

**Minnesota 1837 Fisheries Committee**  
**October 29, 2025, 10:00 am**  
**Bear and Wolf Rooms**  
**Grand Casino Mille Lacs**

1. Welcome and Introductions

Attendees-MNDNR: Patrick Schmalz, Hadley Boehm, Kevin McDonnell, Eric Jensen, Greg Berg, Nate Painovich, Erin Lunda, Brian Nerbonne, Brad Parsons. GLIFWC: Alex Bohman, Mark Luehring, Adam Ray, Brandon Byrne, Kia White (virtual). Mille Lacs Band: Susan Klapel, Carl Klimah. FDL Band: Eric Torvinen. St. Croix Band: Conrad St. John. Band Consultant: John Hoenig (virtual).

2. Agenda approval

Agenda was approved as presented with the addition of a Mille Lacs Band research update as part of the open discussion.

3. Harvest updates

- a. State – Eric Jensen provided the update. State is well below its walleye allocation due to a fairly slow bite for the larger fish. Through September 30, total walleye angler kill is estimated at 33,104 pounds; Estimated yellow perch harvest is 48,796 pounds; northern pike take is estimated at 3,580 pounds; Tullibee harvest is estimated at 3,352 pounds. Conrad St. John asked about measures to keep perch below allocation for 2026 fishing season. State said yes, they do have a plan to have different regulations coming into this winter.
- b. Bands – Adam Ray presented. He noted that few walleye were harvested in the fall so far despite some effort.

4. Fall Assessment: Preliminary Results for Walleye

- a. State GN/EF/Forage results Eric J. presented. Lots of age 1 perch and age 1 tullibee in the forage nets this fall. Not a lot of spottail shiners. No age 0 walleye were caught in the forage nets. Age 1 walleye were 2<sup>nd</sup> highest in the forage net time series. Electrofishing catch rate was the highest on record for age 1 walleye. Electrofishing catch of Age 0 walleye was very low. Age-0 length was small in 2025 (all measured less than 7-in). Median length of age-1 walleye was small (similar to the 2008 year-class) and may affect when they recruit and the strength of the year class. Water temperatures during the gill net survey never fell below the 66F threshold during the survey even though the survey was pushed back to the latest possible start. Tullibee catch increased in the offshore nets due to the big age 1 year-class of tullibee. There are still some remaining 14-17 inch tullibee from the 2013 and 2014 year-classes. Northern pike gill net catch rates increased. Many 23 inch range

northern pike were present. Age 2-3 pike were the most abundant age groups. Yellow perch catch rates were up overall, especially in the offshore nets. The catch of 9+ inch yellow perch went down slightly. It is likely that the perch are similar to the level they have been the last couple of years. The abundance of 5-7 inch yellow perch was high, and most of these are probably from the 2024 year-class. They are likely to add to the harvestable population of perch next year.

- b. Bands EF results Brandon Byrne presented. Noted good catches of age 1 walleye and low catches of age 0 walleye. Many of the age 0 walleye were escaping the current during some sections of the survey. The draft report will be updated for the January meeting once the age breaks are determined, and trend graphs will be added to this report.
5. Initial discussions on status of the walleye population – Kevin McDonnell presented.
- a. The 52 net summary showed a decline in total walleye numbers per net. Mature walleye per net also dropped. Some declines in these catches were expected until the 2024 year-class matures.
    - i. Spawning Stock Biomass was 19 lbs per net. Bootstrapping estimates provide generally overlapping bars with the last few years. The biomass is overall very similar to the 2024 catch. Unlike in 2024, no age 2 males were mature and very few age 3 females were mature in 2025. More big fish in the lake this year than in 2024. The length frequency distribution shows above average numbers of walleye between 7-10 inches (corresponding to age-1). Walleye between 11-17 inches were below average and a second peak in the LFD was present at 18 inches.
    - ii. WAE body condition increased for walleye longer than 20 inches to the highest observed in the time series, but declined for the other 2 size groups (near median condition for mid-sized fish and lowest observed for small fish).
    - iii. Incoming Recruitment - No age 0 were caught in the 52 standard gill nets. Age 1s are well above the median as well, suggesting that they survived well. Walleye recreational fishery was slow especially for larger fish. Forage is sparse for small walleye, but the big walleye seem to have plenty to eat. Tullibee, pike, perch catches were all up.
6. Juvenile index – Adam Ray presented the recommendation from the modeling subcommittee to remove age-0 information from the calculation of the juvenile index. The committee agreed to adopt the recommendation on the juvenile index.
7. Yellow Perch Subcommittee update - Eric Torvinen provided the yellow perch subcommittee update. The SCAA model originally developed by Rick Madsen was updated with data through 2024. In addition, a VPA was created. It was noted that the models work best if fishing mortality is a significant portion of the

mortality. Estimates of total instantaneous mortality (Z) from cohort catch curve analysis appears to increase from the 2010 year class to 2020 and appears to be fairly high, similar to rates estimated in other perch fisheries that have collapsed. The committee plans to continue working on perch information with the eventual goal of producing an annual Kobe plot to describe fishing rates and population status.

- a. Winter angling regulation discussion – The current YEP angling regulation at Mille Lacs is a 5-bag that went into effect in March 2025. Prior to that it was the same as the statewide 20-bag daily with a 40 possession. The state plans to start the winter season at a 10-bag with the option to reduce it to 5 if needed. State will work on checking in with the creel data more frequently than in past winters since the fishery exceeded the allocation between periods in 2025. Ice conditions are expected to drive the pressure. If ice is poor, it's unlikely that the allocation will be exceeded. State was thankful that the group was accepting of the 5 fish bag limit for the remainder of the 2025 fishing season. The intention is to prevent the fishery from exceeding the allocation in 2026. The group agreed that a 10 bag should be ok to start with as long as there is a good tracking plan. The state expressed optimism that there are a bunch of age 1+ perch coming into the system in the next year or two. GLIFWC agreed to review the CPE in the tribal nets for perch and provide them to the committee in January.

8. Keep Fish Wet campaign update – GLIFWC noted that the Keep Fish Wet campaign to educate anglers how to give released fish the best chance of survival would likely be kicking off sometime in the next year. MN, MI, and WI DNRs are all partners in this effort. Greg Berg is the main contact for MNDNR on this project. GLIFWC will make sure he is notified of any upcoming meetings.

9. Identify steps to prepare for January meeting

- a. Model contacts – Adam Ray and Kevin McDonnell were identified as the main contacts for the modeling efforts
- b. December 1 Final data exchange
- c. December 19 initial model exchange
- d. Final model exchange January 12<sup>th</sup>
- e. The group agreed to run the usual 3 walleye models, the northern pike model, and the yellow perch models. Tullibee modeling was not seen as entirely necessary, but if time allows, it might also be completed.

- f. January 21-22 meeting at FDL

10. Open discussion

- a. Mille Lacs Band provided an update on ongoing telemetry studies in the lake. There was discussion about where fish were in the water column and how it might affect gill net catch rates. There is some question about how much longer the array will stay in the lake. Most of the studies that use the array will be wrapping up soon.

11. Adjourn