

## Redear Sunfish Management in Michigan

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*Abstract.*—Redear sunfish *Lepomis microlophus* were first stocked in Michigan waters in the mid-1950s, and some good populations and fisheries developed and became self-perpetuating for over three decades. These fisheries produced occasional trophy-size redear sunfish in an area of the state which was heavily fished and produced few panfish trophies from native species. No other large-scale, purebred stocking programs for redear sunfish occurred until 1984. A redear sunfish management plan was developed and adopted by Fisheries Division in 1991. The primary goal of the program was to offer an opportunity for anglers to catch some large, possibly trophy-size panfish in the southern part of Michigan's Lower Peninsula. This was adopted by Fisheries Division and stocking continued through 1998. A total of 57 lakes have been stocked, primarily with fall fingerlings, at various stocking rates - mostly ranging between 50 and 200 fingerlings per surface acre of water. Fingerlings were reared in ponds. In most situations, lakes were stocked for two or three years in succession in attempts to create breeding populations with multiple year classes. Nearly 40 new redear sunfish populations have resulted since the recent stocking efforts began in 1984. Several other lakes were recently stocked, so it is too early to verify their survival. Comparisons of panfish sizes (average and largest per species) greatly favor redear sunfish over bluegill *Lepomis macrochirus* and pumpkinseed *Lepomis gibbosis*. Of 30 lakes with mature redear sunfish populations (over 5 years old), the average size in trap net catches was 8.7 in, and the average of the maximum-size individual was 10.3 in. Average sizes for bluegills and pumpkinseeds in the same lakes were 6.6 in and 6.5 in, respectively; and maximum sizes averaged 8.8 in and 7.6 in, respectively. Most new redear sunfish populations appear to be self-perpetuating and managers do not anticipate the need for maintenance stocking. No significant impacts to pumpkinseed populations could be demonstrated by comparing catch and growth statistics before and after redear sunfish introductions. If the length of the growing season is the major factor in redear sunfish survival, much more of Michigan's Lower Peninsula could be considered for introductions. There is some evidence that redear sunfish prey on exotic zebra mussels *Dreissena polymorpha*. More education is needed so that anglers will be better able to distinguish redear sunfish from large bluegill and pumpkinseed. New redear sunfish fisheries have produced trophies as is evidenced by reports to the Master Angler Program. The primary goal of the redear sunfish management program has been realized.