Inland Seas Angler

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Region-wide Sea Lamprey control update

Attached is a summary, the data itself, and lake-by-lake talking points of the Region-wide Sea Lamprey control update. You will note the news is generally good: The sea lamprey indices appear to have returned to levels seen prior to the COVID-19 disruption, when lampricide treatments were limited. Lake Superior remains the only lake where sea lamprey indices are significantly above target. In Lakes Michigan and Huron, the indices are closer to target, and in Lakes Erie and Ontario, the indices are below target.

All 29 index streams used to generate lake-specific adult sea lamprey population indices were trapped during 2025 and indices were calculated for all five lakes. 2025 adult indices appear to have returned to levels seen prior to the COVID-19 pandemic when lampricide treatments were limited during 2020 and 2021. As such, a total of 37,800 adults were captured at index sites during 2025, which is just below the 3-year pre-COVID average of 38,167 (2017-2019). 3-year average indices (2023-2025) are above targets for all lakes except Erie, though some indices are still being affected by elevated populations resulting from the limited treatments during COVID. There are no significant 5-year trends in the adult indices for any of the lakes. Encouragingly, the decreases seen in the 2024 adult indices for lakes Huron, Michigan, Erie and Ontario continued into 2025. Treatment effort continues at pre-pandemic levels, and we expect indices should be stabilizing or decreasing in the upcoming years.

Lake Superior

Although the single point estimate for 2025 decreased (55,551 to 40,619), the 3-year average of the adult sea lamprey index (52,809) increased from last year and remains greater than the target (10,421) for Lake Superior.

Population estimates were generated for all 7 index streams for Lake Superior using mark-recapture data.

Stream specific estimates for the Bad and Tahquamenon Rivers contributed most to the lake-wide index estimate in 2025 (46% and 40% respectively). The adult sea lamprey catch in the Tahquamenon River was the second highest on record (N=2,156).

The Brule and Middle Rivers had below average spawning runs in 2025 likely due to lampricide applications on both streams in 2024.

Lake Michigan

The 3-year average of the adult sea lamprey index (23,451) decreased but remains greater than the target (20,526) for Lake Michigan. The index of abundance has remained relatively stable around target level for the past 10 years.

Population estimates were generated for all 6 index streams for Lake Michigan using mark-recapture data.

The stream specific estimates for the Manistique and Big Manistee Rivers contributed most to the lake-wide index estimate in 2025 (37% and 22% respectively).

Lake Huron

The 3-year average of the adult sea lamprey index (39,372) decreased but remains greater than the target (31,274) for Lake Huron.

Population estimates were generated for all 6 Lake Huron index streams using mark-recapture data.

The stream specific estimate from the Echo and Cheboygan Rivers contributed most to the lake-wide index estimate in 2025 (28% and 26% respectively).

Lake Erie

The 3-year average of the adult sea lamprey index (1,709) decreased and is less than the target (3,263) for Lake Erie.

Population estimates were generated for 3 of the 5 index streams using mark-recapture data. The population estimate for Cattaraugus and Youngs Creeks were modeled due to insufficient recaptures of marked sea lamprey.

Stream specific estimates from Cattaraugus (model estimate) and Big Creeks contributed most to the lake-wide index estimate in 2025 (36% and 26% respectively).

Larval crews are having a hard time finding sea lamprey in Lake Erie tributaries which corroborates the low adult numbers observed in recent years.

4 of the 5 index streams will be treated in 2025 (3 are completed, 1 outstanding).

Lake Ontario

The 3-year average of the adult sea lamprey index (29,986) decreased but remains greater than the target (14,065) for Lake Ontario.

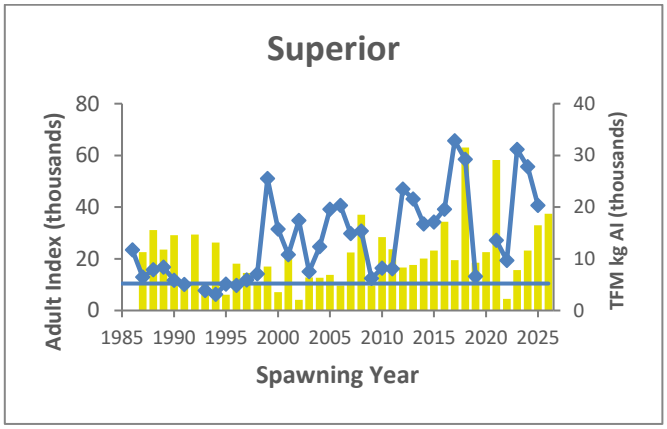
There was a significant decrease in the single point adult index estimate from 2023 (56,000), to 2024 (22,374), to 2025 (11,584).

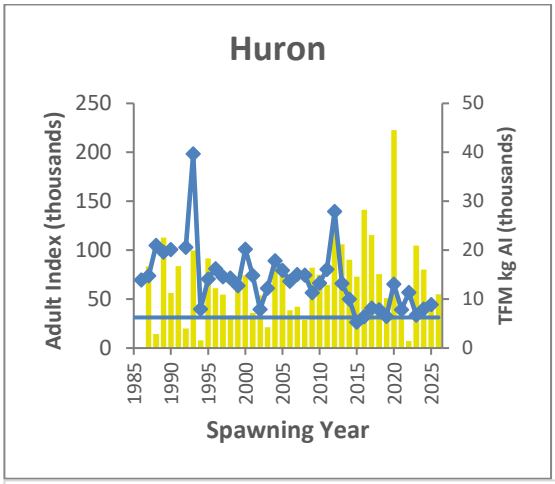
Population estimates were generated for 4 of the 5 index streams using mark-recapture data. The population estimate for Sterling Creek was modeled due to insufficient recaptures of marked sea lamprey.

