



Study says “hidden overharvest” from fishing plays a role in Wisconsin walleye declines

Over the last few decades, walleye in Wisconsin have been on a downward trend. As lakes in the upper Midwest warm due to climate change, this cool-water species has found itself with less habitat in which to thrive. Add in factors like lakefront development and loss of shoreline habitat, and the iconic fishery isn't what it used to be.

Despite this decline, the fish remains as popular as ever with anglers. Though they are catching fewer individual fish than before, the percentage of walleye that state and tribal resource managers allow to be harvested each year has stayed about the same.

Given the cultural and economic importance of this inland fishery, it's time to reassess current regulations, says University of Wisconsin-

Madison Center for Limnology graduate student Holly Embke, lead author of a study published November 18, 2019 in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. It finds that “40 percent of walleye populations are overharvested, which is ten times higher than the estimates fisheries managers currently use,” she says.

A big reason for this “hidden overharvest,” says Embke, is that, for the last 30 years, resource managers have focused on fish abundance and not fishery productivity when calculating harvest limits.

In the late 1980s, after a U.S. District Court judge ruled that federal treaties gave Ojibwe tribes the right to hunt and fish in their former territories, the Wisconsin DNR and the Great Lakes Indian Fish and

Wildlife Commission were tasked with working together to set sustainable harvest limits on walleye for both recreational and tribal fisheries.

These fisheries today consist of more than 1 million recreational anglers who account for about 90 percent of the total annual harvest on the state's 900 “walleye lakes.” The other 10 percent comes from the 450 tribal members who spear walleye on roughly 175 lakes each spring.

Using the best available science at the time, the agencies developed a management plan based on fish abundance. They used adult walleye population estimates to set regulations that ensured a maximum harvest

“Hidden overharvest” in Wisc

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*Merry Christmas
and
Happy New Year*

Fewer hunters: less money for conservation

A decline in hunter participation could mean less conservation funding in Illinois. The decline is part of a nationwide trend and has been occurring for nearly half a century. Jared Duquette, who manages the Wildlife and Hunter Heritage Program for the Illinois DNR, said that hunting plays an important role in the economy and the environment.

“Hunting gets people outside and connects them with nature, which we know through something like nature-deficit disorder, that is a big deal,” Duquette said. “Getting people back outside, it allows them to get natural food, which helps the environment.”

Hunting provides rural communities a huge boost. Hunting supports local communities throughout Illinois and really throughout the world by getting people particularly into rural areas that rely on hunters to stay in their

hotels, pay for the gas, go to diners, and that kind of thing.

A survey conducted by USFWS in 2016 says that around 5% of Americans older than 16 hunt, which is about half of the number around 50 years ago with no signs of it trending upward.

Hunting license revenue took a dive sometime after the passage of the Agriculture and Consumer Protection Act of 1973, more commonly known as the Farm Bill. The Farm Bill gave way to the production for corn and soybean production in addition to the advent of various forms of industrial technology that enabled precision farming.

At the same time, the issue was a lot of people don't realize that deer and turkey – which are very abundant today – were almost extricated from Illinois. ✧

Caught a marked or tagged fish? Report it

Have you ever been fishing Michigan waters and pulled in a fish with a missing fin or one with an external tag on it? Several species found around the state are marked in some way, and the details on the fish and the tags are important to several DNR studies and management efforts. Such species include Chinook and Atlantic salmon, steelhead, walleye, lake sturgeon and brown and lake trout. A fish may have an external mark, such as a fin clip, or the mark could be internal and not visible to the naked eye. Many fish with internal tags also will have a clipped fin. For instance, a fish with an implanted coded-wire tag in its snout would be missing its adipose fin (the small fin found to the rear of a fish's dorsal, or top, fin).

Anglers may come across several different fish tags, including:

- Telemetry or temperature/depth-recording tags, some of which would be discovered only when cleaning a fish for consumption (although some external tags are visible).
- Anchor tags, which often are inserted near the base of a fin.
- Jaw tags, which hook onto a fish's upper or lower jaw.

Tags can be reported through the tagged fish form, available on the DNR's Eyes in the Field observation reporting system. The form asks for contact info; catch location, fish and tag details; and (if available) photos.

Anglers who catch and keep fish with large internal or external tags (about the size of a finger in some cases) are urged to return the tags to the nearest DNR office. The tags often can be reused, and some tags also offer small monetary rewards. For tagged fish intended for release, please don't remove tags; just report the tag information.

Marking and tagging fish help the DNR understand their growth, mortality, exploitation and movement, as well as the value of naturally reproduced versus stocked fish. Michigan.gov/TaggedFish. Questions? Contact [Elyse Walter](mailto:Elyse.Walter@dnr.state.mi.us) at 517-284-5839. ✧

MN DNR, Red Lake Nation renew Red Lake fishery agreement

The Minnesota DNR, Red Lake Nation and Bureau of Indian Affairs signed a new 10-year memorandum of understanding (MOU) that outlines continued cooperative management of the walleye population in Upper and Lower Red Lake in NW Minnesota.

"Red Lake Band members are pleased that our walleye have come back and our fishing community is revitalized," said Darrell Seki, chairman of the Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians. "We are committed to ensuring that Red Lake walleye are managed sustainably."

While the walleye fishery has rebounded, we must now focus our attention on ridding Red Lake of invasive species. This MOU provides an opportunity to address other issues such as preventing and eradicating invasive species.

