huron and in eastern Lake Superior in exchange for exclusive commercial rights there, which left the rest of the lakes available to the important sport fishery and state-licensed commercial fishermen.

Walleye populations and walleye fishing increased dramatically in Lake Erie, southern Lake Huron, Saginaw Bay, and the Muskegon River, along with numerous inland situations.

The Division strengthened its resolve to provide good fishing opportunities to southern Michigan through intensified management and research efforts on warmwater lakes and rivers, and increased public access. More shore fishing and handicapped access was provided.

After 20 years of growth, the Lake Michigan salmon fishery peaked and declined in the mid-1980's, but growth of salmon fishing continued on Lake Huron.

Fish contaminants continued to cast a negative tone in the 1980's even though levels of most contaminants in fish fell substantially. Fish eating advisories (warnings) were expanded as result of better data and analysis.

A considerable shift in philosophy embracing catch-and-release fishing regulations aimed at elevating the quality of angling occurred in the 1980's. Catch-and-release fishing gained strong support, especially among trout, bass, and muskellunge fishermen and regulations were adopted in support of this ethic. A system of Blue Ribbon Trout Streams was designated in 1987 with accompanying management direction and policies.

Another shift came in the area of habitat protection with emphasis changing from instream or in-lake improvement structures toward broader and more important concerns at the watershed level. Some additional responsibilities were given to Division, most notable of which was the Federal Energy Regulation Commission's relicensing effort involving operation of dams at 50 power generating facilities in Michigan.

A broadening of perspective and the force of necessity caused interagency cooperation to increase toward the close of the decade. Especially noteworthy is the strengthening of the Division's working relationship with Land and Water Management and Surface Water Quality divisions and in the establishment of new partnerships with community and clientele leadership statewide.

Cooperative ventures with communities and support groups aided resource husbandry in the latter half of the decade and with it has come better understanding and increased goodwill.