

Charter Boat Catch and Effort from the Michigan Waters of the Great Lakes, 1997

**Gerald P. Rakoczy
and
Donna Wesander-Russell**

*Michigan Department of Natural Resources
Charlevoix Fisheries Station
96 Grant Street
Charlevoix, Michigan 49720*

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-eight percent of the 469 charter fishing operators complied with the law by returning their completed catch reporting forms in 1997. These operators reported making 15,929 charter fishing excursions during April through October. The total number of charter excursions increased by 287 (+2%) in 1997 compared to 1996. Approximately 444,000 angler hours were spent fishing by some 73,300 charter clients. The distribution of charter fishing excursions was: 67% Lake Michigan, 17% Lake Huron, 11% Lake Erie, 3% Lake Superior, and 2% Lake St. Clair. Over 242,000 fish were reported harvested. The harvest was composed of about 89,000 yellow perch, 42,000 walleye, 40,200 chinook salmon, 33,100 lake trout, 16,000 rainbow trout, 12,300 coho salmon, and 5,000 brown trout.

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 469 in 1997. 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 provisions, the law provides more stringent penalties for charter fishing operators who are delinquent by more than 60 days with their catch reports. Also, the