The new MOU closely parallels previous 1999-2019 agreements that facilitated restoration of high-quality walleye fishing to Minnesota's largest inland body of water. The agreement states that each entity will support the Red Lake Fisheries Technical Committee, a joint panel of experts that recommends policies and practices to maintain a healthy fishery.

"We've come a long way in the past 20 years," said DNR Commissioner Sarah Strommen, noting that the combined state and tribal harvest continues to average around 1 million pounds per year. "By renewing this agreement, we are reaffirming our commitment to a successful partnership and working together for the future of this outstanding fishery."

Historically, Upper and Lower Red Lake was a highly productive walleye fishery, but it collapsed in the mid-1990s due to over harvest. The Red Lake Fisheries Technical Committee was formed in 1997. Since then, the regulations, policies and other actions this joint body has recommended have led to a healthy walleye population and a resurgent walleye fishing economy. ✧



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Position Statement

Representing a major interest in the aquatic resources of the Great Lakes states and the province of Ontario, the Great Lakes Sport Fishing Council is a confederation of organizations and individuals with a concern for the present and future of sport fishing, our natural resources and the ecosystem in which we live. We encourage the wise use of our resources and a search for the truth about the issues confronting us.

Inland Seas Angler

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Kids and thin ice – a dangerous holiday combo

As excited as they are about the holiday season, many kids are equally curious when it comes to the ice. Talking with children about ice safety now will help them stay safe during this festive time.

“We want families to get out on the ice and have a good time when conditions allow— but we also want parents to make sure kids know ice is never 100 percent safe,” said DNR conservation officer Adam Block. “They should never go on the ice alone, and they should wear a life jacket and bring safety equipment, including ice picks and a cell phone in case of an emergency. Also tell them to never follow a friend or pet onto potentially dangerous ice.”

Lakes and ponds that appear frozen are inviting spots for ice skaters and children looking to explore. But ice thickness varies greatly at this time of year. Be sure to measure ice thickness in multiple locations before walking on it. There must be at least 4 inches of solid, clear ice for safe walking. Even if the

ice is thick enough for walking, always watch children closely.

“By all means, get outside this holiday—but if you’re hosting a party and you live near a pond, lake, or stream, be sure someone is keeping an eye on any kids near the ice,” said Lisa Dugan, DNR recreation safety outreach coordinator. “And make certain that all the adults know who the designee is.” It can be easy to overlook precautions during outdoor holiday celebrations, so put safety first by following ice safety guidelines.

Ice safety guidelines

No ice can ever be considered “safe ice,” but following [these guidelines](#) can minimize your risk while on the ice:

- Always wear a life jacket on the ice (except when in a vehicle).
- Children need to be supervised when they are near the ice.
- Warn children to stay off ponds, streams, and other bodies of water.

- A thin coating of ice on a pond or lake does not mean it is safe.
- Check ice thickness at regular intervals – conditions can change quickly.
- Before heading out, inquire about conditions and known hazards with local experts.
- Avoid channels and rivers.

The minimum ice thickness guidelines for new, clear ice are:

- 4 inches for ice fishing or other activities on foot.
- 5-7 inches for a snowmobile or all-terrain vehicle.
- 8-12 inches for a car or small pickup.
- 12-15 inches for a medium truck.
- Double these minimums for white ice or ice covered with heavy snow.

For more information, visit mndnr.gov/icesafety and mndnr.gov/boatingsafety. ✧

Looking for property? DNR public land auction ends **Jan 8** Nearly 150 surplus parcels, up to 160 acres in size, are available

The auction is part of the DNR’s strategy to efficiently manage public land while maximizing outdoor recreation opportunities for residents and visitors. Bids will be accepted through **January 8, 2020**.

Land is available in counties mainly in central/northern Lower Michigan and in the Upper Peninsula. Counties include Allegan, Alpena, Bay, Charlevoix, Cheboygan, Clare,

Crawford, Delta, Dickinson, Houghton, Iosco, Jackson, Kalkaska, Lake, Mackinac, Midland, Missaukee, Muskegon, Newaygo, Otsego, Saint Clair and Van Buren. Several of the largest parcels are in Alpena, Dickinson and Newaygo counties.

Much of the land offered at this auction is isolated from other DNR-managed property, which creates some management challenges. Other

parcels are included because they offer limited public recreation benefits,” said Michael Michalek, DNR real estate resource specialist. “Several of the parcels are forested and have riverside or lake frontage and are better suited for private ownership.”

Visit Michigan.gov/LandForSale for auction information including

minimum bid prices, property descriptions and conditions of sale. Individual property listings will not be available for bid until the December 10 auction start date. At that time, instructions for submitting a bid and printable bid forms will be provided at that webpage. Sealed bids must be postmarked by midnight, **January 8**, and will be opened Wed, Jan. 22.

Request printed property information from:

DNR Real Estate Services Section
P.O. Box 30448
Lansing, MI 48909-7948

Additional properties unsold from previous auctions also are listed for sale at their former minimum bid prices. These properties are available for [immediate purchase](#). For more info: [Michael Michalek](#) at 517-284-5950 ✧



Deer Hunters Urged to Report Feral Pig Sightings to the DNR

MADISON, Wis. – State wildlife officials are encouraging hunters heading out for Wisconsin's traditional nine-day gun deer hunting season to keep an eye out for feral pigs. Feral pig sightings and harvests should be reported using the Feral Pig Reporting Form found on the feral pig hunting page of the Wisconsin DNR website.



