

Whitefish Stakeholder Engagement Zoom Meeting  
August 31, 2021

The presentations by Brad Eggold and Taylor Hrabak were recorded and will be available on DNR website.

<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Fishing/lakemichigan/LakeMichiganCommercialWhitefish.html>

Notes from Question/Comment session [Responses in brackets.]

- Bob – Are 100% of walleye released alive? Are 100% released alive from trap nets?
  - Taylor – No. We are analyzing the data to present numbers released alive vs. dead in a future presentation.
- Sclapin – Regarding mortality of bycatch, if I catch walleye in 40 feet of water or more, they are dead. What is the average depth of the gill net and trap net sets?
  - Taylor – We see occasional barotrauma during our monitors. The average depth is roughly from 60-80 feet, but in the southern Bay they are fishing in 20-30 feet of water. Trap nets and gill nets are lifted at a slow rate, which helps the walleye deal with the change in depth.
- Sclapin – We haven't been through a winter sport fishing season yet, so we haven't been able to see how the increased quota under the emergency rule may have impacted the sport fishery. Why would we move forward with creating a permanent rule now?
  - Brad – We need to continue moving forward on the permanent rule due to the rule making process timeline. We will need another emergency rule to bridge the gap before the permanent rule is in effect.
- Bob – A temporary rule was allowed to expire for sport fishermen regarding lake trout. Why are we extending a temporary rule for commercial fishers?
  - Brad – We are learning from our mistakes.
- Charlie – Lifting trap nets at a slow rate of speed is important to commercial fishers. We experimented with setting nets in deeper water and found that the slow speed makes a difference. Whitefish handle it better than walleye. The walleye mortality at the worst has been 8-10% on our worst day, more like 0-1% typically. Whitefish mortality is less than 1%. We don't want to kill fish unnecessarily. Regarding extending the emergency rule, we were in the middle of the pandemic when the lake trout rule lapsed. That doesn't mean we should let it happen again.
- Bob – Regarding the 50/50 allocation between sport and commercial, the sport fishery is January through March. What do we look at to make sure everything stays equal?
  - Brad – We are working on electronic reporting for guides in the Bay which will be in effect January 1, 2022. There is no sport quota per se. It is regulated through a daily bag limit, and we could look at adjusting the bag limit if the sport harvest was too high year after year.
- Bob – Can we make the sport anglers responsible for electronic reporting, similar to hunters having to report deer or turkey?
  - Brad – Law enforcement has been involved with the guide reporting rule making process to ensure it is enforceable. Having anglers self-report has been discussed. It is difficult to get anglers to report when they don't catch any fish.

- JJ – Many guides are not reporting anymore. The guide reporting needs more backbone. Regarding the economic impact statement – are impacts to bars and restaurants included in the estimate?
  - Brad – we are looking at impacts of more fish caught in commercial Zone 1 and less in Zone 2. The economic impact is dedicated to the commercial side of things since the scope statement is related to commercial fishing.
  - Meredith – We are looking at the overall impact of the rule at all businesses that would be affected at a broad scale. Any businesses not included in the economic impact analysis are welcome to comment on it.
  - Brad – Non-reporting by guides was a main concern in re-writing the guide reporting rule. Law enforcement will have the tools to enforce it, so we expect compliance by guides to go up considerably.
  - Ryan (via chat) – Law enforcement will be supporting fisheries with the new guide reporting requirements.
- Charlie – There are a lot of whitefish in Green Bay. I wouldn't expect any immediate change from the additional commercial harvest. I'm not sure requiring all anglers to report their catch is practical as it is with wildlife harvest. Whitefish in the south end of the lake have not been factored into the whitefish model yet.
- Taylor (via chat) – I will say that Patrick, Titus, and I are once again applying for the Saltonstall Kennedy grant to attempt at helping gathering more information pertaining to rec/guided ice fishery! More to come on that.
- Sclapin – The economic impact of the sport fishing is huge. Hotels are sold out in February, and bars and restaurants are full. Could the impact of the sport fishing be larger than the commercial fishery? Could the economic impact analysis be expanded to include the sport fishery?
  - Meredith – we describe the impact of the fishery on the sport fishing community, but the economic impact statement needs to be focused on the commercial fishery since the rule is focused on the commercial fishery and doesn't directly impact the sport fishery.
- Taylor – Regarding walleye bycatch in March through July, 27 walleye were caught in 181,500 feet of gill net fished. It is a low number of walleye bycatch overall.
- Charlie – The restaurant and tourist businesses in Door County and NE Wisconsin depend heavily on the commercial fishery. The sport fishery may have a bigger impact in the winter, but the commercial fishery is huge spring, summer, and fall.
- JJ – The number of ice shacks in the Bay is huge, and a large number of people travel a long distance to ice fish. Taverns, bait shops, cabins/hotels all benefit. Wives go to wineries while their husbands fish.
- Bob – Sport fishing in WI generates between 1-2 billion dollars annually. Excise taxes on sport fishing gear comes back to WI.
- Titus – Trying to put numbers on both the sport and commercial fisheries requires an extensive economics study. Maybe this could be added to a grant proposal.
- JJ – I want everyone to be a part of this process. I don't want anything to be overlooked that may be detrimental to this unique sport fishery.
- Lauren (via chat) – Sorry my internet connection went out and is still not good enough to support video – I wanted to comment that in my recent travels (past 2 years) that when I meet people from different areas of the US I bring up ice fishing and whitefish and many people light up and say that

they have always wanted to try "Green Bay Whitefish" it has become a bucket list item for ice anglers.

Participants (27 during the presentation, including DNR and staff from other agencies/universities)

WDNR

Brad Eggold  
Brad Ray  
Meredith Penthorn  
Scott Hansen  
Tom Meronek  
Ryan Propson  
Cheryl Masterson

Other Agencies/Universities

Susan Wells – US Fish & Wildlife Service  
Chuck Bronte – US Fish & Wildlife Service  
Taylor Hrabak – UW-Green Bay  
Titus Seilheimer – UW Sea Grant

Participants

Avery  
Bob  
Bob  
Charlie  
DJ  
Fishl  
Fritz  
James  
JJ  
John  
Lauren  
Mitchell  
Morgan  
Randy  
Sclapin  
Steve  
Steve  
Stuth01  
Virlee  
Zach