

Summary of the May 2, 2005 meeting of the Lake Superior Advisory Group – Enforcement and Regulations

Sea Grant Building at 2305 East Fifth St., Monday, May 2, 2005, 7 to 9:00 p.m.

The meeting was started with distribution of the agenda and issue response forms. Don talked about the line up of speakers for the habitat meeting next month and introduced Chris Johnson from DNR Enforcement.

Chris talked about the Marine Unit composition and their activities. Conservation officers are brought in from other areas to work plainclothes fishing. Violation rates remain pretty steady. St. Louis River regulation enforcement was mentioned. The spring draws a dangerous crowd that necessitates heightened awareness for officer safety. There is a need to further develop SE Asian language synopses for education. Work with COs familiar with the cultures of these groups has been helpful. There was discussion of upcoming boiler inspections for the Charter Industries. The quarter mile limit for commercial nets is delimited by the net location. Chris clarified that any snagging of fish is illegal. Reporting violations to the State Patrol Dispatch (723-4885) will get the fastest response. Gifting fish, double tripping, and over limits were discussed. There is a noise limit for boats that will be enforced. Float tubes are not considered watercraft, but wearing of PFDs is advisable. There have been some applications of the gross over limit law. River access and trespass law was discussed. Poor visibility of kayaks on Lake Superior was mentioned by some of the charter captains. Off-reservation sale of fish from tribal catch and state payment for tribes not to exercise treaty rights were talked about.

Introductions were made and Don presented information on cormorants. There is growing concern about cormorants on all of the Great Lakes. Experimental control techniques and diet analysis was preformed on Knife Island in spring 2004. Results show a diverse diet including some stocked fish when they are available in abundance. There was some negative public feedback about this effort. Currently there is an effort underway to reduce numbers at Leech Lake. There is concern that potential controversy at Knife Island could harm control efforts at Leech Lake. A meeting involving parties interested in management of the Knife Island cormorant population should be convened to develop a long-term solution. Dave Bennett talked about Lake Superior Steelhead Association involvement with the Knife Island issue. He presented photos showing cormorant impact on the island. He talked about the growing problem around the Great Lakes. There was a general discussion of personal accounts of cormorants followed by a call for science-based decision-making on the issue.

Don moved the meeting to regulations and started with a discussion about stream regulations. The goal is to simplify the stream regulations. Simplification would be enhanced with uniform above-barrier regulations on Lake Superior tributaries. He offered proposals to make the brook trout limits uniform and eliminate the aggregate limit. The discussion turned to preserving opportunities for youth, instilling conservation ethic, and realization of increasing fishing pressure on streams. Don talked about making sanctuary dates uniform. Sanctuaries restrict brook trout opportunity. Knife River Marina fishing was raised. The desire to develop criteria to allow a limited steelhead harvest was mentioned. Don asked for input on a one over 25-inch length limit for lake trout and changing the bag limit to two fish. This brought up hooking mortality as an issue. There was a call for more data to base a lake trout regulation on. There was discussion on the length limit ramifications. The next topic discussed was the date for closing the lake trout season, which is important because large fish are more vulnerable during the fall season. The group talked about the possibility of reducing the number of potential commercial fishermen. The benefits of a reduced number of fishermen may be more catch per individual. Fairness of new fishermen entering the fishery was discussed. The apprenticeship system may limit entry to the fishery. Whether or not a commercial lake trout fishery would be self-limiting because of the high workload was discussed. There would have to be law changes that accompany changes to the commercial fishery.

Don closed by reviewing the function of the Lake Superior Advisory Group and where we are in the planning process. He highlighted the importance of getting the Issue Response forms in if input is to be considered. He mapped out the next steps and the time frame for completing the plan. The group agreed to extend the last meeting by thirty minutes to discuss habitat issues. Last month's Issues Response from the group on lake trout was distributed. The meeting was adjourned.