

Lake Erie Committee

REPRESENTING THE FISHERY MANAGEMENT AGENCIES OF LAKE ERIE AND LAKE ST. CLAIR

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Contacts:
Canada: John Cooper: 705-755-5476
USA: Marc Gaden: 734-662-3209 x 14

2100 Commonwealth Blvd.
Suite 100
Ann Arbor MI 48105-1563
Tel: 734-662-3209

MICHIGAN DNR

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Binational Panel Recommends Lake Erie Yellow Perch and Walleye Catch Limits for 2011

2011 yellow perch and walleye levels similar to last year

YPSILANTI, MI – The Lake Erie Committee, a binational board of fishery managers from Michigan, New York, Ohio, Ontario, and Pennsylvania, recommended a 2011 total allowable catch (TAC) of 12.651 million pounds of yellow perch and 2.919 million walleye¹. The yellow perch and walleye TACs are similar to last year's levels. These recommendations are based on extensive biological assessments and analyses by Canadian and American fishery agencies. For both yellow perch and walleye, the committee is moving forward on a revision of fisheries policies and guidelines for the future. The intent is to fully engage all stakeholders throughout that process.

Said Lake Erie Committee chair Don Einhouse of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, "The relative constancy of both the walleye and yellow perch TACs reflects the committee's interest in providing stability to fisheries as we develop revised walleye and yellow perch harvest policies, with input from stakeholders. We understand that in certain areas, the biological risk at these levels of harvest may increase, but will not threaten the sustainability of the resource as we transition to new policies."

YELLOW PERCH

Overall, yellow perch stocks in Lake Erie are on the decline, though the stocks are stronger in the lake's eastern part than in other areas of the lake. For 2011, the Yellow Perch Task Group estimates the presence of 130 million yellow perch in Lake Erie, a 28% reduction from 2010 and a reduction from more than 400 million fish in the mid-2000s. The decline is due to a weak year class in 2009. The fishery is currently sustained by older fish from some good recruitment during the past decade.

Given the state of the Lake Erie yellow perch fishery, the committee recommended a 2011 TAC of 12.651 million pounds, a small decrease from last year's allocation of 13.137 million pounds. The consensus among committee members is that weak year classes may lead to lower allocations in some management units in the future.

The five jurisdictions on the lake divide the lakewide allocation of yellow perch based on allocation formulas by management unit. For 2011, Ontario's allocation is 6.182 million pounds, Ohio's allocation is 4.991 million pounds, and Michigan's allocation is 0.188 million pounds. New York and Pennsylvania will receive 0.246 million pounds and 1.044 million pounds, respectively. In 2010, actual lakewide yellow perch harvest was 9.69 million pounds or 74% of the TAC.

¹ Yellow perch are allocated in pounds; walleye are allocated by number of fish.

WALLEYE

The Lake Erie Committee recommended a binational TAC for walleye in 2011 of 2.919 million fish, compared to the TAC of 2.200 million fish in 2010. Actual walleye harvest in 2010 was approximately 2.0 million fish, or 91% of the TAC. The Committee's Walleye Task Group—comprising scientists and field biologists—reported that walleye recruitment in recent years has been moderate, particularly the 2007 year class. Fish from the 2007 year class and the exceptional 2003 hatch remain the major contributors to the fishery. The increased TAC recommendation for 2011 reflects the committee's consensus that walleye status in Lake Erie appears better than previously forecasted.

The TAC is recommended by the Lake Erie Committee and is allocated to Ohio, Michigan and Ontario by an area-based sharing formula of walleye habitat within each jurisdiction in the western and central basins of the lake. Under a 2011 TAC of 2.919 million fish, Ohio will be entitled to 1.492 million fish, Ontario 1.257 million fish, and Michigan 0.170 million fish. The walleye fisheries of eastern Lake Erie remain outside the quota management area and harvest limits in that area are established by Ontario, Pennsylvania, and New York.

Said Committee Chair Don Einhouse, "The Lake Erie Committee is aware that the 2011 TAC recommendation, while an increase from last year, is still lower than TACs of five to ten years ago and substantially lower from TACs of the 1980s and 1990s. Abundance of walleye in Lake Erie today is estimated to be 21.2 million fish, compared to highs of between 70 and 80 million fish in the past."

Einhouse added: "The committee remains committed to promoting sustainable walleye fisheries while allowing for the careful allocation of the fish based on annual biological assessments, modeling, and deliberation among the jurisdictions, with continued input from our valued stakeholders."

LAKE ERIE COMMITTEE

The Lake Erie Committee comprises fishery managers from Michigan, New York, Ohio, Ontario and Pennsylvania. The committee's work is facilitated by the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, a Canadian and U.S. agency on the Great Lakes. Each year the committee recommends a total allowable catch for walleye and yellow perch. Total allowable catch represents the number or weight of fish that can be caught by sport and commercial fishers without putting the stocks at risk. The individual agencies implement the recommended total allowable catch. For more information, visit the Lake Erie Committee online at www.glfc.org/lec.