Agenda

Minnesota 1837 Fisheries Committee
October 26, 2021, 9:00am
Zoom

1. Welcome and Introductions

   Introductions were made and attendance recorded (attached).

2. Agenda approval

   Agenda approved without changes.

3. Harvest update

   a. State

      State Walleye harvest (harvest and hooking mortalities) through the end of September was at around 53,000 lbs without tournaments. This is about 60% of the State's share of the agreed upon harvestable surplus. Northern Pike harvest was at around 4,000 pounds and Yellow Perch harvest was less than 1,000 pounds. The State's creel will continue until the end of October. The State's fall fishery allowed Walleye harvest starting September 16 and allowed fishing to occur until midnight. There appeared to be little effort response to the extended fishing hours.

   b. Bands

      The Bands shared a handout summarizing harvest through October 25. Walleye harvest was at 50,866 lb of 62,200 lb share of the agreed upon harvestable surplus with 35,000 pounds taken by gill net, 15,000 pounds taken by spearing. Northern Pike harvest was at 2,600 pounds and Yellow Perch was at 116 pounds. Most Walleye harvest occurred out of the Cedar Creek and North Garrison accesses. Effort included 623 gill nets, 382 spearing permits

      A suggestion was made that at future meetings the annual harvest numbers should be presented as multi-year graphs to provide more context.

4. Fall Assessment: Preliminary Results for Walleye

   a. State GN/EF/Forage results

      CPE for the forage net (fish/net) and electrofishing (fish/hr) surveys showed similar YOY WAE trends. The CPE for YOY Walleye for 2021 electrofishing survey was about 150/hr.

This was below 2002-2013 median. The 2021 CPE for Age 1 WAE was 15/hr. The survey results for 2021 appear to at least be "not discouraging."

The CPE for Yellow Perch in the forage nets was near the median for the time series. The CPE of small perch increased in deeper forage nets.

The CPE of Cisco in the forage nets has remained flat since 2015. Survey results do not indicate a strong year class.

There was a discussion about the use of the geometric mean to calculate the CPE of Yellow Perch in the forage nets. Eric J. indicated that it was used because of patchy catches. John H. stated that he would prefer to see several measures of central tendency when catches are uneven among nets. He recommended using the mean and median rather than geometric mean. Tom H. shared a summary that calculated CPE based on the sampling depths. John H. liked that method because it shows more information than a simple number.

b. Bands EF results

The Bands shared a handout summarizing their fall electrofishing survey. About half of the shoreline was sampled from September 13-15. The CPE (fish/mi) was about 35 fish for YOY and about 1 fish for Age 1. The highest catches were observed near Malmo and Garrison, this is consistent with past years. The length-frequency of the YOY WAE catch had a mode around 5.5 inches.

There was a brief discussion on how to present the new EF sampling design as it has fewer stations than the original survey. The group agreed that it would be best to select the same sites from the historical data to create a new times series based on the new sampling configuration. John H. requested that the Age 1 time series be plotted on second axis to emphasize year-to-year changes.

5. Initial discussions on status of the 2022 Walleye fishery
    a. 52 net summary

i. Spawning Stock

Mature walleye biomass in all 52 nets was 16.2 lb per net in 2021 survey. This is lower than last year. Some decrease was expected because recruitment to maturity was not expected to match mortality. Numbers have also come down a little and are near the 2002-2013 median. Bootstrapped confidence intervals for catch rate overlap for the last three years.

The CPE of mature females by both numbers and biomass stayed about the same as last year. The CPE of mature males decreased. This is probably influenced by the 2017 year class. Females from this year class are still maturing into the spawning population, but males were already fully mature last year. By length groups, the CPE of 14-20 inch fish was around the median, but the CPE of larger and smaller fish were below median. The CPE of small fish was trending down, but the CPE of large fish appeared more stable.

ii. Condition

Condition increased for all sizes, presumably as a response to forage. But condition for all sizes still low. Condition was similar between sexes.

iii. Incoming Recruitment

CPE of immature fish by numbers and biomass declined. Aging data will help to inform on strength of individual upcoming year classes, but the low CPE of all immature fish suggests that potential recruitment for the next few years is not strong.

John H. summarized that harvest is under control, but there are continued concerns about recruitment. The fall gillnet CPE for mature fish is below 20 lb/net benchmark. More information on ages is needed to interpret if recruitment will be adequate this year.

Kelly A. stated that we should not get used to lower level of abundance.

There was a discussion on the lack of a Cisco die-off over the summer despite record setting water temperatures early in the season. Given the early warming, there were expectations

for a Cisco die-off. But the rate of warming slowed as the season progressed, with temperature used for hooking mortality peaking at 76 degrees. Eric J. stated that historically Cisco kills typically didn't pick up until about 80 degrees.

