



DEC wants comments on proposed 2020 regulations for Great Lakes fishing – due February 28

Anglers encouraged to review and comment to help continue improving the region’s fishery

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) announced it is seeking angler feedback on proposed fishing regulation changes for New York’s Great Lakes. The proposed changes are designed to safeguard and expand certain fish populations while also enhancing anglers’ continued enjoyment of one of the state’s premier fisheries. The majority of the proposals are a direct result of DEC’s work with anglers during the past year to identify desired outcomes for Lake Ontario’s fishery.

Potential regulation changes:

- extending the open season for lake trout and decreasing the daily creel limit for rainbow trout/steelhead on Lake Ontario and the Lower Niagara River;
- decreasing the brown trout daily creel limit and increasing the minimum size limit for rainbow trout/steelhead on Lake Ontario tributaries; and
- eliminating a special Lake Erie tributary regulation now deemed unnecessary in a continuing effort to simplify New York fishing regulations.

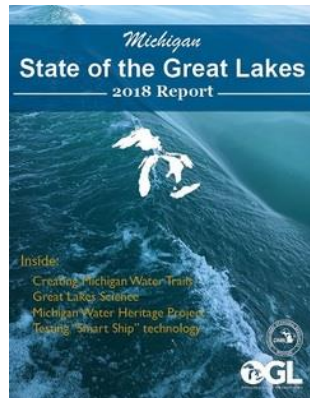
Following a review of public comments received and further evaluation this winter, DEC may advance these proposals for formal adoption in 2020. DEC welcomes and encourages feedback on the regulation changes currently under consideration.

To [view these proposals and provide input](#), visit DEC’s website. Comments will be accepted through **February 28, 2019**. Comments and questions can also be directed to Steve LaPan, Great Lakes Fisheries Section Head, at: NY DEC, P.O. Box 292, Cape Vincent, NY 13618. ✧

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State of the Great Lakes Report now available



Looking for a window into the world of managing fresh water systems? Check out the 2018 edition of the annual Michigan State of the Great Lakes report, now available for readers to dive into.

Articles written by contributors from university, government, environmental and other organizations collectively tell a story of Great Lakes ecosystems, communities and restoration. They celebrate research findings, environmental restoration projects and community engagement

initiatives; and raise awareness about the challenges – things like effects of chemical contaminants and re-establishing locally extinct fish species—that resource managers are working to overcome.

“Our goal as state resource managers is to support healthy Great Lakes and sustainable coastal communities,” said OGL Director Jon W. Allan. “The stories in the State of the Great Lakes report reflect the work, innovation and partnerships that go into realizing that vision.”

[Read the report ▶](#)

The State of the Great Lakes Report is annually published by the Michigan Office of the Great Lakes, established in 1985. Learn more about the [OGL online](#) or by contacting outreach coordinator [Rachel Coale](#). The Office of the Great Lakes works in partnership with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. ✧

New daily limit for MI yellow perch starts April 1

If you're planning to fish for yellow perch this spring, keep in mind that there's a new daily possession limit – 25 fish, reduced from 50 – starting April 1 on nearly all state waters.

Exceptions include:

- Lake Erie, which will retain a 50-fish daily limit,
- Lake Gogebic, which will have the 25-fish daily limit, but with no more than five of those fish being 12 inches or longer.

The Michigan Natural Resources Commission approved the proposed fishing regulation change late last year, after extensive public and scientific reviews. The new regulation is effective with the start of the 2019 Michigan fishing season.

The DNR collected many comments from concerned anglers and others interested in reducing the daily possession limit for yellow perch. Lowering the statewide daily possession limit also supports consistent yellow perch regulations across waterbodies, particularly connecting waters, tributaries and drowned river mouths

“The major goal for lowering the yellow perch daily possession limit was to better achieve an optimal balance between conservation and fishing opportunity, reflecting the importance and popularity of yellow perch in Michigan,” said Christian LeSage who works for the DNR’s Aquatic Species and Regulatory Affairs Unit. “Yellow perch are among the most sought-after game species in Michigan, and we want to ensure generations of anglers can continue to enjoy fishing for them.”

