

94-110-0774

Original: Fish Division
cc: Education - Game
Institute for
Fisheries Research
C. T. Yoder
E. H. Andersen
H. D. Tait

*DSJ
ELC
LVA
RCB*

June 19, 1952

Report No. 1342

REPORT OF CHEEL CENSUS ACTIVITIES AND INTERVIEWS OF BOAT LIVERY
OPERATORS AND FISHERMEN AT MUSKEGON LAKE AND THE MUSKEGON RIVER
DURING THE PERIOD MAY 28 TO JUNE 3, 1952

by

Howard D. Tait

"Fishing for walleyes has been very good." This is the most often expressed comment I heard in my investigation of fishing success along the Muskegon River and at Muskegon Lake. To get some concept of the area and the problems involved in sampling these waters I began with an inspection of the river from Croton Pond on down to Nawaygo.

I contacted Conservation Officer Patrick Robinson at his home in Fremont and learned much about the river and fishing on it.

At Muskegon Lake I talked with several fishermen at boat liveries. The period covered by this report was probably the worst possible time to get a census of the fishing on Muskegon Lake. The weather apparently had discouraged most fishermen. It was cold and rainy and the stiff wind piled up large waves on Muskegon Lake, eliminating all boating. On May 29, after a look at Muskegon Lake, I inspected the Muskegon River upstream to Nawaygo by driving down

to the river at each accessible point. Only three fishermen were seen along this section of the river. I stopped at several more places above Newaygo and saw no more fishermen.

Comments of Mr. R. Henry, Proprietor of Maple Island Grocery located at Maple Island Bridge:

"Fishing has been good for walleyes and rainbow trout up until this rain hit. Most walleyes are taken from the bridge and downstream (Maple Island Bridge) and are caught by fishing from the bank with night crawlers on a double hook rig. Sizes range from 14 inches to 20 inches. Recently two men drowned in the river. The sheriff's department with the conservation men dynamited a log jam below here to recover a body. They killed hundreds of walleyes."

Fishing on Croton Pond on the night of May 29 was limited to fishermen on the boom above the Consumers Power Company dam. Although the number of fishermen present during the evening ranged from 12 to 27, only three walleyes were caught. Most popular fishing gear used was a spinning outfit with a weighted lure resembling a minnow.

Comments of Mr. Ralph James, Resident of Croton and local guide:

"Fishing is much better this year with the transfer of fish. Fishing has been good in the river below Newaygo but the fish have been dropping down the river and now the fishing is very good in Muskegon Lake. We still catch them in the river below Newaygo but we have to work for them."

COMMENTS OF BOAT LIVERY OPERATORS AT MUSKEGON LAKE

Mr. Phillip Carter (operates 18 boats at Muskegon conservation club landing):

Apparently Mr. Carter has been active in the controversy over the walleye transfer. He stated that walleyes are being caught regularly in Muskegon Lake, at least by the better fishermen. The fish range in size from 15 to 18 inches, however. Mr. Carter feels that there is not enough supervision of the transfer operations. He apparently worked with Paul Eschmeyer when the latter was studying the walleye in the area and he was much interested in the results of Eschmeyer's study (I gave him a copy of "The Life History of the Walleye in Michigan").

Mr. Carter stated that he maintained a creel census earlier (about 1947) and that a conservation department employee picked up the records weekly.

Mr. G. Mollann, bait dealer on south shore of Muskegon Lake:

"They have really been catching walleyes the last couple of weeks out by the buoy and in the channel."

Anton's boat livery (largest livery on Muskegon Lake):

Mr. Anton stated that walleye fishing is very good. Size range is from 16 to 22 inches, with some limit catches. He also said that he thought the new law regulating boat liveries was a good thing. Mr. Anton claims there is usually good walleye fishing all summer in Muskegon Lake.

Maurice Cherb, Proprietor of Fishermen's Haven in North Muskegon

(Boats and cabins):

"Walleye fishing has been good. Particularly the last couple of years. Size runs small though. I don't think lifting fish over the dam hurts our fishing a bit. A great many bluegills are being taken off the spawning beds now."

Frey's Bait Shop:

Talked with several fishermen and the shop salesman. Their comments were uniformly that walleyes have been biting well in the river and the lake.

Summary of creel census records obtained on Muskegon Lake and Muskegon River:

Twenty-four anglers were contacted as they completed their fishing trip. Many more anglers were questioned in the vicinity of Muskegon Lake during the period covered by this report, but they were not fishing when contacted. The average catch for all anglers contacted for all fish was 0.6 fish per hour

The average catch of those anglers who took walleyes was 0.65 fish per hour. Nine anglers caught a total of 15 walleyes.

Nine anglers took no fish. Seven anglers caught pan fish; these anglers probably were not fishing for walleyes.

METHODS OF OBTAINING RELIABLE ESTIMATES OF THE WALLEYE CATCH AT MUSKEGON LAKE AND ON MUSKEGON RIVER

Fishermen enter and leave the lake from one of the several river channels or from the boat liveries. These places would be excellent

sources of creel information, but because of the large area involved only a small percentage of the total fishing pressure could be censused. Carter's boat livery would provide the best sample of the fishing done at the river mouth and at the east end of Muskegon Lake. Anton's boat livery is located at the point where the Bear Lake channel enters Muskegon Lake and most fishermen leaving Anton's fish either Bear Lake or the open waters of Muskegon Lake. Freye's Bait Shop is situated on the south channel of the Muskegon River at the causeway. While many fishermen start their fishing trips at Freye's by purchasing minnows, worms and tackle, very few finish at this point; therefore, it should be considered as a check point to determine the numbers of anglers but not the fishing success of anglers. Additional check points for obtaining creel census records are at the yacht club landing on the south side of the lake, and possibly at the state park. There are several vantage points along the bluff in North Muskegon from which the lake could be surveyed with binoculars to make boat counts.

Although past experience with voluntary creel census conducted by boat livery operators has not been encouraging, I think in this case it might well be tried again. Mr. Phillip Carter, particularly, has exhibited a keen interest in the fishing at Muskegon Lake, and quite voluntarily has expressed an interest in helping collect records of the catch.

The problem of obtaining creel census records on the Muskegon River below Nawaygo is somewhat different. Fishing for walleyes is most intense during and following the spawning runs. Probably the most useful data on the magnitude of the walleye run and the portion

removed by fishermen should be collected during this period. Contact of fishermen along the isolated stretches of the river seems to be possible only by canoe, and this is made difficult by the fact that much of the fishing is done after dark.

INSTITUTE FOR FISHERIES RESEARCH

Howard D. Tait

Report approved by A. S. Hassard

Report typed by J. K. Mial