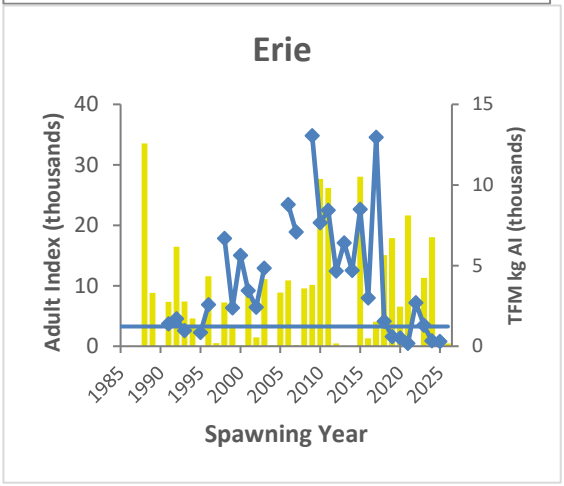
Stream specific estimates from the Humber and Black Rivers contributed most to the lake-wide index estimate in 2025 (37% and 31% respectively).

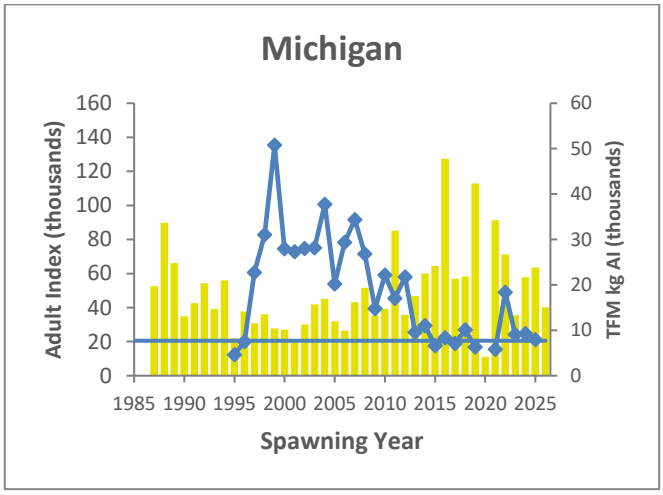
Spawning runs were likely diminished in 4 of the 5 index streams due to 2025 lampricide applications.

Understanding the process and following graphics:
Success in meeting target objectives in each lake is determined by assessing the 3-year average index for that lake. The 5-year trend of the index is determined by the direction of the slope over the past 5 years; single year point estimates can fluctuate due to environmental conditions, can have wide error bars, and sometimes cannot be generated, thus the focus on 3-year averages and 5-year trends. A pooled-Petersen mark-recapture method is used to estimate adult sea lamprey populations in individual index streams, but sometimes estimates are modeled if there are insufficient recapture data. Conversion factors are used to calculate lake-wide adult sea lamprey populations from the indices.









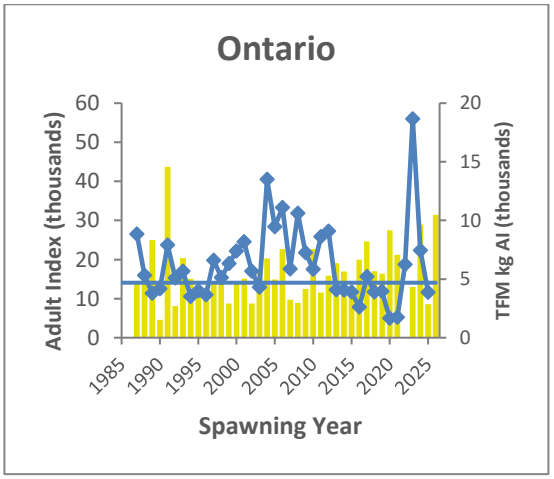


Figure 1. *Single-year adult sea lamprey abundance indices (blue lines and diamonds) and their targets (horizontal blue lines) plotted with TFM use in kg of Active Ingredient (yellow bars) for all lakes. TFM use is offset by two years to correspond with when the impacts of TFM treatments would first be observed in the adult index data. For example, the impacts to the adult index resulting from no TFM treatments in Lake Ontario during 2020 are first observed in the 2022 spawning year.* ✧

Finding Fall Fish

If you want to catch a fish, put your bait where a fish lives. That might sound basic, but the most basic concept of fishing is to fish where the fish are. You can have the nicest boat around, lots of expensive rods and reels and tackleboxes full of lures, but if you don't put your lure near a fish, all that other stuff is going to do you no good. Here are some ideas for finding different species of fish this fall.

Let's start with crappies. Crappies are abundant and popular almost everywhere. In spring, we catch them near cover like rushbeds and docks and timber in shallow water. In fall, if you fish those areas, you probably won't be eating crappies for supper. In most places, they're not in the shallows in large numbers now.

In some lakes, the crappies will be on or near the deep weed line. The clearer the water, the deeper they'll be. Sometimes they'll be 25 yards off the edge of the deep weed line. On a calm evening, you can see them creating dimples as they suck bugs off the surface of the water. Try a Mr. Crappie Grub or an XL Shadpole on a 1/16-ounce jig. If they're finicky, tie on a Shoo Shiner jig, tip it with a minnow, and work it under a slip-bobber rig. Even when the crappies are being fussy, a Shoo Shiner/minnow combination will get at least a few to bite.

Crappies will also be found on bottom in the basin of some lakes. Cruise the basin in 20 to 30 feet of water with a close eye on your sonar. When you see a concentration of fish, work them with 1/8- or 1/16-ounce jigs and plastics. Try a variety of shapes and colors until the fish show you what they want.

Walleyes can be in a lot of places, depending on the lake. Different lakes provide different hangouts. In shallow lakes with stained water, you can sometimes find walleyes on windblown points in water two feet deep.

In deep, clear lakes, they'll be on deep structure in 20 feet or more of water. Or they might suspend away from structure near baitfish. They'll go on a night-bite in other lakes. Research the body of water that you'll be fishing to determine where you should focus your efforts.

Largemouth bass will also be in a variety of areas, but as the weather gets colder, you'll find fewer of them in the sloppy shallows that many inhabited during the summer. On a warm, overcast fall day, you can find them cruising reed beds near deeper water. Reeds in 6 to 8 feet of water, close to cabbage beds in deeper water, can be very good. The bass hold in the deeper water during cold conditions, then move shallower when there's a day or two of warmer weather. A Tour Grade Swim Jig tipped with a bulky piece of plastic, something like a Rage Craw, will get largemouth bass to bite. Big bass like bulky baits in fall.