Starting March 1, the 2019 Michigan Fishing Guide will be available online and in printed copy form at fishing license retailers. For more information, visit Michigan.gov/DNRDigests. ✧

DNR wants to hear about your winter fishing experiences

This winter fishing season, MI DNR creel clerks again will be out and about at many fishing spots to interview anglers about the details of their trips. Most interviews take just a few minutes, but the critical information gathered makes a big difference to successful fisheries management.

DNR creel clerks ask anglers, through brief interviews, about how long they fished, what species they targeted, what they caught and where they live. Statewide, clerks talk fishing with roughly 80,000 people a year.

Sometimes the clerks might ask to measure or weigh fish and take scale samples to gather key biological information on those fish. These data help fisheries managers make decisions about fishing regulations, habitat improvement and fish-stocking needs.

This winter creel clerks plan to talk with anglers fishing Saginaw Bay, Lake St. Clair, the Les Cheneaux Islands, Munising, Marquette, Keweenaw Bay, Lac Vieux Desert, Otsego Lake and Little Bay de Noc. Starting April 1 and continuing into the fall, creel clerks will interview anglers at Great Lakes boating access sites, fishing piers and shorelines across the entire coastline to get estimates on spring, summer and fall fisheries.

Most people are happy to talk about their time on the water. Everyone loves to tell their fish tales.

Learn more about [creel clerks and anglers surveys](#) on the DNR webpage Michigan.gov/FishResearch. Questions? Contact Tracy Claramunt, 517-282-2887 or claramunt@michigan.gov or Elyse Walter, 517-284-5839 or waltere@michigan.gov. ✧



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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.

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Petition to give away NW Angle flops

Have you ever wanted your voice heard at the White House? Well, that opportunity exists through the [“We The People” section](#) of the White House website. Someone, and nobody has come forth to claim who, started a



petition to give Minnesota's Northwest Angle to Canada.

Basically, you can easily create a petition online, share it, and collect signatures. If you gather 100,000 signatures in 30 days, they will review your petition, make sure it gets in front of the appropriate policy experts, and issue an official response. Well, the NW Angle petition to give back a pristine piece of Minnesota to Canada flopped as it received only 5,544 names.

Here is the wording of the official NW Angle petition... *Negotiators of the initial Canada-US border misunderstood the geography of the area. Benjamin Franklin and British representatives relied on the Mitchell Map of colonial American geographer John Mitchell. Due to a surveying error, it is the only place in the United States outside Alaska that is north of the 49th parallel, which forms the border between the U.S. and Canada. The total population is only about 120 people which are native to Canadian soil. Make America great by correcting this critical survey error.*

One thing the NW Angle petition did do is create a lot of media and consequently education about the [NW Angle](#). The NW Angle or “Angle” as

many call it is the northernmost point of the Contiguous United States. Much like Key West, FL has the buoy marking the southernmost point; [Lake of the Woods](#) has the buoy marking the northernmost point.

It is also the part of the lake where the Canadian Shield begins and where the 14,552 islands of the lake really begin. Being such a big lake with so many islands, Lake of the Woods has over 65,000 miles of shoreline. There is no shortage of areas to fish and be by yourself.

When you drive to the NW Angle, you must cross through Canada and then back into the U.S. This means travelers must have proper credentials for entering Canada and then back into the U.S. This means a passport, passport card, enhanced driver's license or a combo of birth certificate and driver's license. Many already have the necessary credentials to embark on the adventure.

Travelers who do not have the credentials can elect to go by way of lake. This means the 42 mile groomed and staked trail from the south end up to the Angle. Some resorts actually offer a

transport service for a small fee to haul you to the north end of the lake and back. In the open water, boats are used to transport people north. Some resorts use charter boats which do a nice job on Lake of the Woods.

To say the Angle is special is an understatement. As the petition states, there are around 120 residents, about 12 resorts, half on islands and the other half on the mainland, a community called Angle Inlet. The Angle boasts the only active one room school in the State of MN, has a

ton of history and once you visit, you will understand why people value this area so much.

Fishing is the main reason people come to this part of [Minnesota's Lake of the Woods](#). With so many islands, there is a wide variety of fish in good numbers. The most sought after fish in these parts of course is the walleye. In addition, there are world class muskies, crappies, jumbo perch, smallmouth bass and pike.

[Ice anglers](#) are enjoying the nice resort accommodations this time of year with nice [lodging](#), transportation to heated fish houses in areas holding fish and some excellent food and drink once the day of fishing is complete. Now, bombardiers, side by sides with tracks and snowmobiles are the main source of transportation. There is an ice road for guests to drive out to their resort if they are staying on an island.