Feral pigs can be found across a wide variety of habitats and are highly destructive because of the rooting they do in search of food. They are also efficient predators, preying on many species, including white-tailed deer fawns and ground-nesting birds like grouse, woodcock, turkeys and songbirds. Feral pigs are known to carry several diseases dangerous to humans and the domestic swine industry, including swine brucellosis, pseudorabies and leptospirosis.

[Feral pigs](#) have been defined as pigs "existing in an untamed or wild, unconfined state, having returned to such a state from domestication" and living in an unconfined environment.

For removal purposes, feral pigs are currently considered unprotected wild animals and may be hunted year-round. Feral pig hunting hours are the same as for deer during the nine-day season. During the rest of the year, there are no hunting hour restrictions for feral pigs. There is no bag limit on feral pigs, and landowners may shoot feral pigs on their property without a hunting license. Anyone else can shoot a feral pig so long as they possess a valid small game license, sport license or patron license and have landowner permission if they are on private land. ✧

423M guns in America, 1.2 per person, 8.1B rounds of ammo/yr

New federal data shows that there are 422.9 million firearms in circulation, or about 1.2 guns for every person in the country. What's more, despite years of criticism of modern "assault-style" rifles such as the AR-15 and AK-47, there are a record 17.7 million in private hands, proving that it is the most popular gun around. And last year alone, the arms industry produced 8.1 billion rounds of ammunition. Source: U.S. ATF and were crunched by the NSSF, the gun industry trade group. ✧

Record-breaking number of Thanksgiving travelers screened

WASHINGTON – The Transportation Security Administration saw a record-breaking number of travelers during the Thanksgiving holiday, screening more than 26 million passengers and crew members during the holiday travel period, from Nov. 22 to Dec. 2. On the busiest day, Dec. 1, more than 2.8 million travelers passed through TSA security checkpoints nationwide, and with 2,870,764 travelers screened, it marked the busiest day ever for the agency. ✧

Youth Goose Hunt Jan. 19-20, 2020

Youth interested in participating in the annual Central Illinois Youth Goose Hunt, sponsored by the Illinois DNR, may register now for the hunt scheduled for January 19-20, 2020. To register phone in to the IDNR at 217-785-8060 by the registration deadline of Friday, Jan. 3, 2020. The youth goose hunt will be held at private waterfowl hunting clubs in the Canton area in Fulton County. A lottery drawing involving all youth who phone in to register will be conducted January 6, 2020, and youth hunters selected will be notified by mail. The hunt is open to youth ages 10-17 at the time of the hunt. ✧

Firearms Industry Celebrates Penn Sunday Hunting

WASHINGTON – The National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF), the firearms industry trade association, applauds the Pennsylvania legislature for passing legislation that will allow for Sunday hunting in the Keystone State for the first time in more than 100 years. The Pennsylvania state Senate approved S. 147 in a vote of 38-11.

This is a tectonic shift in policy and one that will benefit Pennsylvania's conservation, growth in outdoor recreation and economic impact.

The National Shooting Sports Foundation has made Sunday hunting a priority issue in Pennsylvania. NSSF led the Sunday Hunting Coalition, along with 15 other like-minded hunting and conservation groups and outdoor retail businesses. NSSF was successful in recent years in bringing Sunday hunting to North Carolina, Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia and South Carolina. Maine and Massachusetts still have outright Sunday hunting bans, and several states still restrict hunting, including allowing hunting only on private lands.

The Pennsylvania legislation would allow Sunday hunting one day during rifle deer season, one during statewide archery deer season and a third day to be selected by Pennsylvania's Game Commission. Pennsylvania sold 855,486 hunting licenses in 2018. The addition of just these three days allows for working mothers and fathers to take three more days in the woods and marshes with their children to pass along shared hunting traditions. The economic benefit to removing all Sunday hunting barriers in the Keystone State would inject \$764,291,489 in total economic contribution, including jobs, output and wages created from hunter expenditures ranging from licenses, ammunition, and hunting supplies to food, fuel, and magazines. ✧

Great Lakes water levels, St. Clair River likely to rise in 2020

Prepare for higher water levels next year in the Great Lakes and the St. Clair River. That's the word from the St. Clair County Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management.

Director Justin Westmiller addressed the Marysville City Council at its regular meeting on November 25. Assistant Director Mark White visited the St. Clair City Council on November 18. "We are 11 inches higher right now than we were at this time in 2018," Westmiller said. "We're at the lowest point of the year right now and from this point forward water levels will rise."

September saw a lot of rain, resulting in Lake Michigan/Huron – hydrologically one lake – rising to 35 inches above its long-term average and Lake St. Clair 33 inches above its long-term average. "Our office has

had quite a few meetings with the USACE and National Weather Service and our big concern is what's coming our way," said White.

Lakes Superior, St. Clair, Erie and Ontario set all-time records for high water this year; Lake Michigan/Huron missed a record high by an inch. Westmiller said that river levels are likely to be 7 to 12 inches higher next spring and summer than a year ago.

"It's not just St. Clair County," said White. "A lot of coastal communities in Michigan are being impacted ... by the weather we've had, the amount of precipitation, the amount of snow pack, the amount of melting and runoff, everything that comes from Lake Superior on down has been huge. Predictions are that conditions in the coming year are going to be probably worse."

In order for the water levels to fall, the Great Lakes Basin would need a warmer than normal winter, in which the lakes experienced little freezing, allowing for accelerated evaporation ... and less snowfall. But forecasters are calling for a colder than normal winter.

