

STUDY PERFORMANCE REPORT

State: Michigan

Project No.: F-81-R-7

Study No.: 230462

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

Period Covered: October 1, 2005 to September 30, 2006

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. To determine the ratio of resident to non-resident charter anglers. To provide a measure of sea lamprey occurrence on lake trout and Chinook salmon to the USFWS.

Summary: This report presents results from the 2005 charter angling season. Similar data are being collected for the 2006 season; these will be summarized in next year's report.

In March of 2005, 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 2005 data collection season, Charlevoix staff sent post card or certified mail notification to delinquent charter operators and found that 95% 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 2006 (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 2005, a total of 67,037 charter anglers participated in 16,053 excursions on the Michigan waters of Lakes Michigan, Huron, Erie, Superior, and the St. Clair system, including the major tributaries, and spent 391,022 angler hours fishing. These measures of charter fishery effort are essentially unchanged from those reported in 2004 (less than 0.5% changes in each of the three measures). Charter operators reported a total of 163,081 fish harvested from the Michigan waters of the Great Lakes and its major tributaries in 2005. The most numerous species in the 2005 harvest was Chinook salmon *Oncorhynchus tshawytscha* (84,655), followed by yellow perch *Perca flavescens* (25,291), lake trout *Salvelinus namaycush* (22,710), and walleye *Sander vitreus* (12,388). Relative to 2004, 2005 Chinook salmon harvest numbers increased by 13%. Harvest of yellow perch (+30%), brown trout *Salmo trutta* (+22%), and rainbow trout *Oncorhynchus mykiss* (+21%) also increased in 2005; however, for all other species, 2005 charter harvest decreased relative to 2004. In 2005, sea lamprey incidence on Chinook salmon increased in both Lake Michigan and Lake Huron compared to 2004. Sea lamprey occurrence on lake trout increased in Lakes Michigan and Superior, but decreased in Lake Huron.

Findings: Jobs 1 through 4 were scheduled for 2005-06 and progress is reported below.

Job 1. Title: Distribute data forms.—In March, 2005, Charlevoix 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 559 charter operators. With these mailings, personnel reminded operators that they were required by law to complete the form every time they fished and that the report must be mailed to Charlevoix MDNR by the tenth day of the following month.

Job 2. Quality control and education.—As charter report forms arrived at the Charlevoix Station in 2005, personnel checked the forms for completeness. If incomplete, they returned the forms to charter operators with an explanation and request for completion. In some cases, Charlevoix personnel did not receive report forms by the due date; therefore, they sent post-card notices 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 through certified mail, which stated that it would be the last notice. By the end of January 2006, 95% 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); therefore 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's Law Enforcement Division handled all remaining delinquent cases, where loss of inspection certificates was more probable.

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 during the reporting period, and a demonstration version of the system should be available for testing in early 2007.

Between October 1, 2005 and September 30, 2006, 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; (3) address questions and get feedback about the program; and (4) 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.—Data are summarized in:

Wesander, D.L., and D.F. Clapp. 2006. Charter Boat Effort and Fish Harvest from the Michigan Waters of the Great Lakes, 2005.

Copies of this report, as mandated by law, were mailed to all charter operators during 2006. The report, as well as summary tables for individual ports, is also available on the MDNR website.

This annual progress report was prepared as scheduled.

Prepared by: Donna Wesander and David F. Clapp

Dated: September 30, 2006