

Original: Fish Division
cc: Education-Game
Regional Supervisor of Field Adm., Roscommon
District Supervisor of Field Adm., Roscommon
Mr. Hans Peterson 7-7-41
Mr. Carbine

INSTITUTE FOR FISHERIES RESEARCH
DIVISION OF FISHERIES
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION
COOPERATING WITH THE
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

ALBERT S. HAZZARD, PH.D.
DIRECTOR

ADDRESS
UNIVERSITY MUSEUMS ANNEX
ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

June 20, 1941

REPORT NO. 672

SPEARING AND DIP NETTING OF SUCKERS ON THE
CUT, BACKUS AND DENTON CREEKS IN ROSCOMMON COUNTY

by

W. F. Carbine

On March 25, the writer was informed by Dr. Hazzard that Mr. Westerman had suggested that an investigation be made of the Cut and Backus Creeks, tributaries of Houghton Lake, during the spring run of suckers in 1941, to determine to what extent the fishery was being utilized, and the possible effect of the netting operations on Houghton Lake.

On April 16, the writer made a trip to Houghton Lake to investigate this problem, and to look over the northern pike spawning grounds. The Cut and Backus Creek problem was discussed in detail with the District Supervisor of Fisheries Operations, and with the regional and district officers of the Division of Field Administration.

From all of the information obtained, it appears that on June 24, 1940, the Board of Supervisors of Roscommon County turned a resolution over to Mr. Mert McClure, District Supervisor, recommending that the Department of Conservation issue an order closing all streams in Roscommon County to the netting (dip nets and similar devices) of fish. This action on the part of the Supervisors was taken after a petition by certain residents of Roscommon County had been received asking that the Cut Stream between the Backus Creek and Houghton Lake be closed to

the netting of suckers during April and May. Neither of the petitioning bodies furnished reasons for wishing these streams closed to netting.

The Cut Stream is the main outlet of Higgins Lake, and is approximately eleven miles long. It enters Houghton Lake at the Mounds Resort. The Backus Creek is approximately seven miles in length, heading at Mud Lake, and entering the Cut Stream a little over a mile from Houghton Lake. These streams are not fished a great deal during the summer months, but have been open to the spearing and netting of suckers for many years.

The Cut and Backus Creeks were visited both during the day and at night on April 18, 19, and 20. On April 20 a canoe trip was made down the Cut Stream from the C. C. C. Bridge to Houghton Lake with Officer George Luhrs. A summary of the observations made and of interviews with various fishermen that were contacted are discussed below.

From the evidence obtained, it appears that a controversy exists between the dip netters and spearers. The spearers claim that the majority of suckers are removed from the stream by the netters, thereby making it more difficult for the spearer to obtain a mess of fish. This is particularly true when low water prevails. During these years it is possible for dip netters to theoretically block off the stream by staggering or concentrating the nets. This is accomplished by placing the nets in such a fashion that if a sucker misses one net, it invariably runs into another. Of course it is technically possible for a sucker to go over the top of a net despite the fact that the side walls on three sides of the net vary from 18 to 36 inches in height.

Many fishermen and landowners protest that people should not be allowed to sell the suckers that are taken from our inland waters.

Some people contend that a great many northern pike and walleyed pike are taken during the netting and spearing season. This is borne out by the many arrests that are usually made each spring on the Cut and Backus Creeks for the possession of walleye and northern pike.

On Saturday night, April 19, it was estimated that well over one hundred people were netting and spearing on the Cut and Backus Creeks. A total of 37 automobiles were counted at one time at the Mounds. Many fishermen brought their own boats but more than twenty boats were rented at the Mounds Resort. Many people also entered the stream from at least four other points, and a number of people were also camping at several points along both streams. These fishermen were not all from Roscommon County, a number coming from points as far off as Traverse City, Clare and Midland.

Approximately fifty dip nets were in operation on the Cut Stream between Backus Creek and Houghton Lake this spring. This is a much smaller number than usual according to the officers acquainted with the area.

The water in both the Cut and Backus Creeks was unusually high and murky this year. In many places when the stream banks were low, water had inundated large areas. It was almost impossible to see the bottom in water over two feet in depth. Most fishermen that were contacted claimed that because of the murky water, all spearing had to be done in shallow water near the stream banks and in flooded areas.

Many suckers were eluding the fishermen this year as evidenced by the large numbers of suckers observed spawning in the shallow, running water along the stream banks and in the flooded areas. In these places suckers were observed spawning on various types of bottom such as sand, muck, leaves, grass, roots, shrubs, sticks, etc.. Large numbers of eggs were found in these places.

Northern pike and suckers leave Houghton Lake and start to run up creeks and ditches before the ice goes out, but the main sucker run usually occurs just after the ice has gone out of the lake. The spawning season of the northern pike and sucker do overlap somewhat, but the northern pike is usually through spawning before the sucker begins.

Very little evidence has been obtained on the relationship between suckers and other fishes in Houghton Lake. Young suckers are probably eaten to

some extent by bass, walleye pike and northern pike. Aside from this, the only other check on the adult suckers in the lake itself are disease and predators. Very few suckers are taken in Houghton Lake by anglers. It is therefore possible, especially during a successful spawning year, for the sucker population to increase out of proportion to the game fish population, if some means of reducing their numbers is not available. All fishes in our lakes and streams should be utilized, either as food for other fishes or for man if we are to get the most out of our fishery resource. Adult suckers reach a size often too great for our larger game fish to eat. Therefore, it is believed by the writer, that netting and spearing for suckers should be allowed on the Cut, Backus, and Denton Streams. There are other streams flowing into and out of Houghton Lake where suckers run in the spring. A large number of suckers run down the Muskegon River, (as shown by the operation of the weir) and up Blood and Sucker Creeks. Suckers also are said to run up Knappen and Spring Brook Creeks, although no evidence of a sucker run has been obtained by the writer. So with these streams available for suckers to spawn in, probably the sucker population in Houghton Lake is in no great danger of depletion.

Many suckers were able to elude fishermen this year because of high water, but in low-water years these streams could be almost entirely blocked with dip nets, similar to the situation on the Denton Creek in 1940. (In 1940, Mr. McKee had the Denton Creek almost entirely blocked with dip nets, and Mr. Detmers who was dipping upstream several miles farther was able to dip but a few suckers.) It is not recommended that fish, such as the sucker and northern pike, that use tributary streams for spawning, be prevented from running by the blocking off of a stream by either dip nets or other devices. The writer believes that the proximity at which dip nets can be placed in a stream should be regulated by law, or by order of the District Office of the Field Administration Division. Nets should be at least fifty feet or more apart. This should do a great deal to lessen further

complaints and will give the suckers a better chance to escape the netters.

INSTITUTE FOR FISHERIES RESEARCH

By W. F. Carbine

Report Approved by: A. S. Hazzard

Report Typed by: M. Hoffman