Some lakes have more options than others for fall fish. In some lakes, there will be just a couple of types of areas that will hold fish. On other lakes, you need to try different things to get bit. Keep that in mind for getting lots of bites. ✧

2025 Lake-Wide Adult Sea Lamprey Index

The index of adult sea lamprey abundance is estimated annually for each Great Lake. Based on the mean over the last 3 years (2023-2025), adult indices were greater than the targets for all lakes except for Lake Erie (**Table 1, Figure 1**). Index targets were determined for each lake as average abundance observed during a 5-year period when wounding rates were at an acceptable level. Adult sea lamprey indices and lake-wide abundances from 1985 to 2025 are reported in **Tables 2 and 3**.

Comparing the 95% confidence intervals of the single year 2025 estimates with those in 2024, the number of adults significantly decreased in lakes Superior, Michigan, Ontario; remained the same in Lake Erie; and significantly increased in Lake Huron **(Figure 1**).

The contribution from individual streams to the adult index is shown in **Figure 2.** The distribution of the 2025 stream estimates around the Great Lakes is shown in **Figure 3**. Mark-recapture estimates of adult sea lamprey abundance were available for 26 of the 29 index streams.

Table 1. Status of the adult sea lamprey index based on the 3-year average relative to the target.

	Lake	2025 index	2023-2025 mean index	Target	Status
1	Superior	40,610	52,809	10,421	Greater than
2	Michigan	21,273	23,451	20,526	Greater than
3	Huron	44,591	39,372	31,274	Greater than
4	Erie	803	1,709	3,263	Less than
5	Ontario	11,584	29,986	14,065	Greater than

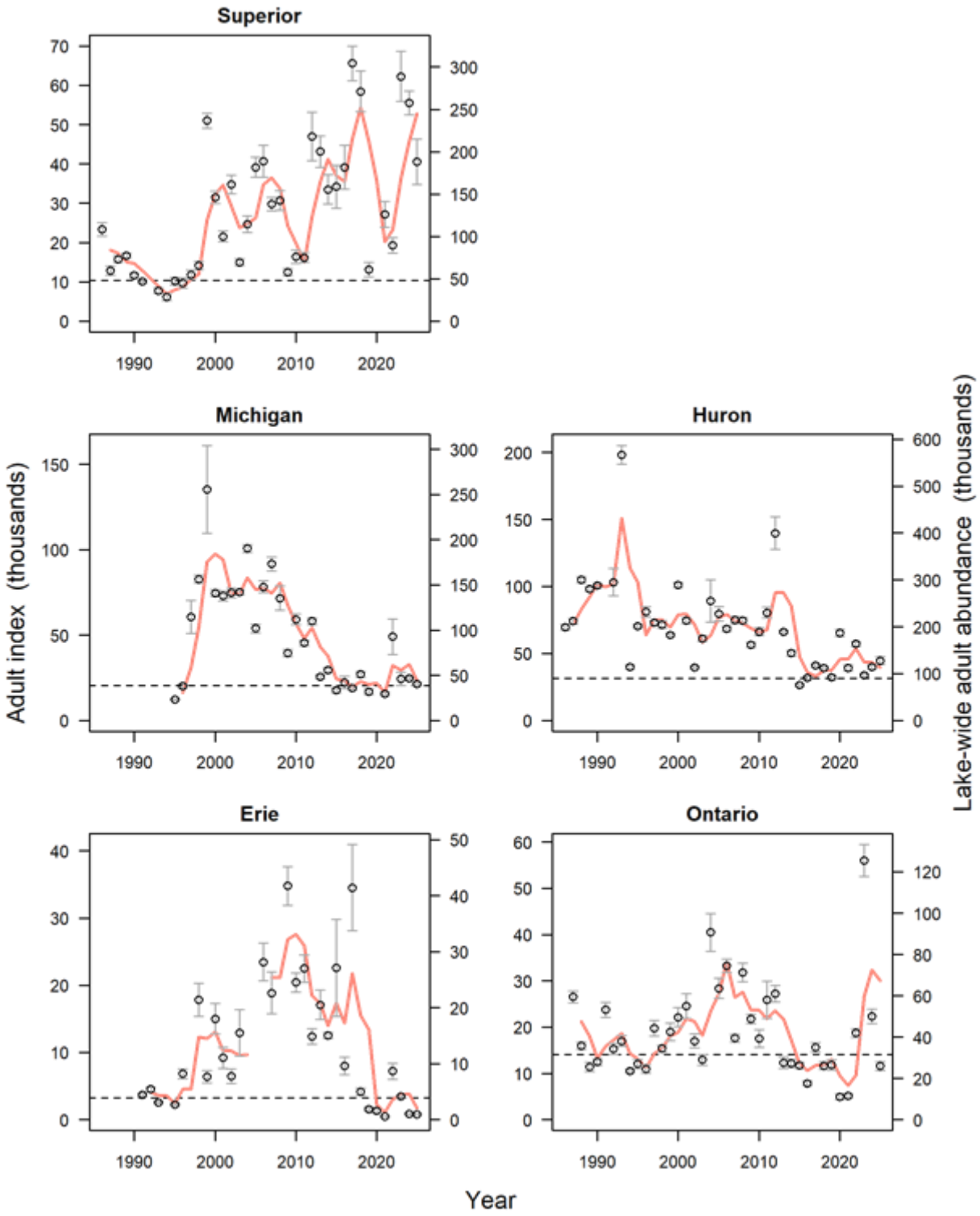


Figure 2. Adult index values for each Great Lake through 2025, with 3-year averages shown as red lines. Individual estimates with 95% confidence intervals are shown in gray. Targets are represented by the dashed horizontal lines.

Table 2. Adult Indices, 1985-2025. NA indicates that a minimum of two successful mark-recapture estimates were not achieved.

