

Summary of the March 7, 2005 meeting of the Lake Superior Advisory Group – Anadromous Fishes
Sea Grant Building at 2305 East Fifth St., Monday, Mar 7, 2005, 7 to 9:00 p.m.

Don Schreiner welcomed everyone, distributed meeting agenda, and introduced the meeting topic. Introductions were made around the room.

Joe Ostazeski gave a brief presentation on the history and status of the Chinook salmon program. The summer boat fishery has experienced high catch rates and harvest of mostly wild Chinook that are being produced in other jurisdictions. Less than five percent of Chinook salmon caught in the summer boat fishery are Minnesota hatchery fish. Returns to the French River have remained poor despite the stocking of Lake Huron strain Chinook. Returns have been insufficient to meet minimum brood stock requirements. The principal criterion for success has not been satisfied in the first two years of the evaluation. We will continue to evaluate the program through creel surveys and trap returns. Seventy-five disease-free spawners returning to the French River in 2005 are necessary for maintenance of the program.

Don Schreiner gave an overview of the status and management of rainbow trout and brook trout programs. He outlined the main points in the Rainbow Trout Management Plan of 2003. This plan is to be incorporated into the Lake Superior Management Plan with only minor modifications if necessary. Focal points include attempting to rehabilitate the Knife River system by stocking steelhead smolts and allowing clipped fish to pass upstream of the trap to reproduce. The plan acknowledges that continued stocking of Kamloops may place the long-term health of naturalized steelhead populations at risk. Kamloops program continues to provide a popular fishery with good catch rates. Don summarized recent management activities and status of brook trout. He talked about past above and below barrier population and genetic comparisons. Assessments are scheduled on a five-year interval, which will look at population response to the 20-inch minimum size regulation in tributaries below barriers. Recent projects looked at ground water available to migratory species and assessed road crossings for fish passage and prioritized sites for improvement. Groundwater habitat is extremely limited on the North Shore making rehabilitation difficult. Anecdotal reports of larger brook trout have been received and large brook trout have been reported in the spring creel. Possible approaches include additional restrictions in tackle, sanctuaries, limited stocking, and patience to see if under restrictive regulations, the brook trout can rebound on their own. Any coaster brook trout fishery will be a "memorable experience" type fishery and not a harvest fishery.

Darryl Bathel talked about French River Hatchery programs. He outlined last year's production and presented scenarios for producing various sizes, numbers and species of salmonids. A fall spawning fish or rearing advanced fry from spring spawning fish would best utilize hatchery nursery space.

Don summarized the presentation portion of the meeting with a few final thoughts. Chinook salmon are reproducing in other jurisdictions, driving the boat fishery in Minnesota. Stocking has not been effective. Don gave some possible options to utilize nursery space in the hatchery.

There was general discussion about the Chinook program. The appropriateness of the French River for attracting returning fish was raised as an issue. Suitability of the St. Louis River for Chinook salmon was talked about. Various methods of augmenting stream water were mentioned. The cost of the Chinook salmon returned to the angler was talked about and compared to other species. There was concern about Chinook stocking impacting the forage base. The point was made that the Chinook are now a self-sustaining species in Lake Superior and stocking is no longer economical or necessary to provide a fishery. Use of incidental tags for Chinook salmon in the commercial fishery was talked about.

Rainbow and brook trout management were discussed. Opening up harvest of steelhead was talked about. The need to have criteria for when the steelhead populations can be harvested was mentioned. The focus of rehabilitation of the Knife River in the Rainbow Trout Management Plan was a topic that was discussed. Incidental catch of steelhead in the charter industry was mentioned. The requirement of groundwater habitat for brook trout was touched upon. A suggestion of drilling for groundwater to supplement river habitat was made. Someone asked about the historical distribution of coaster brook trout along the Minnesota shoreline.

Input forms were distributed and the meeting was adjourned.