In the warm weather months,



everything changes over to boating for the main source of transportation. [Fishing](#), shore lunches with fresh fish and lots and [lots of history](#) await visitors. It appears those who even heard about the NW Angle petition are just fine leaving things as they are. It was an error made and agreed to by both sides. It is old history and as long as there is the “We the People” section of the White House website, there will be more petitions. [Click Here to learn more about the NW Angle](#) ✧

Regs change **March 1** on Lake of the Woods and Rainy River

Walleye fishing regulations are changing starting **March 1** on Lake of the Woods and the Rainy River.

“These are extremely popular destinations not only in the spring, but all year long,” said Phil Talmage, Baudette area fisheries supervisor with the DNR.

The winter regs on Lake of the Woods that begin March 1 will match the current summer regs, reducing the aggregate walleye and sauger limit from eight to six, with no more than four walleye. The protected slot limit remains in effect that requires anglers to immediately release any walleye between 19.5” and 28”, with only one fish over 28” allowed in possession.

On the Rainy River and in Four Mile Bay, a catch-and-release season will be in effect March 1 to April 14. The current Rainy River spring season regulation allows anglers to keep two walleye or sauger, and requires the immediate release of walleye 19.5” or larger.

The new regulations on both waters help ensure the long-term sustainability of the resource while maintaining fishing opportunities.

The lake changes are a response to expanding winter fishing pressure that pushed sauger harvest above management objectives – the annual target harvest is 250,000 lbs. but current harvest is 400,000 lbs. Winter angling accounted for 80 percent of the annual sauger harvest.

The changes on the river are a response to increasing fishing pressure and longer periods of open water that led to higher walleye harvest, particularly male walleye in the spring.

More info about Lake of the Woods and the Rainy River, the new management plan, and a document detailing public comments and DNR responses to FAQs can be found at mndnr.gov/lakeofthewoods. More background about the changes can be found in the [December news release](#) originally announcing the regulation changes. ✧

Ohio Coastal Atlas Third Edition Showcases Lake Erie

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) recently released the Ohio Coastal Atlas Third Edition, a 14 x 10” document that illustrates and discusses many of the historical, cultural, physical and natural resources of Ohio’s Lake Erie coastal region. The 267-page Ohio Coastal Atlas is an informative and easy-to-use publication that features nearly 100 maps, descriptive text and colorful pictures. Topics covered in the 10-chapter book include the Lake Erie Watershed and hydrography; Lake Erie’s role in western expansion and settlement of northern Ohio; transportation and waterborne commerce; land use; protected lands; outdoor recreation and Lake Erie public access; ecosystems and habitat types; coastal processes; physical geography and geology; and much more.

Released by the ODNR Office of Coastal Management, the Ohio Coastal Atlas Third Edition is a fully-updated publication (Second Edition, 2007) intended to serve as an educational tool for coastal and community decision-makers, resource managers and professionals, nonprofits, educators, researchers, students, citizen scientists, residents, recreationalists and all stakeholders with a vested interest in Lake Erie and its natural resources. The atlas provides a framework for recognizing the relationships and interactions between the physical environment and human activities and actions.

A limited number of books will be printed and distributed. Free copies of the Ohio Coastal Atlas Third Edition will be available to the public starting in March at more than 30 locations in the Lake Erie coastal region while supplies last. A complete list of distribution sites can be found on the ODNR Office of Coastal Management’s Ohio Coastal Atlas webpage at coastal.ohiodnr.gov/atlas. The full document in PDF format to download by chapter is also available now on the webpage. ✧

Recreational Fishing Now Generates \$125 Billion Impact

Alexandria, VA – Recreational fishing has a significant economic impact on communities throughout the U.S. But what does that really mean?

The American Sportfishing Association (ASA) teamed up with [Southwick Associates](#) to create the [2019 Economic Contributions of Recreational Fishing: U.S. Congressional Districts](#), which updates the 2016 version. This also illustrates recreational fishing’s economic impact on all 435 Congressional districts and the 50 states.

The report and infographics use macro data from the 2016 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services’ *National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation*, which is condensed into ASA’s [Sportfishing in America](#) report. The study used mapping and population software to hone in on smaller geographic areas in a way that is particularly relevant to members of the U.S. House of Representatives.