Year	Superior	Michigan	Huron	Erie	Ontario
1986	23,404	NA	69,668	NA	NA
1987	12,915	NA	74,038	NA	26,521
1988	15,811	NA	105,035	NA	15,950
1989	16,720	NA	98,241	NA	11,384
1990	11,617	NA	100,737	NA	12,494
1991	10,098	NA	NA	3,698	23,744
1992	NA	NA	103,088	4,527	15,284
1993	7,767	NA	198,315	2,576	17,023
1994	6,185	NA	39,904	NA	10,547
1995	10,206	12,311	70,516	2,251	12,048
1996	9,717	20,127	81,259	6,847	10,947
1997	11,828	60,691	72,881	NA	19,761
1998	14,170	82,817	71,670	17,815	15,382
1999	51,019	135,394	63,677	6,364	18,986
2000	31,533	74,651	101,056	15,022	22,143
2001	21,562	72,887	74,387	9,208	24,548
2002	34,760	74,750	39,539	6,470	17,028
2003	15,027	75,085	61,244	12,913	12,921
2004	24,683	100,691	89,272	NA	40,484
2005	39,136	53,897	79,604	NA	28,389
2006	40,677	78,268	68,473	23,449	33,287
2007	29,761	91,599	75,068	18,855	17,596
2008	30,711	71,639	74,590	NA	31,816
2009	12,436	39,505	56,450	34,797	21,763
2010	16,413	59,144	66,255	20,412	17,530
2011	16,164	45,419	80,399	22,483	25,896
2012	46,965	58,051	139,787	12,401	27,218
2013	43,124	25,517	66,086	17,070	12,283
2014	33,509	29,524	50,145	12,528	12,206
2015	34,222	17,655	26,360	22,624	11,679
2016	39,154	22,249	31,930	8,004	7,852
2017	65,594	18,882	41,032	34,524	15,652
2018	58,467	26,999	39,178	4,142	11,666
2019	13,133	16,844	32,268	1,587	11,844
2020	NA	NA	65,280	1,340	4,971
2021	27,174	15,507	39,128	449	5,187
2022	19,313	49,007	57,054	7,198	18,731
2023	62,265	24,282	33,640	3,455	56,000
2024	55,551	24,799	39,885	870	22,374
2025	40,610	21,273	44,581	803	11,584

Table 3. Lake-wide adult sea lamprey abundances, 1985-2025, which are based on the adult index estimates multiplied by lake-specific conversion factors (Superior 4.64, Michigan 1.89, Huron 2.86, Erie 1.2, Ontario 2.24). NA indicates that a minimum of two successful mark-recapture estimates were not achieved.

Year	Superior	Michigan	Huron	Erie	Ontario
1986	109,000	NA	199,000	NA	NA
1987	60,000	NA	212,000	NA	59,000
1988	73,000	NA	300,000	NA	36,000
1989	78,000	NA	281,000	NA	26,000
1990	54,000	NA	288,000	NA	28,000
1991	47,000	NA	NA	4,000	53,000
1992	NA	NA	295,000	5,000	34,000
1993	36,000	NA	567,000	3,000	38,000
1994	29,000	NA	114,000	NA	24,000
1995	47,000	23,000	202,000	3,000	27,000
1996	45,000	38,000	232,000	8,000	25,000
1997	55,000	115,000	208,000	NA	44,000
1998	66,000	157,000	205,000	21,000	34,000
1999	237,000	256,000	182,000	8,000	43,000
2000	146,000	141,000	289,000	18,000	50,000
2001	100,000	138,000	213,000	11,000	55,000
2002	161,000	141,000	113,000	8,000	38,000
2003	70,000	142,000	175,000	15,000	29,000
2004	115,000	190,000	255,000	NA	91,000
2005	182,000	102,000	228,000	NA	64,000
2006	189,000	148,000	196,000	28,000	75,000
2007	138,000	173,000	215,000	23,000	39,000
2008	142,000	135,000	213,000	NA	71,000
2009	58,000	75,000	161,000	42,000	49,000
2010	76,000	112,000	189,000	24,000	39,000
2011	75,000	86,000	230,000	27,000	58,000
2012	218,000	110,000	400,000	15,000	61,000
2013	200,000	48,000	189,000	20,000	28,000
2014	155,000	56,000	143,000	15,000	27,000
2015	159,000	33,000	75,000	27,000	26,000
2016	182,000	42,000	91,000	10,000	18,000
2017	304,000	36,000	117,000	41,000	35,000
2018	271,000	51,000	112,000	5,000	26,000
2019	61,000	32,000	92,000	2,000	27,000
2020	NA	NA	187,000	2,000	11,000
2021	126,000	29,000	112,000	1,000	12,000
2022	90,000	93,000	163,000	9,000	42,000
2023	289,000	46,000	96,000	4,000	125,000
2024	258,000	47,000	114,000	1,000	50,000
2025	188,000	40,000	128,000	1,000	26,000

