

Final Minutes

Minnesota 1837 Fisheries Committee
Fond du Lac Resource Management Building, Cloquet
October 24, 2019 10:00 AM

1. Welcome and Introductions

The committee was welcomed to Fond du Lac by Tom Howes. Introductions were made, and a sign-in sheet was passed around (Attachment 1).

2. Agenda approval

The agenda was approved as presented (Attachment 2) with the addition of an acoustic telemetry study update under 'other updates.'

3. Harvest update

a. State

Rebecca Munter presented the estimated angler harvest for the 2019 fishing season through the end of September (Attachment 3). She noted that the 2019 fishing season produced the highest catch rates on record for walleye in Mille Lacs. Overall angler kill was 92,843 lbs as of September 30th. This was 6% over the state allocation, but below the harvest cap for 2019. She also noted that walleye fishing was closed on Mille Lacs Lake starting on September 6, and continuing until December 1. MNDNR had a two-week harvest season early in the open water period in 2019. The estimated walleye harvest during this period was 14,001 lbs. Harvests of other species were well below allocations.

b. Bands

GLIFWC presented results from the tribal harvest through October 25, 2019 (Attachment 4). Tribal walleye harvest was 45,477.5 lbs out of a quota of 62,200 lbs. GLIFWC stated that they would present a more thorough harvest summary in January 2020, as in past years. The committee suggested that this more thorough summary include effort and cpe time trend graphs.

4. Fall Assessment: Preliminary Results for Walleye

a. State GN/EF/Forage results

Eric J. presented preliminary results from MNDNR's fall assessment on Mille Lacs Lake (Attachment 3). Overall, walleye spawner biomass in the 2019 survey was similar to the 2017 biomass. He noted that the 2017 year-class appeared to be a relatively strong

year-class. John H. suggested that forage gill net graphs be displayed by year-class rather than year so that the index would be easier to track. Yellow perch and Northern Pike are down. John H. suggested a need to create a condition graph for pike. Zebra mussel density appeared to have leveled off near 600 per square foot in the last 3 years.

b. Bands EF results

GLIFWC presented preliminary results of the fall electrofishing survey (Attachment 5). Age 0 and Age 1 catch rates were below average. GLIFWC, FDL, and Mille Lacs Band stated that they are considering ways to alter the survey to reduce the amount of effort necessary to complete the survey.

5. Initial discussions on status of the 2020 Walleye fishery

a. 52 net summary

MNDNR presented a summary of the walleye catch in the 52 gillnets (Attachment 6). The catch of mature walleye in the 52 gill nets was 18.5 lbs per net. This catch rate would place the walleye population in Category 4 in the recovery decision tree unless the Juvenile Index is less than 1. The committee agreed that the juvenile index will be calculated once all of the aging data are available. Walleye condition was noted to be near the lowest on record for fish under 14 inches, and was the lowest on record for 14-20 inch fish and 20+ inch fish, indicating that the fish are lighter than expected for their length.

6. Modeling Subgroup Update:

a. Update on management strategy evaluation process

The modelling subgroup presented slides on the management strategy evaluation (Attachment 7). The initial evaluation included 42 different scenarios with different management strategies and recruitment projections for walleye in Mille Lacs. Graphs were presented comparing the scenarios. The MNFC agreed that the subgroup should continue to run scenarios, simulate a range of allocations between tribal and state fisheries, and provide an update for the next meeting. In general, the ramp and step scenarios were received favorably and were considered worthy of further investigation.

7. Tribal open water harvest of Muskellunge on Mille Lacs Lake

Tribes have begun to express some interest in open water muskellunge harvest on Mille Lacs Lake. In previous and current tribal harvest management plans, this activity has not been allowed. The Tribes stated that they will discuss this issue among themselves and,

if agreed to, provide MNDNR with a proposal to implement open water harvest of muskellunge in Mille Lacs Lake.

8. Other updates

a. Mille Lacs Band Stocking

Carl K. provided an update on Mille Lacs Band stocking totals for 2019 (Attachment 8).

b. Mille Lacs Band also provided an update on the acoustic telemetry project. Additional data will be collected when the receivers are downloaded next spring.

9. Identify steps to prepare for January meeting

A WebEx meeting was scheduled for the first week of January to help prepare for the January meeting. Mille Lacs Band agreed to host the meeting with a location to be determined. The group agreed to conduct modeling data exchange on the usual schedule, with preliminary model runs to be provided around December 20th, and final model reports due about 1 week prior to the January meeting.

10. Open discussion

11. Adjourn