

STUDY PERFORMANCE REPORT

State: Michigan

Project No.: F-81-R-8

Study No.: 230462

Title: Charter boat fishing effort, harvest and harvest rate in the Michigan waters of the Great Lakes

Period Covered: October 1, 2006 to September 30, 2007

Study Objectives: To obtain a continuous annual record of charter boat fishing effort, harvest, and harvest rate directed towards the major sport fish in the Michigan waters of the Great Lakes.

Summary: This report presents results from the 2006 charter angling season. Similar data are being collected for the 2007 season; these will be summarized in next year's report.

In March of 2006, MDNR Charlevoix Fisheries Research Station personnel mailed Charter Boat Daily Report forms, instructions on how to fill-out and mail the forms, and grid maps of the Great Lakes, to all charter fishing operators who possessed a license to fish the Michigan waters of the Great Lakes and their major tributaries. State of Michigan Public Act 451 (Act 22) requires all charter operators to record their daily fishing effort and harvest on these forms and return them to the department on a monthly basis. During the 2006 data collection season, Charlevoix staff sent post card or certified mail notification to delinquent charter operators and found that 92% of all charter operators complied with State-mandated reporting requirements by the end of the season. Study results were disseminated as follows: a written report of harvest, summarized by Great Lake, was mailed to all charter operators in 2007 (as mandated by Michigan State Public Act 451); detailed harvest results were presented at meetings of charter organizations and Citizen Advisory Groups; and data were posted on the MDNR website.

In 2006, a total of 68,572 charter anglers participated in 16,147 excursions on the Michigan waters of Lakes Michigan, Huron, Erie, Superior, and the St. Clair system (including the major tributaries), and spent 378,989 angler hours fishing. These measures of charter fishery effort changed slightly from those reported in 2005 (excursions increased less than 1%, anglers increased 2%, while angler hours decreased 3%). Charter operators reported a total of 191,103 fish harvested from the Michigan waters of the Great Lakes and its major tributaries in 2006. The most numerous species in the 2006 harvest was Chinook salmon *Oncorhynchus tshawytscha* (83,965), followed by walleye *Sander vitreus* (41,127), yellow perch *Perca flavescens* (26,029), lake trout *Salvelinus namaycush* (21,146), rainbow trout *Oncorhynchus mykiss* (7,860), coho salmon *Oncorhynchus kisutch* (6,390), and brown trout *Salmo trutta* (455). Relative to 2005, 2006 Chinook salmon harvest numbers decreased by 1%. Harvest increased for walleye, yellow perch, and coho salmon, whereas lake trout, rainbow trout, and brown trout harvest decreased. In 2006, sea lamprey occurrence on Chinook salmon was unchanged in Lake Michigan but increased significantly in Lake Huron compared to 2005. Sea lamprey occurrence on lake trout increased in Lakes Huron and Superior, but decreased slightly in Lake Michigan.

Findings: Jobs 1 through 5 were scheduled for 2006-07 and progress is reported below.

Job 1. Title: Distribute data forms.—In March 2006, Charlevoix Great Lakes Station personnel mailed Charter Boat Daily Report forms, instructions on how to fill-out and mail the forms, and grid maps of the Great Lakes to 610 charter operators. Charter operators were reminded that they were required by law to complete the form every time they fished and that the monthly report must be mailed to the MDNR (Charlevoix Station) by the tenth day of the month following the month of fishing.

Job 2. Quality control and education.—As charter report forms arrived at the Charlevoix Station in 2006, personnel checked the forms for completeness. Incorrectly completed forms were returned to charter operators with an explanation and request for the form to be corrected or completed. When Charlevoix personnel did not receive report forms by the due date post-card notices were sent to delinquent charter boat operators requesting that the form be sent. These notices were sent 30 days after an operator was delinquent with data for a given month. If previous notices did not elicit a response, Charlevoix personnel sent a final notice to operators in December. Those operators with one delinquent report were sent a letter via first class mail and those with two or more delinquent reports were sent letters via certified mail. By the end of January 2007, 92% of all charter operators had complied with the law.

Charlevoix staff continued close coordination with Law Enforcement to identify reasons for noncompliance. This enabled Charlevoix staff to identify those operators who failed to submit forms for acceptable reasons (e.g. stopped fishing during the middle of the season), thereby reducing the percentage of noncompliant operators. Furthermore, the coordination effort enabled Charlevoix staff to identify and add operators who were absent from the database, improving the accuracy of effort and harvest totals for the following year. MDNR Law Enforcement Division handled all remaining delinquent cases.

Program staff also continued work with Department of Information Technology developers, to implement an online reporting system for charter captains. Significant progress was made in this area and a completed version of the system was made available to 7 charter operators for testing in August 2007. Testing will continue through 2007 and early 2008 and if testing goes well the online system will be made available to all charter operators beginning in April 2008.

Between October 1, 2006 and September 30, 2007, program personnel made presentations at Sea Grant charter and fisheries workshops, MDNR Citizen's Advisory Meetings, and other public and agency meetings. These workshops and meetings provided an opportunity to (1) share local and lake-wide fishing data; (2) educate charter operators about the importance of accurate and timely data reporting, (3) explain how to interpret results and how the data are used to address fisheries management concerns; (4) address questions and get feedback about the program; and (5) promote positive and trusting relationships between the public and the MDNR. Furthermore, Charlevoix personnel emphasized the importance of accurate reporting throughout the entire season via telephone conversations with charter operators.

Job 3. Summarize and analyze data.—Data were summarized and analyzed to fulfill the educational obligations described under Job 2 and the reporting requirements described under Job 4.

Job 4. Write annual and other reports.—This annual progress report was prepared as scheduled. Additional data and information are summarized in:

Wesander, D. L., and D. F. Clapp. 2007. Charter Boat Effort and Fish Harvest from the Michigan Waters of the Great Lakes, 2006.

Copies of this report were mailed to all charter operators, as mandated by law, during 2007. The report, as well as summary tables for individual ports, is also available on the MDNR website.

Job 5. Submit Division report and/or manuscript for review and publishing.—A division technical report manuscript will be completed and submitted for publication to Research Section administrative staff by December 31, 2007.

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