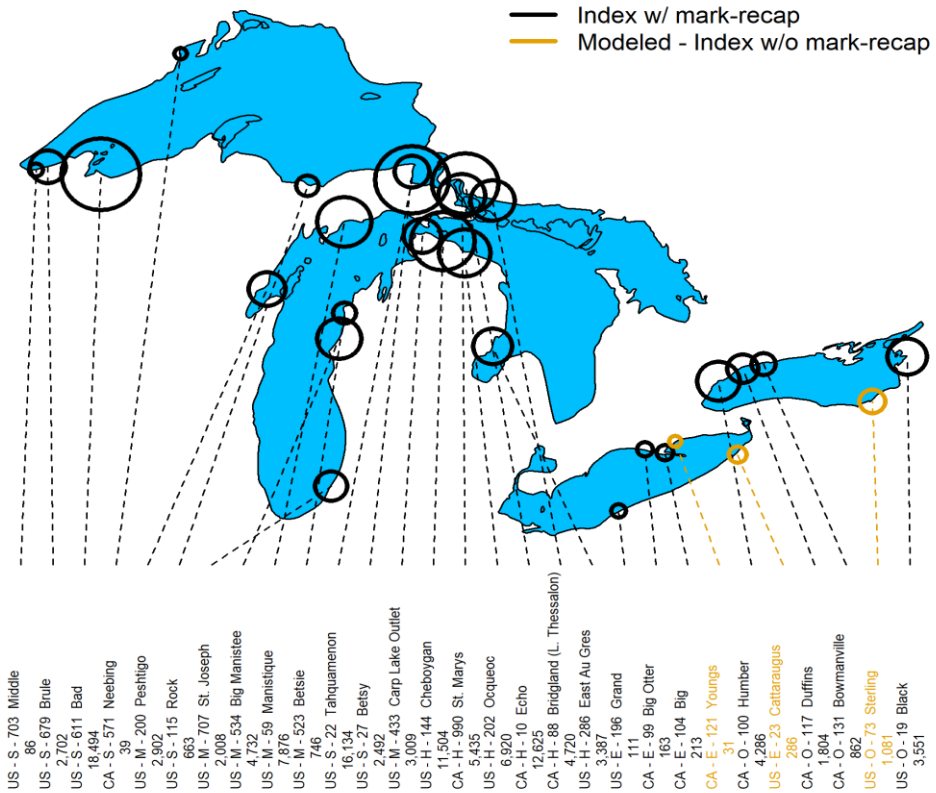


Figure 3. Relative size of adult sea lamprey population estimates in Great Lakes index streams, 2025. Circle size represents size of population estimate, circle color represents the method of index calculation.

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Autumn rains ignite Chautauqua Steelhead Alley

Chautauqua, New York – October 14, 2025: After weeks of dry weather and low stream flows along the five Chautauqua County tributary streams of Lake Erie that form Steelhead Alley here, the long-awaited rains and chilling temperatures have arrived. With the change in weather comes the first big push of steelhead and brown trout into Chautauqua County Creeks. For much of the early fall, the lake-run trout had been staging in Lake Erie, waiting for the chance to move upstream into the tributary creeks. Now, as water levels rise and water temperatures drop, anglers can look forward to some of the best action of the year in what's known as "Steelhead Alley"– the legendary stretch of Lake Erie shoreline in Chautauqua County from Cattaraugus Creek to the New York-Pennsylvania state line.

The Steelhead Alley streams include Cattaraugus Creek, Silver Creek, Walnut Creek, Canadaway Creek, and Chautauqua Creek, and all the tiny feeders of these creeks – the fish are there too. When the creeks run high and hard, the lower sections of these streams are turbid, the fish move up to the tiny feeders and clear water. A call to a local tackle shop or guide service will provide updates on the best time to fish here. These local guides, with their knowledge and experience, are your best bet for a successful fishing trip.

As creeks swell and color up, expect strong pushes of fresh steelhead into the lower reaches of each creek. Fish near the creek mouths and lower stream access areas like Chautauqua Creek in Westfield, Canadaway Creek in Dunkirk, and Silver Creek for easy access. One of the most popular tributary fishing hotspots located just south of Dunkirk, NY, is Canadaway Creek, where it meets Lake Erie.

For a color map of Canadaway Creek-Lake Erie to Laona Falls: https://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/fish_marine_pdf/canadawaycreek.pdf. The Canadaway Creekmouth is a steelhead and brown trout entry point and offers easy, well-used angler walkway paths to the stream right from roadside parking on Route 5. The steelhead that enter Canadaway can swim as far as 6-miles upstream to Laona Falls, where they cannot swim the high falls there. Ask private owner permission to fish there.

Immediately after the rains, fall-run steelhead from Lake Erie savor a variety of baits, including brightly colored egg sacs, large streamers, and flashy spinners or spoons. Fly fishermen and spin-fishermen can both enjoy the fishing. Then three to

five days after the heavy rains, clearing flows occur, the water drops and begins to clear, conditions become ideal with fish spreading to upper flows and settling into pools and runs. That's when smaller natural offerings are best, including single eggs, nymphs, jigs under floats, micro-streamers, and similar baits. Water temperature is key, then turbidity. The clarity or cloudiness of the water affects how fish forage and how they find shelter and ambush areas, forcing visual orientation or scent preferences to feed.

Note that there is no closed season for trout and salmon in Lake Erie tributaries, but there are special seasonal regulations that do apply to ALL Lake Erie tributaries from September 1 to March 31. The special rules apply from the bridge closest to the mouth upstream to the first barrier impassable by fish. Fishing is allowed from 1/2 hour before sunrise to 1/2 hour after sunset ***(fishing at night is prohibited),*** and for hook size, the distance between a hook shaft and point cannot exceed ½". Hooks attached to any artificial lure must be free-swinging, except on an artificial fly or jig. In addition, in Chautauqua Creek, from the bridge on South Gale Street upstream 1.3 miles to the upper Village of Westfield water intake dam, this is a catch and release zone for trout and salmon. Generally, for all Lake Erie tributaries of Chautauqua County, a 12-inch minimum size limit with a daily bag limit of 3 fish per person. Anglers can check the NYSDEC fishing regs at https://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7917.html. Catch/release is encouraged. Steelhead can live for decades.

Similar principles and weather conditions affect steelhead fishing in like streams throughout the region. ✧

Fall Largemouth Bass Essentials

As the weather starts to turn a bit cooler as the calendar flips toward the fall, our thoughts often turn to a favorite topic: largemouth bass fishing. More specifically, what are some of the best ways to target bass during this transitional time?

When bass fishing in fall, it's important to keep moving—the bass are constantly on the go. They can be found in many different places and at various depths, including on the surface, on the bottom or suspended somewhere in between. Often, they will transit from shallow to deep water and back again multiple times during the day in search of forage as they fatten up for the coming winter.

With that in mind, there are a number of tactics which will work better than others in the fall. Among the most productive is throwing a few old standbys—spinnerbaits and crankbaits. A good spinnerbait is great for imitating baitfish and is most effective when there's good visibility. The vibration and flash produced by the blade can draw in bass, and it's a good way to cover a lot of ground in a short period of time. A crankbait does the same thing, covering various water depths and imitating forage baitfish. A lipless design produces a tighter wobble and can be especially effective in shallower water.

For probing the midrange and bottom depths, it's hard to beat a jig. Using colors which mimic a bass' natural prey, this will work year-round but extremely well on suspended mid-water fish. A swimbait can accomplish the same thing, while also offering a lifelike soft feel to striking fish.