Ice jams in the St. Clair River in the late winter and early spring are a growing concern. "The river can shoot up two-three feet in eight hours," Westmiller said. "Are we going to get first-floor flooding in Marysville like we're going to get in Clay Township, Algonac, Marine City and East China?" No, he said. St. Clair and Marysville sit relatively high compared to downriver communities. "But we're likely to see seawalls over-topped," Westmiller said. Tributaries of the big river are likely to flood again. ✧

New provincial proposals for baitfish harvest and transport win conditional support

ONTARIO – The province is proposing a series of changes for Ontario anglers using live or dead baitfish or leeches that could have a significant impact on the sport fishery. The changes largely involve the use, movement and harvest of bait and are aimed squarely at minimizing the spread of diseases like viral hemorrhagic septicemia (VHS).

Freshwater fish suffering from VHS were first detected in the Great Lakes in Lake Ontario in 2005. Such fish may exhibit any or all of the following symptoms: bulging eyes, pale gills, signs of bleeding around the eyes, bases of the fins, sides and head, dark colouration, distended (fluid-filled) belly, gasping at the surface, corkscrew swimming behaviour and a high death rate.

Under the new regulations, movement of fish will be restricted to four bait management zones (BMZ), two of which encompass Northern Ontario. Anglers will not be permitted to harvest bait outside their BMZ, determined by their primary

residence. If an angler purchases bait while fishing in a BMZ that does not contain their primary residence, they will be required to carry the receipt for two weeks after that purchase. After the two weeks has expired, the angler will be required to dispose of the bait in a legal manner.

Regardless of the BMZ, use and storage of bait will be prohibited in native brook trout lakes. The regulations also include provisions to modernize and standardize commercial operations through a training and best management practices guide.

As for local bait sellers, whose numbers have dwindled in recent years, the changes are not expected to have much of an impact on their operations. "I get a lot of information on changes coming from the government every year," laughed Don McCulloch, proprietor of Breakaway Sports in Little Current, the only place to buy minnows in town. "I don't expect these changes to have any impact on me at all. I think it is

more the guys who harvest the minnows and people buying bait who it will affect."

Mr. McCulloch won't be selling minnows for a little while yet this year, however. "I won't be getting any in until likely later in December," he said, "once things freeze up and the ice is in so guys can get out on the ice to fish I will have them in stock."

The new regulations do have wide-spread, if conditional support, in the sports fishing industry. Neil Debassige of the Fuel the Fire television program and an industry player gave a careful nod to the plan. "When you look at the devastation that can be caused by an invasive species or disease, we have to do all that is within our power to protect the native species," he said, "provided that the regulations are based on sound data. If the ministry has done its due diligence and there is sound data to show that transporting baitfish is a cause, then we have to get behind and support it." ✧

DEC encourages New Yorkers to give the gift of a lifetime sporting license

Just in time for the holidays, State DEC Commissioner Basil Seggos is reminding New Yorkers that it's a great time of year to treat yourself or a loved one to a gift that will provide decades of outstanding recreational opportunities—a lifetime sporting license.

[Lifetime licenses](#) are available to New York residents of any age who have resided in state for at least one year prior to purchase ([proof of residency is required](#)). For more information, go to [DEC's website](#).

Lifetime licenses may be purchased at any [license-issuing agent](#). A lifetime license may also be purchased by phone (866-933-2257) or [online](#) with a current New York State DMV driver or non-driver ID containing a valid New York State address. Allow 14 days for delivery of lifetime licenses purchased online or by phone.

Lifetime fishing, trapping, or hunting licenses and privileges will remain valid for use in New York for a lifetime (with [hunter/trapper education](#) requirements), even if the holder moves out of state.

Available lifetime licenses:

- **Lifetime license (includes hunting, fishing, and turkey hunting privileges)**
 - For a person age 0-4 yrs \$380
 - For a person age 5-11 yrs \$535
 - For a person age 12-69 yrs \$765
 - For a person age 70 yrs + \$65
- **Lifetime fishing license**
 - For a person age 0-69 yrs \$460
 - For a person age 70 yrs+ \$65
- **Lifetime hunting license** \$535

For more information, visit a license-issuing agent today or call DEC's License Sales Office at 518-402-8843 (Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.). ✧

After committing in April, IL Gov. Pritzker holds up planning on project to stop Asian carp

Outdoor sports advocates and environmentalists said Gov. J.B. Pritzker has been dragging his feet on allowing the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to get started on a plan to keep Asian carp out of Lake Michigan despite committing to the study in April.

Seven nonprofit groups sent Pritzker a petition signed by 3,894 residents of the Great Lakes region urging the governor to sign the formal agreement with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the last hurdle before they can begin the planning, engineering and design, or PED, process of fortifying the Brandon Road Lock and Dam in Joliet. In April, Pritzker said he was concerned about the cost of the project, but indicated he would support the beginning engineering and design work on it.

"I will not sign a Project Partnership Agreement without a cost control strategy and additional cost sharing among the states," Pritzker said at the time. "However, the State of Illinois is willing to move forward to preconstruction, engineering and design on the project." In that April statement, the governor and others said they were wary about moving forward without assurances that the state wouldn't get stuck with the lion's share of the bill.

Illinois has devoted \$2 million for the design work and other states had pledged financial support, but the potential cost of the estimated \$778 million project could be much higher. The governor's office did not respond to questions about the petition.