6. Overage Plan History & Discussion

The Modeling Subgroup presented an overview of past overage plans (attached powerpoint).

Original overage plans 2003-2007, 2008-2012.

- GOAL: No overage at end of plan
- COMPONENTS: annual harvest caps, mechanism for addressing overages incurred during plan.
- Mechanism dependent on population condition.
- Discussed some examples of application.

One year harvest plans from 2013-2016 did not allow overage.

Consensus plan 2017-2020.

- Harvest level based on population goals according to projections ("The Claw").
- Included allocation rules and allowable overages and mechanisms.
- Included in-season closure rules.

Other FTC agreed upon concepts

- 2014 – began "small fish friendly" harvest regulations
- 2017 – "Recovery Plan" defined population status categories based on gillnet, recruitment, and SCAA population estimate, but no management actions based on population status

Discussion

The way things stand now, walleye management consists of two elements: establishing a safe harvest and handling harvest overruns (overages). Establishing harvest levels is a matter of conservation, while resolving minor overages is an issue of equity. John H. stated that recently the State has said it would rather manage for regulation consistency. John said this could be done by placing less emphasis on sticking to an allocation of the harvest and placing more emphasis on maintaining population goals. Strict adherence to safe harvest/allocation/overage has lead us into a numbers game. Tom J. agreed, but that past attempts to alter this process have not been well received by leadership on either side. Missy added that even if we did

something like that, conservation caps would keep us in a numbers game, and also noted the lack of support by the full committee towards such a change (management strategy evaluation presented in January 2019).

Missy suggested that having an overage plan might help relieve concerns about the state not trying hard enough to control its fishery. An overage plan would set sideboards to help relieve tension when State harvest exceed expectations as there would be defined consequences and actions. Aaron and Kelly addressed desires for increased communication. Aaron would like to see a written prescription for how the state chooses regulations based on projections, which may provide some reassurance to the Bands. Kelly reminded us of Tribal interest in being informed and part of the discussion if State kills approach allocation.

Are there components of past plans that are still useful?

Brad thinks first two five-year plans succeeded.

Patrick - Protocols say we need to establish annual have safe harvest level, divide the harvest and each fishery stay within their share of the safe harvest. Tribes complain when the State exceeds its allocation, so we can't just let the State fish. Having a set mechanism for accounting for overages helps.

Kelly – We need clear mechanisms and tools to ensure limited harm.

Are there components that are unacceptable?

Jon – we are poor at projecting too far out. Consider changing name from overage plan to something else (Equity plan?). Overage has negative connotations.

Tom J. (and John H) – overage plan end dates could potentially result in overly restrictive actions on the State's fishery. Some sort of rolling plan may alleviate this.

Do we have information to revisit any agreed upon principles?

We need to define how overages and underages are calculated.

Can underages offset future overages or can they only repay past overages?

How fast does repayment have to occur?

Does FTC want to charge Modeling Subcommittee (MSC) with writing an up-to-date overage plan?

Yes. Try to draft a plan that can be discussed prior to the January FTC and agreed to at the January meeting.

7. Other updates
    a. State Mille Lacs Fisheries Management Plan

       Tom Heinrich – hoping to complete before Jan 1. Tribal comments were addressed and passed to commissioner's office.
    b. State's winter Walleye regulation

       Walleye regulation proposed to State leadership is same as last year.

       Tullibee bag limit will be reduced from 10 to 5.
    c. Results of 2021 Zebra Mussel survey

       Abundance down to about ¼ of maximum. Future dynamics are unknown. The literature is mixed. The population may boom and bust or may stay at low levels.

       Mussel density does not appear to be controlling factor in clarity as water clarity increased prior to invasion.
8. Identify steps to prepare for January meeting – Jan 19

   MSC to work on overage plan.

   Population modeling to proceed following standard timeline.

   MSC needs to know how to allocate harvest in harvest scenario projections. Jon G will check with Tribes.

   Plan for Zoom meetings to discuss the overage plan and population models.

   Zoom meetings December 16 (overage plan) and January 4 (Modelling).

9. Open discussion

   Any update on MLB telemetry project? Can telemetry data detect changes in fish movement during the fall assessment? Tom will send e-mail to Carl and Aaron with specific questions.

10. Adjourn

Attendance:

Jonathan Gilbert
Joe Dan Rose
Mark Luehring
Adam Ray
Aaron Schultz
Kelly Applegate
Carl Klimah
Reggie DeFoe
Brian Borkholder
John Hoenig
Lyle Chapman
Kia Hmielewski
Conrad St. John

Brad Parsons
Brian Nerbonne
Missy Treml
Tom Heinrich
Eric Jensen
Dan Schermerhorn
Tom Jones