One final technique is topwater. After all, who doesn't enjoy a smashing strike on a topwater lure? Those early mornings and late afternoons are the perfect time to use your favorite topwater bait.

All of these require an angler to make hundreds of casts, and as the weather cools off, sometimes we also want a little more warmth for our hands as well as additional padding and grip for all-day comfort. That's where Fish Monkey's line of fall fishing gloves and gear comes in.

One of the most popular fall fishing gloves of all time is **the Wooly**. A natural insulator, wool is an exceptional performer in any cool or cold-weather environment. The comfort and fit is unmatched in performance and the unique characteristic of wool allows the glove to absorb up to 30 percent of its weight in water without feeling heavy or damp. The wool fibers also breathe, allowing moisture to be wicked away while its insulating quality keeps your hands warm even when wet. The synthetic leather palm provides extra hand protection from fatigue and superb wet grip, while the exposed fingers allow for knot tying, bait rigging and rod and line management. There is now a **Wooly Long** with full fingers and a **Wooly Mitten**, which flips back to expose the fingertips when needed.

When the day calls for something with complete hand coverage, the **Task Fleece** is a perfect fit. It's constructed of technical fleece material that allows for superb dexterity while providing great warmth and protection from the wind, with a synthetic leather palm and non-slip silicone print for a superior grip. The tapered fit allows for full hand use in all fishing situations, and there's even a touchscreen-compatible pad on the index finger.

The Blocker is another fan favorite. Made with ultrathin 2mm neoprene, it has enhanced feel and dexterity while providing a warm and dry environment for your hands—perfect for those chilly, windy, damp days when a heavier glove is just too much. Slit openings on the index fingers and thumbs mean you can use touchscreens, tie knots or release fish without having to remove the gloves. ✧

Autumn offers some of the finest topwater bass fishing action of the year, if you use the right approaches.

We'll break down the top surface lure types for this time of year.

Many veteran anglers consider fall the best time to catch largemouth, smallmouth and spotted bass with topwater lures. The bass are feeding heavily, with winter approaching, and much of their forage stays high in the water column. Five types of topwater lure—frogs, poppers, walkers, buzzbaits and tail spinners, each provide distinct advantages for autumn bass fishing. We'll look at each lure type and the approach that goes with it, considering advantages and how to use each to help you catch more bass this time of year.

Use Frog Lures to Catch Bass from Vegetation

Aquatic vegetation holds food and offers cover for bass during fall and commonly holds great concentrations of fish. A hollow-bodied soft-plastic frog lure like a BOOYAH Pad Crasher is ideal for creating commotion atop the vegetation and prompting explosive strikes.

An original Pad Crasher works wonderfully for working pad fields, mats of milfoil and hydrilla and thick, shallow stuff, like water willow. A Poppin' Pad Crasher, which has cupped "popping" face, allows you to work weed edges and places where floating eelgrass or other vegetation makes it hard to present a traditional popper, but with a popping splash to trigger strikes.

Fall excels for fishing mats because underwater parts of the plants begin breaking up, leaving excellent shade and concealment on the surface and scattered below but with plenty of space for the bass to move underneath. It's also a time when shallow vegetation of all types gets loaded with bluegill, crawfish and other bass forage species.

Poppers Mimic Prey & Bass Feeding Sounds

Bass feed heavily on shad and bluegill throughout fall, and a popping lure like a Rebel Pop-R or BOOYAH Boss Pop works wonders for fooling these fish. With different rod movements, a popper can be used to imitate a feeding bass to get fish to investigate or a fleeing baitfish to trigger strikes. Effective presentations often incorporate both sounds.

A slow, short rod sweep with the line tight creates a chugging sound, which suggests a bass feeding and will draw other bass to investigate. Quicker rod snaps produce more classic pops to prompt attacks. Repeated snaps, with the line semi-slack, make a popper walk and spit like a fleeing shad. Each sound has virtues. Use them together to prompt strikes and pay attention to what causes bass to respond.

A popper provides an excellent option anytime the bass are relating to bluegill or shad, and the water is sufficiently snag-free to work a lure with exposed treble hooks. It can be cast close to cover and worked with punctuated pauses to coax strikes or fished much faster to find fish and prompt reactions.

Fish Walking Topwater Lures to Call in Bass

A topwater lure designed to "walk the dog," such as a Heddon Zara Spook or other baits in the Heddon Spook family, allows you to work broad areas, like flats, long points, tops of river bars and roadbeds, to call in fish. This is important during fall, when bass often relate to large schools of shad and spread across vast structural features.

Walking lures glide rhythmically from side to side, often emitting sound with every move. Fish see and hear them and feel the vibrations from far away and can home in on a bait as it moves across the surface. Long casts that cover more territory and keep the bait in the water longer with each cast are beneficial. Most veteran bass anglers like to keep the cadence steady.

Spooks come in a broad range of sizes to fit different situations, and some rattle, while others knock or are intentionally made silent. Alabama bass pro and guide Jimmy Mason relies the most on the Super Spook Jr and the One Knocker Spook but will sometimes turn to a Super Spook to target bigger fish or mimic larger forage.

Buzzbaits Cover Water & Find Bass

When bass feed shallow during fall, they commonly get widespread, holding near vegetation, docks, laydowns, stumps and many other types of cover. A buzzbait allows you to cover water quickly and to work through shallow cover to find actively feeding fish. Keys for buzzbait fishing include keeping the bait moving as you work a shoreline or grassline and working the bait as close as possible to any available cover. In the case of sparse vegetation, that often means coming right through the grass. In the case of downed tree, it might mean buzzing between a couple of branches.

Mason's go-to buzzbait for most situations is a War Eagle Buzzbait, which he believes makes the perfect buzzing sound and has a great profile. When forage is small or fishing pressure is high, he'll downsize to a 1/8-ounce BOOYAH Pond Magic Buzz, which he fishes on spinning tackle with braided line. Buzzbaits produce a lot of big fish for Mason during the fall, and that includes the diminutive Pond Magic Buzz.

