

## **Charter Boat Catch and Effort from the Michigan Waters of the Great Lakes, 1996**

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*Abstract.*—Legislation enacted in 1992 by the State of Michigan requires all charter boat operators to report sportfishing catch and effort to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. The objective of the catch and activity reporting system is to obtain a continuous annual record of the number, type, and location of fish harvested by charter boat clients in Michigan.

Ninety-two percent of the 491 charter fishing operators complied with the law by returning their completed catch reporting forms in 1996. These operators reported making 15,642 charter fishing excursions during April through October. The total number of charter excursions increased by 115 (+1%) in 1996 compared to 1995. Approximately 438,000 angler hours were spent fishing by some 73,500 charter clients. The distribution of charter fishing excursions was: 66% Lake Michigan, 17% Lake Huron, 11% Lake Erie, 3% Lake Superior, and 3% Lake St. Clair. Over 240,000 fish were reported harvested. The harvest was composed of about 89,500 yellow perch, 43,300 walleye, 33,800 chinook salmon, 33,500 lake trout, 20,900 rainbow trout, 9,400 coho salmon, and 3,900 brown trout.

In general, catch rates of important species taken in the charter fishery during 1990-96 correlated significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) with catch rates estimated independently from Michigan's Great Lakes creel survey during the same time period.

Michigan's charter boat industry increased from 250 operations in 1979 to nearly 900 in 1989. Since the late 1980s, the number of charter boats used for sport fishing excursions on Michigan's Great Lakes waters has declined to 491. The charter fishing industry provides Michigan's economy with significant economic benefits each year. For example, 239,000 clients spent an estimated \$21 million in addition to charter fees in 1985, and the total statewide investment by charter boat firms in the same

year was estimated to exceed \$30 million (Mahoney et al. 1986).

The Michigan Legislature in 1992 passed Act 115, Public Acts of 1992. This legislation re-authorized and strengthened the law, first enacted during 1989 (Act 22, Public Acts of 1989), which required the reporting of sport catch and effort by the charter fishing industry. The legislation was supported by both Michigan Charter Boat Association (MCBA), an industry representative, and Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR). Among other