"Fortifying Brandon Road Lock and Dam is a critical next step to keep invasive Asian Carp from creeping any closer to Lake Michigan and crashing our regional economy," said Joel Brammeier, CEO of the Alliance for the Great Lakes. "We are hopeful that Governor Pritzker will listen to

Fond du Lac Band to exercise netting rights on Lake Superior

The Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior says their process to begin netting on Lake Superior is in its early stages. They're currently exploring subsistence netting of whitefish and herring on Lake Superior, potentially for next season. The Band were ready to allow band members some limited netting on Lake Superior this fall, but no one showed up.

The band's Tribal Council offered band members the opportunity for subsistence netting (any fish caught could not be sold) on the big lake for herring and whitefish. But Fond du Lac members would first have to take an apprentice fishing course from veteran Grand Portage band netters.

So far, no Fond du Lac members have signed up for the program, said Brian Borkholder, Fond du Lac fisheries biologist. Borkholder said he expects the offer to be out there again in 2020 for Fond du Lac members. While Fond du Lac members, thanks to treaty rights, are allowed to net and spear walleyes and other fish in smaller lakes each spring, this was the first time band members had been allowed access to Lake Superior netting. Fond du Lac and Minnesota DNR fisheries experts would work together to develop a management plan for any species targeted by the band. ✧

his constituents and sign the agreement soon so that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers can move to the next phase of the project."

If approved by Congress, the Corps would begin the preliminary work on the combination of acoustic, air and electric barriers at the dam. This would be the most effective way of preventing the spread of the invasive fish that could threaten the multi-billion dollar boating and fishing industries in the Great Lakes region, according to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. ✧

Bipartisan effort drops a lifeline to fish reeled up from the Deep

U.S. Reps. Graves and Huffman team up to conserve reef fish in the Gulf

Alexandria, Va. – A coalition of recreational fishing and boating organizations is lauding the introduction of the DESCEND Act by Congressmen Garret Graves (R-La.) and Jared Huffman (D-Calif.). The DESCEND Act of 2019, or the “Direct Enhancement of Snapper Conservation and the Economy through Novel Devices Act of 2019,” would require commercial and recreational fishermen to possess a descending device rigged and ready for use or venting tool when fishing for reef fish in Gulf of Mexico federal waters.

The recreational fishing and boating community has long advocated for the use of descending devices to reduce the mortality rate of prized reef fish such as snapper and grouper. When deep-water fish (more than 30 feet) are brought rapidly to the surface, they experience barotrauma—a condition where a buildup of gas pressure in their bodies makes it difficult or impossible to swim back down. If a fisherman releases the fish due to size, season or bag limit restrictions and the fish does not survive, this is a dead discard or wasted fish.

A descending device is a weighted hook, lip clamp, or box that will hold the fish while it is lowered to a sufficient depth to recover from the effects of barotrauma and release the fish. A venting tool is a sharpened, hollow device capable of penetrating the abdomen of a fish in order to release the excess gas pressure in the body cavity when a fish is retrieved from depth.

Possession of descending devices on board is required in other parts of the country, including several West Coast states and, starting next year pending final regulatory approval, in South Atlantic federal waters. However, similar regulatory action in the Gulf of Mexico has been held up due to concerns that such action would make ineligible an impending \$30 million project related to

barotrauma reduction, funded through the Deepwater Horizon Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration program.

The DESCEND Act would break through this bureaucratic roadblock by both allowing the \$30 million project to proceed and requiring possession of descending devices or venting tools.

Given the economic and cultural importance of fishing in the Gulf of Mexico, we should be doing all we can to ensure the conservation of these fisheries,” said Mike Leonard, vice president of government affairs for the American Sportfishing Association. “Improving the survival of released fish has long been a sportfishing industry priority. We strongly support the DESCEND Act, and appreciate Reps. Graves and Huffman for their continued leadership on marine conservation policy.”

“The huge economic impact of the Gulf of Mexico reef fish fishery depends on an abundance of fish and fishing opportunities. We commend this bipartisan effort led by Congressmen Graves and Huffman for tackling wanton waste of America’s fishery resources,” said Jeff Angers, president of the [Center for Sportfishing Policy](#). “By following simple best practices such as the use of descending devices and venting tools, recreational and commercial fishermen can do a little extra to return alive many more fish to their deep-water homes.”

“Discard mortality and commercial bycatch are significant, hidden drains on our marine resources that must be confronted by all stakeholders and this legislation is a targeted effort that aims to decrease the impact of recreational angling on important species,” said Ted Venker, conservation director for [Coastal Conservation Association](#). “No one likes to throw back a fish, see it float off and know that it’s a wasted fish. Given the availability and

effectiveness of descending devices to address one of the main factors impacting the availability of many species, particularly red snapper, this legislation makes sense and hopefully leads to greater awareness of the need to reduce all sources of discard and bycatch mortality.”

“Not only will ensuring that we can return fish to depth and minimize post-release mortality benefit fisheries conservation, it will increase angler access to those fisheries in the long-term,” said Chris Horton, fisheries program director for the [Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation](#). “Releasing more fish alive today will translate to more fish and more days on the water tomorrow.”

“Expanding the use of descending devices is sound conservation policy that will help ensure the health of fisheries for generations to come,” said Nicole Vasilaros, senior vice president of government and legal affairs for the National Marine Manufacturers Association. “The recreational boating and fishing community thanks Representatives Garret Graves and Jared Huffman for their leadership on this issue and we call on all members of Congress to support the bipartisan DESCEND Act.”