Tail-Spin Topwaters Combine Surface Lure Appeals

Tail-spinners like a Heddon Swim'n Image create a different splash and sound to appeal to bass and allow you to work quickly or slowly. The most traditional use is to fish one like a buzzbait, casting and reeling back steadily at a medium pace, but the same lure can be cast close to a piece of cover, allowed to rest and brought to life with a snap or sweep of the rod and then worked with steady repeated snaps or long pauses.

The gurgle of a Swim'n Image will call up bass some fall days when they simply do not want other topwater lures. It offers a blend of subtly and a commotion that the fish can't refuse, and it provides a different look and sound when a lot of anglers are walking the dog or fishing poppers. Because the Swim'n Image is engineered for long casts for its size, and because of its churning appeal when swam steadily, it ranks among the best topwater lures to cast to schooling bass during fall. ✧

Changes in Fall Fishing

Autumn is in the air. It's not as noticeable during the day, but air temperatures at night are getting colder and the locusts are louder. The leaves on trees are showing some red, yellow, and orange colors a little earlier than usual. Snakes, salamanders, and caterpillars are starting to show up on hard surfaces, especially after a rain, because those areas are a little warmer. These are just a few of the subtle signs that indicate that fall is closer than we might think.

Walleyes, bass, and most other fish notice signs of the upcoming fall season also. Those signs tell the fish that they need to get ready for the cold waters of winter. To get ready for the extended period of colder water, fish add some weight, and to add that weight, they eat more than usual. Fish that want to eat are welcomed by those of us who like to catch fish.

Most bodies of water go through some changes in the fall. Some are more noticeable than others. One of the changes that happens in a good number of lakes is called the turnover. Turnover is when the surface water cools, becomes denser, and sinks to the bottom of the lake. The water on the bottom then moves to the surface. The water in the lake "turns over." After a few days, the surface water and the deeper water become about the same temperature.

The feeding habits of the fish will get goofed up during this turnover. Catching can get tough. It works well to find a lake that has either completed the turnover or a lake where the turnover hasn't started.

Fish can be in a lot of different places in the fall. It's best to keep moving until the best pattern is determined. I've had outstanding walleye action casting Rage Swimmer style plastics on eighth ounce jigs to shallow, windblown points, and have also had outstanding action casting a crankbait like a Hornet to shallow structure and trolling the same bait in deeper water. Just like anywhere and anytime, you've got to find the fish and then give 'em what they want.

In the fall, big baits will be more appealing to the fish. The people who study fish explain that, in the fall, fish would prefer to eat one big meal rather than several smaller ones. Back in my musky fishing days, it was amazing how many big walleyes we caught while musky fishing. Those walleyes took ten to twelve inch musky baits very aggressively. We caught enough trophy walleyes while throwing musky baits to realize they weren't being caught by accident. They wanted something big to eat.

If you're on big fish water, your odds for catching a really big one are good. Probably the best of the year. Be sure that you're confident that the line on your reel is suitable for big fish. If you've been using the same line all summer, you should strongly consider tying on some fresh stuff. Your line is the only link between you and perhaps the biggest fish you've ever caught. Take the time to tie on line that you know you can count on.

The fall season provides maybe your best bet for taking a trophy, and it's also an outstanding time just to be on the water. You could have the lake to yourself, or you might be sharing the water with some migrating waterfowl. If you're lucky enough to get on the water in the next few weeks, you might find out for yourself just how much autumn has to offer the angler. ✧

Bring on the Bugs for Late-Summer Smallmouth

The chorus of cicadas echoes on a steamy late August morning. Sycamore trees are already starting to turn yellow as summer is nearing its end. Abundant underwater grasses undulate in the crystal clear flow of Virginia's James River. It's officially the ebbing of summer, a time fly anglers cherish when it comes to sight-fishing for smallmouth bass.

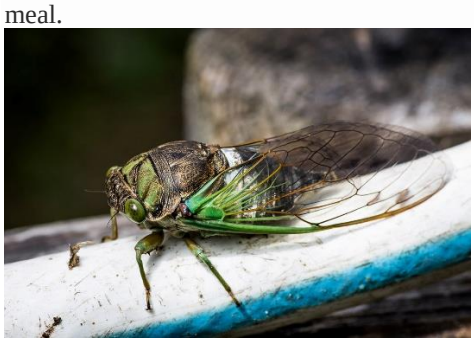
It's Insect Season

In my opinion, the conditions in late summer and early fall favor the angler that approaches the river with a fly rod verses a conventional or spin fishing outfit. This time of the year is insect season on Virginia's warm-water rivers and streams. While smallmouth will absolutely key in on aquatic hatches like damselflies and dragonflies, it's the abundant terrestrial insects that get fly anglers so excited about smallmouth bass during this timeframe.

Low and clear water in late summer and early fall creates arguably the best site fishing conditions of the year. This, combined with a seasonal abundance of terrestrial insects, is the perfect combination for the fly angler looking to fool smallmouth on the surface. While forage fish and crayfish are staple food items for the smallmouth bass, dietary studies have shown that these omnivorous fish will be opportunistic when it comes to finding a meal. And opportunities are plentiful during the end of summer as terrestrial insects routinely find their way into the water.

Terrestrial Favorites

Annual cicadas in Virginia might excite fly anglers the most when it comes to fishing terrestrials for smallmouth. Once soil temperatures get to approximately 65ºF, annual cicadas will emerge from brooding underground, their exoskeletons left behind on trees and rocks as they enter the adult portion of their life cycle. This adult life stage only lasts four to six weeks and is the cicada's chance to focus on finding a mate to start the life cycle over again. Males spend all of their time in the trees "singing" in an effort to attract a female to mate. When the adult portion of the cicada's lifecycle is nearing its end, these insects can be seen falling and erratically flying towards the ground. Some of these green and black bugs inevitably land in the water, creating the perfect opportunity for a smallmouth to take advantage of a large and nutritious meal.



In addition to cicadas, other terrestrial insects like Japanese beetles, grasshoppers, and crickets can also become an opportunity for smallmouth bass. A gust of wind can push these insects off the bank or out of trees and into the water. Rest assured, the smallmouth are keyed in on all of these opportunities. For the fly angler, success is dependent on paying attention to the scenario and approaching it accordingly, which involves picking the right fly for the right situation and executing the presentation.

