

Lake Erie Committee

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

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Lake Erie Committee Recommends Walleye and Yellow Perch Catch Levels for 2012

Allowable walleye and yellow perch harvest to increase in 2012

WINDSOR, ON – The Lake Erie Committee, a binational board of fishery managers from Michigan, New York, Ohio, Ontario, and Pennsylvania, recommended a 2012 total allowable catch (TAC) of 3.487 million walleye and 13.637 million pounds of yellow perch¹. These recommended harvest levels represent an increase in allowable walleye and yellow perch catch for 2012 over last year, reflecting updated stock assessment results. Extensive biological assessments and analyses—conducted and analyzed jointly by Canadian and American fishery agencies—inform these TAC recommendations. The committee also engaged commercial and recreational stakeholders in a new and enhanced committee structure—called the Lake Erie Percid Management Advisory Group (LEPMAG)—to heighten awareness of stakeholder fishery objectives, to gain consensus about decisions, and to improve the process for binational dialogue among all interested parties.

The committee sought to maintain TACs at levels consistent with Lake Erie's biological conditions while providing commercial and recreational fishers with some level of stability, as indicated in LEPMAG discussions. However, the committee is concerned about environmental conditions in Lake Erie and potential impacts on fisheries in future years. The heightened stakeholder engagement reflects the committee's interest in involving the fishing community in discussions related to management of the lake's percid fisheries.

WALLEYE

The Lake Erie Committee recommended a binational TAC for walleye in 2012 of 3.487 million fish, compared to the TAC of 2.919 million fish in 2011. Actual walleye harvest in 2011 was approximately 1.69 million fish, or 58% of the TAC. Scientists and field biologists from Ontario and the Great Lakes states—working together as the Walleye Task Group—reported that walleye recruitment in recent years has not been strong. Fish from the strong 2007 and the exceptional 2003 year classes remain the major contributors to the fishery. This recommended TAC is based on updated walleye abundance estimates from the Walleye Task Group. The increased TAC recommendation for 2012 reflects the committee's consensus that walleye harvest is being managed at a sustainable rate for fisheries lakewide.

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 2012 TAC of 3.487 million fish, Ohio will be entitled to 1.782 million fish, Ontario 1.502 million fish, and Michigan 0.203 million fish. The walleye fisheries of eastern Lake Erie remain outside the quota management area and harvest limits in that area are established separately by Ontario, Pennsylvania, and New York.

¹Walleye are allocated by number of fish; yellow perch are allocated in pounds.

YELLOW PERCH

Based on the estimated abundance of yellow perch stocks in the lake, the Lake Erie Committee recommended a 2012 TAC of 13.637 million pounds, an increase from last year's allocation of 12.651 million pounds. As the committee considered the yellow perch TAC, it noted that stocks generally appear to be healthier as one moves west to east across Lake Erie, consistent with environmental conditions (such as nutrient loads) of recent years. Fisheries were afforded the highest allowable catches where stocks were the healthiest. The committee also noted that continued weak year classes will likely result in lower-than-average yellow perch allocations in the future.

The five jurisdictions on the lake divide the lakewide allocation of yellow perch based on allocation formulas by management unit. For 2012, Ontario's allocation is 6.701 million pounds, Ohio's allocation is 5.349 million pounds, and Michigan's allocation is 0.164 million pounds. New York and Pennsylvania will receive 0.259 million pounds and 1.163 million pounds, respectively. In 2011, actual lakewide yellow perch harvest was 9.620 million pounds or 76% of the TAC.

A NEW LAKE ERIE PERCID MANAGEMENT PROCESS (LEPMAG)

The Lake Erie Committee and the Lake Erie basin stakeholders marked the success of the first round of the Lake Erie Percid Management Advisory Group (LEPMAG), a new, ongoing process that represents a major change in how walleye and yellow perch management decisions are made on Lake Erie. LEPMAG was established by the Lake Erie Committee in late 2010 as a new approach to pursue cooperative and structured decision making; the process informs TAC recommendations.

LEPMAG is designed to improve decision making by creating a process to facilitate discussions among state and provincial management agencies on Lake Erie and stakeholders. LEPMAG participants include Lake Erie Committee members, biologists, recreational and commercial fishers, and facilitators/modelers from the Quantitative Fisheries Center at Michigan State University. Through this process, participants work together to identify objectives, consider management options, recognize uncertainty, evaluate trade-offs, and reach consensus on desired actions.

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 and fisheries 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.