“Recreational anglers are the biggest champions of fish conservation in our country. One of the best ways to ensure survival for reef fish and to enhance conservation and grow the resource is by using descending devices to help fish adjust after being caught in deeper waters and avoid being eaten by predators in the process,” said Chris Macaluso, Center for Marine Fisheries director for the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership. “We applaud the authors and co-sponsors of this bill for their continued work with recreational fishermen to improve fishery management and resource conservation.” ✧

“Hidden overharvest” in Wisc

Continued from page 1

amount of 35 percent of the adult walleye in any given lake. The average exploitation rate for walleye stocks is closer to 15 percent, so the agencies assumed these regulations were sufficiently conservative to be sustainable.

These regulations “worked for a long time,” says co-author Steve Carpenter, director emeritus of the Center for Limnology, “and then they stopped working. Over the last couple of decades, there began to be walleye recruitment failures scattered around the state.” In these last few decades, annual walleye production in many of the state’s lakes has declined by 35 percent. On top of that decline, walleye stocks now take one and a half times longer to replenish themselves than they did in 1990.

State fisheries managers responded by changing angler regulations to protect large female walleye, boosting walleye populations by stocking hatchery-raised fish in struggling lakes, and managing individual lakes according to their productive capacity, says Greg Sass, fisheries research team lead in the DNR’s Office of Applied Science. But these efforts didn’t reverse the broader walleye decline.

So, Embke and her colleagues set out to better understand other factors fisheries managers might consider when setting harvest rules. By focusing on production, they hoped to get a clearer picture of how well populations withstand fishing pressure and continue to reproduce and grow. “We wanted to take a more nuanced approach and ask not only how many fish are in a lake but also consider how fast they’re growing, how big they are, and how many are produced every year,” she says.

One way to think of it, Embke says, is in terms of a bank account. “Abundance tells you the money in the bank while production tells you the interest rate,” she says. In other words, if you start taking more money out of your account than the interest rate contributes each year, your savings shrink. Do this several years

in a row and those annual withdrawals begin to have an outsized impact on what little money is left in the bank. Using data that state and tribal researchers had already collected, Embke and her colleagues calculated how walleye biomass had changed over a 28-year period in 179 lakes. Measuring biomass is akin to throwing all of the walleye in a lake on a scale and recording the overall weight. Production is a reading of how much biomass grows each year, an indication of a population’s ability to replenish its losses.

By comparing walleye production to the total fishery harvest in these study lakes, they found that overharvest is ten times higher than the 4 percent estimates generated when fisheries managers consider abundance alone. What’s more, Embke says, the study found great variation in walleye production from lake to lake. Some lakes remain walleye strongholds and can handle current fishing pressures, while others can’t sustain even current average harvest rates of 15 to 20 percent, much less the 35 percent harvest benchmark. By considering production, fisheries managers may be better equipped to set limits for individual lakes.

These results, the researchers write, “highlight the urgent need for improved governance, assessment, and regulation of recreational fisheries in the face of rapid environmental change.” “Nature has changed,” says Carpenter. “The climate now is different from what it was in the 1980s and it’s not going back. That means habitat is decreasing and, on average, walleye stocks can’t take the harvest levels they have seen.” The good news, he says, is that the data fisheries managers already collect can be plugged in to Embke’s method for estimating production and help chart a way forward. By better understanding the resilience of Wisconsin walleye populations and by acknowledging the role that anglers play in reducing stocks, the future of this iconic fishery just may have a fighting chance. <https://www.nps.gov/miss/learn/nature/ascarpover.html>. ✧

DNR seeks candidates for Snowmobile Advisory Workgroup

People interested in helping to shape and support Michigan's snowmobile program and trail opportunities are encouraged to apply for vacancies on Michigan's [Snowmobile Advisory Workgroup](#). The DNR will accept resumes through **Monday, Dec. 16, 2019**.

This workgroup assists the Michigan Trails Advisory Council and the division in the creation, development, operation and maintenance of the state’s designated snowmobile trail program. Michigan is a national leader in rails-to-trails and maintains more than 6,200 miles of groomed snowmobile trails.

The vacant positions include:

- A member to serve as grant sponsor, in order to bring knowledge and expertise on funding, paperwork, brushing and signing, grooming and equipment related to trail development and maintenance.
- A member to represent Region 3 (southern Lower Peninsula) of the Michigan Snowmobile and ORV Association.
- An at-large member to represent the statewide interests of residents and visitors.

Appointments are for four-year terms, and members are expected to participate in four meetings each year. Meetings are hosted in different locations throughout the northern Lower Peninsula and the Upper Peninsula.

Resumes may be sent to:

Annalisa Centofanti

Trails Section Administrative Assistant

DNR Parks and Recreation Division

525 W. Allegan St.

P.O. Box 30257

The DNR also will accept resumes by email at CentofantiA@Michigan.gov.

Learn more about snowmobiling permit info:

Michigan.gov/Snowmobiling. ✧

Salmon River hatchery slated for \$5.2 million in improvements

ALTMAR, N.Y. – The state Department of Environmental Conservation’s fish hatchery on the Salmon River, the largest in the DEC’s hatchery system, is slated for more than \$5 million in upgrades beginning next year. The hatchery, the state’s largest, was built in 1980 and specializes in raising Pacific salmon, steelhead and brown trout. It was built to revive and enhance the Great Lakes fishery and now provides most of the fish for the multi-million-dollar Lake Ontario salmonid fishery.

Each year, this hatchery stocks more than 1.4 million Chinook salmon fingerlings (young fish 3-5 inches long), 155,000 coho fall fingerlings (3-5 inches), 90,000 coho salmon yearlings (a fish between one and two years old), and 750,000 steelhead yearlings.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo recently announced that \$5.25 million will be spent to modernize the facility. The fishing scene on Lake Ontario and its tributaries generates some \$85.9 million annually to the state’s economy, according to the DEC.