Rods, Flies, & Approach

For rods and reels, I prefer a heavy 6wt or 7wt fly rod with a floating fly line tapered for bass bugs. A 6wt or 7wt in the 9- to 10-foot range will have the backbone to turn over the larger surface bugs that produce eats during terrestrial season. A longer 9- to 12-foot leader tapered to 0x, 1x, or 2x will excel in low clear water. For fly selection, larger poppers that are green and silver and black will mimic the annual cicadas well. I like Boogle Bug poppers and the Surface Seducer Double Barrel Bass Bug Popper in the correct color combo for a cicada imitation. Large foam cicada patterns such as Rainy's Ultimate Cicada Fly sporting a foam body with hackle, elk hair wings, and rubber legs will also work well. Additionally, foam beetle patterns and larger foam hopper patterns, like the Fat Albert and Chernobyl Ant, will also get the smallmouth's attention.

It's All About the Splat

When fishing these terrestrial patterns for smallmouth, I often times try to splat the fly down on the initial landing. Deeper water under overhanging tree limbs near the bank is prime habitat to prospect. The fish are used to the splat these insects make when they hit the water, so making it loud and clear that your fly is on the water during the initial landing is key. I will often wait 10 seconds or more before I twitch or lightly strip the fly. I've seen smallmouth react to the splat and swim 10 feet or more to slurp the bug. Being patient after the fly initially lands on the water can produce additional strikes that otherwise might not have occurred. After waiting 10 seconds or more, a light twitch or strip to gurgle the fly is a great way to imitate a struggling insect on the water's surface.

The fish will often times dictate how you present and retrieve the fly on any given day. In faster-moving water, you can take a more aggressive approach where it can pay dividends to be more delicate with your presentation than in flat water. The eats can also be just as variable. In flat water, the biggest smallmouth will often barely break the surface of the water as they delicately sip or slurp the bug down. It can be hard to maintain patience, but waiting until the fish has closed its mouth and turned is key for hooking up and not pulling the fly out of the fish's mouth. The eats can also be fast and furious as well, especially in faster-moving water. Smallmouth can explode on the fly, making for exhilarating surface action.

Fly anglers that have never fished for smallmouth before but enjoy fishing dry flies for trout will be pleasantly surprised with smallmouth bass terrestrial action. This can be some of the most exciting fishing of the year and you might just develop an addiction for it like I have. ✧

Public Meeting on proposed catch for Lake Michigan and Green Bay Lake Whitefish

MADISON, Wis. – The Wisconsin DNR will host a virtual public meeting to gather stakeholder feedback regarding the proposed new total allowable catch numbers for lake whitefish in Lake Michigan and Green Bay for the 2026 fishing season. The meeting will take place on **Wednesday, Oct. 29,** starting at 6:30 p.m. The public can join the meeting via Microsoft Teams or by phone.

DNR staff will share information using a PowerPoint presentation and recommend joining the meeting via computer to see the information. Although the call-in number will allow attendees to listen to the discussion, callers will not be able to view the presentation. Join by phone: 1-608-571-2209; Phone Conference ID 942-588-689# ✧

Purchase your sturgeon spearing license by Oct. 31

MADISON, Wis. – The Wisconsin DNR reminds all spearers interested in harvesting a lake sturgeon from Lake Winnebago during the 2026 sturgeon spearing season to purchase their license before **October 31, 2025.** There are an unlimited number of licenses available for Lake Winnebago, and both residents and nonresidents can purchase a license through the **Go Wild** system or at any license **sales location.**

All license holders must be a minimum of 12 years old. However, military personnel home on leave during the spearing season and youth who will turn 12 between November 1, 2025, and the last day of the 2026 spearing season do not need to purchase their license by the October 31 deadline.

The Upriver Lakes fishery (lakes Poygan, Butte des Morts and Winneconne) is managed by a preference point system and lottery that is limited to 500 permitted spearers. Successful Upriver Lakes tag applicants have already been authorized for the 2026 season and have until the start of the spearing season to purchase a license. Successful Upriver Lakes tag applicants cannot purchase a tag for Lake Winnebago.

The Winnebago lake sturgeon population continues to be one of the healthiest populations in the world, supporting the spearing season, but protecting and maintaining this special opportunity has and continues to require a lot of time and resources. Sturgeon spearing license sales help fund the necessary management activities on the Winnebago System, such as staffing the registration stations during the spearing season and the work during the spawning season to gather data to set the sustainable harvest caps.

The license sales also fund the large acoustic tagging project in the Winnebago System, which tracks lake sturgeon movement throughout the system and helps ensure all Winnebago lake sturgeon management decisions are made using the latest science.

The 2026 sturgeon spearing season will open on **February 14, 2026**, and will run for a maximum of 16 days or until any of the predetermined harvest caps are met.

Additional season information can be found on the DNR's **Sturgeon Spearing webpage** ✧

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

Once threatened Lake Erie water snake hunts invasive fish. See viral Kelleys Island video

Recovery efforts have delisted the once threatened Lake Erie water snake, a native of the Great Lakes islands. The species can grow up to 3.5 feet long and their favorite prey is the round goby, an invasive, nuisance fish species.

Another 'exceptional' hatch year for walleye in Ohio

The preliminary results for the 2025 walleye hatch have been ranked 'Exceptional,' the highest on the Ohio Division of Wildlife's scale. This translates into a high probability that this year's young will enter the fishery in 2027 in numbers of 20 million or more

What to know about Michigan whitefish crisis, from limits to solutions

The collapse of lake whitefish stocks threatens Michigan's environment, economy, and culture. Saving lake whitefish requires suppressing quagga and zebra mussels, but now, the infestation is only getting worse.

Fishing plays greater role on Midwest fish populations than warming, study finds

Despite worries over rising temperatures, it turns out anglers have a greater effect on fish populations than climate change according to a new study led by the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Whitefish crash has Michigan fishers on the brink: 'It makes you want to cry'

Once numbering in the thousands, now only dozens of commercial fishers remain in lakes Michigan and Huron as whitefish stock collapse; and unlike other fish crises, this one can't be fixed by docking boats until stocks recover.