Salmon River angler expenditures alone contribute \$27 million.

“The funding will support the development of cutting-edge technology to save and reuse water to increase fish production,” Cuomo said in a news release announcing the grant. “Raising fish is a water-intensive practice and the hatchery currently uses a water flow of 10,000 gallons of water per minute. The improvements will enable the facility to save money while raising more fish for stocking.”

The Salmon River was initially selected as the location to build the hatchery due to the fact that it had the highest water quality and coolest temperatures of any of the Lake Ontario tributaries, said Fran Verdoliva, the DEC’s special assistant to the Salmon River. The water used at the hatchery is a combination of water drawn from Beaver Dam Brook (a tributary of the Salmon River) and well water.

Tom Kielbasinski, the hatchery’s manager, pointed out the Altmar hatchery is almost 40 years old and constructed of mostly steel

and concrete. “It’s a big piece of infrastructure and some things just need to be replaced. The hatchery’s fish ladder, which is vital to the operation of the fish hatchery is ailing and needs to be replaced. The hatchery’s plumbing, tanks are getting old. They still function, but aren’t as reliable as we’d like them to be.”

The hatchery is also a tourist attraction. Its visitor’s area includes a giant aquarium and a number of eye-catching displays. In addition, there are several viewing areas where visitors can observe hatchery operations and fish coming into the hatchery via a fish ladder from Beaver Dam Brook. Verdoliva said during a typical fall the hatchery from September 1 to the end of November draws more than 35,000 visitors.

During the fall of 2017, DEC announced completion of [\\$150,000 in improvements](#) at the hatchery, which included new live fish displays, revitalized public areas, signage, and interpretive displays in the visitor center. ✧

DNR to host employment event for military veterans [Jan 9](#)

The Minnesota DNR is hosting its third annual Veteran Employment Information Event on [Jan. 9](#), in St. Paul. Space is limited and pre-registration is required to attend the free event. Veterans can register for a time slot between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m. by going to tinyurl.com/dnrvets2020.

Many veterans want to work in a natural resources environment, and many military skills translate into DNR positions. “If you’ve served in the military, you probably have a lot of experience relevant to many of our professional areas,” said Don Matthys, DNR regional supervisor and U.S. Army retired.

At the event, veterans will have the opportunity to talk to DNR staff, including those who work in the areas of fisheries and wildlife, information technology, GIS and mapping, forestry, enforcement, engineering,

and more. Veterans will learn the types of jobs available, education and experience requirements, and how a military career fits with state employment. Attendees will have the option to meet with current DNR employees who are also military veterans, and learn resume tips for translating military skills and experience to position qualifications.

Human resources staff will provide information on how to apply for DNR jobs, set up job searches, and receive job posting notifications. Veterans will also be on hand to answer questions. Information on DNR veteran support resources will also be available. This event will be held at the DNR Headquarters, 500 Lafayette Road N., St. Paul, MN 55101. Vets will receive a welcome packet with additional information when registration is confirmed. ✧

Register for winter outdoors workshop for women, [Jan. 24 - 26](#)

Women can sign up for a January weekend workshop that will include classes on archery, canning, climbing, dark house fishing, fly fishing, hiking, knots, rifle shooting, scouting for wildlife, snowshoeing, trapping, turkey hunting, wood burning design and wild game cooking. The winter workshop is Jan. 24-Jan. 26, at the Audubon Center of the North Woods in Sandstone, and is organized by the Becoming an Outdoors Woman (BOW) Program of the Minnesota DNR. A winter workshop schedule with a registration form is available at mndnr.gov/bow. ✧

No Asian carp found in two-week sampling of Bubbly Creek

Chicago – The Illinois DNR, and partner agencies under the leadership of the Asian Carp Regional Coordinating Committee (ACRCC), have found no Asian carp in the second week of searching for the invasive fish in the Chicago Area Waterway System (CAWS). Agencies jointly decided to pursue a two-week intensive survey of the area for live bighead and silver carps following the October 30, 2019 notification of the presence of Asian carp environmental DNA (eDNA) in Bubbly Creek, which is part of the South Branch of the CAWS.

Response efforts in the second week of monitoring mirrored the first week, including intensive netting and electrofishing near Bubbly Creek and the surrounding 10 miles of river by IDNR, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. In the second week of monitoring, agency biologists surveyed 166 sites, completing 22.5 hours of electrofishing and used contracted fishers to set and retrieve 11.6 miles of nets. A total of 1,693 fish were captured in these efforts, including 21 species and two hybrid groups. Gizzard shad, largemouth bass, and bluegill dominated the native fish catches this week, along with state threatened banded killifish. Common carp, a non-native species, was the second most abundant of all fishes surveyed. In total, 331 sites were visited during the two-week response, capturing more than 2,500 fish from waters in the 10 miles surrounding both the initial and follow-up eDNA detection sites. No bighead or silver carps were seen or captured.

Subsequent eDNA sampling in Bubbly Creek conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on October 29 and 30, 2019 did detect additional eDNA positives. A total of 172 water samples were collected, of which 51 were found to be positive for silver carp eDNA, 21 were positive for bighead carp eDNA and 28 were positive for both bighead and silver carp eDNA. Notably, netting and

electrofishing revealed no live fish present within Bubbly Creek where positive eDNA was detected.

During the second round of eDNA collection in Bubbly Creek, biologists observed the start of a combined sewer overflow event. Given that the water quality in this area of Bubbly Creek is unlikely to support live fish, agencies will continue to investigate other potential sources of eDNA, as well as potential connections between the observed combined sewer overflow event and the unusual eDNA results.



“We’re extremely pleased with the absence of invasive carps during this week’s monitoring,” said Kevin Irons, aquaculture and aquatic nuisance species program manager, IDNR. “Given that no bighead or silver carp were found, the ACRCC will proceed with scheduled sampling in spring 2020, looking for both live fish and eDNA in the ongoing effort to protect the Great Lakes from Asian carp.

To aid monitoring efforts, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers canceled testing at the barriers planned for November 20-22, 2019, which would have required the two most upstream barriers to be powered down.

“The transition to cold weather operations at the barriers, which involves powering down one half of Barrier II and operating the other half at reduced voltage settings when water temperatures drop below 10 degrees Celsius were postponed to allow the ACRCC and partner agencies to finalize the response actions and any prudent follow up measures deemed necessary,” said W. Patrick Bray, chief of public affairs

for the Chicago District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

With no live bighead or silver carp detected or captured, the ACRCC’s normal monitoring efforts in the CAWS will resume as scheduled. The CAWS, including the vicinity of Bubbly Creek, is intensively sampled each year through a comprehensive, multipronged interagency sampling plan focusing on the detection of Asian carp in the waterways between the electric dispersal barriers and Lake Michigan. Additional

information about Asian carp monitoring efforts, as well as the ACRCC’s response plans, can be found at www.asiancarp.us. ✧

Northern pike anglers and spearers reminded of zone regulations

As cold temperatures continue to make ice on Minnesota lakes, ice anglers and spearers gearing up for winter fishing action are reminded that northern pike zone regulations apply. The regulations went into effect in May 2018 and created three distinct zones in the north-central, northeastern and southern parts of the state. The northern pike regulations apply to inland waters but do not affect border waters or individual lakes, rivers and streams that have their own special regulations for northern pike. Special pike regs are in place on about 95 waters and always take precedence over statewide regulations. Specific regulation details can be found on the DNR website at mndnr.gov/pike or in the Minnesota Fishing Regulations booklet online at mndnr.gov/regulations/fishing.

Anglers also can find ice safety guidelines at mndnr.gov/icesafety. ✧



As we reflect on 2019, our soldiers on active duty around the world, our country and its leaders, our own safety, our health, family and all we have to be grateful for...our best wishes for a very Merry Christmas and blessed and wonderful New Year in 2020.

"...behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be unto all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour..." Luke 2:10-11

Merry Christmas
and
best wishes for a safe and
Happy New Year

Other Breaking News Items: **(Click on title or URL to read full article)**

Lake Erie's severe algal bloom in 2019 stirs worries about 2020

This year's harmful algal bloom on Lake Erie, according to Michigan officials from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration who track it, had a "severity index" of 7.3 compared with 3.8 in 2018.

Schumer, shippers battle over Lake Ontario flood prevention

Amid fears that Lake Ontario will overflow its banks and destroy millions of dollars of property again next year, Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer and the shipping industry are clashing over whether more water should be released from the lake

Great Lakes fishery: The start of the industry and the fall of fish populations

Long ago, as fishing the Great Lakes first became a major business, a commercial apparatus that would see great successes, and failures, was born. With the arrival of railways, fish could be caught and shipped anywhere.

Harmful algae could kill invasive mussels

Scientists are trying to find new ways to manage the spread of non-native mussels harming the Great Lakes ecosystem. Recent research found that chemicals produced by blue-green algae, also called cyanobacteria, are toxic to the larvae of invasive zebra and quagga mussels.

ODNR creating wetlands to keep Lake Erie clean

The Ohio DNR announced six new wetland projects through H2Ohio, two of which are right at the mouth of the Maumee River. The Cullen Park project and the Grassy Island project will help keep toxins out of Lake Erie

Cuyahoga County fears Cleveland may opt out of plastic bag ban, diminishing its effectiveness

Cuyahoga County Council fears the city of Cleveland, Ohio will opt out of the county's ban on disposable plastic bags that takes effect Jan. 1 and greatly diminish the effectiveness of the ban

Invasive sea lamprey populations at near-historic lows

The Great Lakes Fishery Commission announced last week that sea lamprey populations reached near-record lows in the Great Lakes. The decline in population from near-record high numbers is attributed to elevated spring precipitation levels this year.

Lake Huron to see more Atlantic salmon stocked next year

Following recent declines in Atlantic and coho salmon populations in Lake Huron due to changing food-web dynamics, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources plans to stock more fish to increase numbers

Study links Asian carp with Mississippi River fish drop

Sport fish have declined significantly in portions of the Upper Mississippi River infested with Asian carp, adding evidence to fears about the invader's threat to native species and the Great Lakes, according to a new study

State asks \$50 million in damages in revised lawsuit over Lake Ontario flooding

The State of New York submitted a revised lawsuit against the International Joint Commission over high lake levels along Lake Ontario that caused damage to shoreline communities this year

New challenge in fighting sea lampreys: warmer waters

New research indicates that warmer waters in Great Lakes tributaries reduce the effectiveness of sea lamprey removal treatment techniques. The findings suggest greater use of treatment chemicals will be necessary, making control of sea lamprey costlier

'We're all going to be gone': Bills threaten commercial fisheries

The commercial fishing industry in Michigan has struggled in recent years due to rapid declines in the population of the one fish they are allowed to catch, the lake whitefish

End