America’s 49 million anglers generate nearly \$50 billion in retail sales with a \$125 billion impact on the nation’s economy creating employment for more 800,000 people.

Recreational fishing is the foundation of an industry that involves not just the manufacturing, sale or provision of tackle and other fishing gear, but also includes services such as boat builders, hotels, restaurants and much more.

Leonard concluded, “With so many new lawmakers in office, it’s critically important that we provide accurate, detailed information to new, and veteran, decision-makers on the tremendous value that recreational fishing provides to the nation.”

The report and Congressional district infographics are available on the [ASA website](#) under Facts & Figures. ✧

Feb. 9 Lake Winnebago System Sturgeon Season opener

OSHKOSH, Wis. – February marks the most wonderful time of the year for sturgeon spearers as Wisconsin's season opens February 9 on the Lake Winnebago system.

The Winnebago System is home to one of the world's largest self-sustaining populations of lake sturgeon, with an estimated 19,500 adult females and 24,500 adult males, and a unique spearing season dating back more than 85 years.

"In 2019, spearers have another great opportunity to renew traditions and go after some really big fish," says Ryan Koenigs, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources sturgeon biologist.



Forty-three fish exceeding 100 pounds were harvested in 2018, including a 75.6-inch, 155.6-pound fish harvested by Benjamin Berger and a 84.5-inch, 143.7-pound fish taken by Kyle Jenkins.

"As always, water clarity and ice conditions determine spearer success—mild weather in December and January have delayed ice formation and thus DNR staff have not collected water quality data," said Koenigs. "Anecdotal reports from locals indicate poor water clarity with reports of 5-9 feet of visibility being common. Water clarity on Lake Winnebago averaged 6.5 feet during the 2018 spearing season with a total harvest of 654 fish. Given current

conditions, a similar harvest is anticipated at this time."

Interest in sturgeon spearing continues to be strong: 12,897 licenses (12,411 for Lake Winnebago and 486 for the Upriver Lakes) were sold for 2019. Resident licenses were sold to spearers in 70 out of 72 Wisconsin counties and non-resident licenses represent 33 states.

"Spearers continually tell us it's the chance to get together with family and friends, to relive old memories and create new ones that keeps them coming back year after year," said Koenigs.

The success of the Winnebago fishery and the fish population is a testament to the successful co-management of the sturgeon resource among DNR, stakeholder groups, and a passionate general public.

"These are really the good old days when it comes to sturgeon spearing on the Winnebago System," Koenigs says. "There are more fish in the system now than there have been for decades and more big fish than we have had at least since the early 1900s. In fact, 22.7 percent of the female sturgeon handled during 2018 spawning stock assessments were larger than 70 inches."

Season and license details

Sturgeon spearing opened at 7 a.m. Saturday, Feb. 9 and may run for up to 16 days (**through February 24**). However, an early closure may be triggered if pre-set harvest caps are reached. If early closure occurs, notices will be posted and the sturgeon spearing webpage will be updated at dnr.wi.gov, keyword "[sturgeon](#)." A helpful [sturgeon spearing email list](#) is also available to provide instant email notifications.

The system-wide harvest caps remain unchanged from 2018: 430 juvenile females, 950 adult females and 1,200 males.

To spear sturgeon, participants must possess a sturgeon spearing license and tag. Spearing hours run from 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. and all sturgeon must be presented at a DNR operated

registration station by 2 p.m. of the same day the fish is harvested.

Successful spearers must immediately validate their carcass tag by removing the validation stub—a validated carcass tag does not need to be attached to a harvested fish before registration, as long as the spearer stays with the fish until registration. However, the harvest tag must be attached to the sturgeon if the spearer leaves the fish prior to registration. DNR recommends spearers bring a clear plastic zip-top bag and tie to protect and secure the tag to the fish.

More details about sturgeon spearing throughout the Lake Winnebago system, including the 2019 rules and the 10 registration stations, can be found at keywords "[Winnebago system sturgeon](#)."

To learn more about sturgeon management in Wisconsin, [check out an episode of the Wild Wisconsin: Off the Record podcast](#) featuring Ryan Koenigs. Podcasts are available on [YouTube](#), [iTunes](#) and [PodBean](#). ✧

Don't forget about mandatory muskie harvest registration

With Michigan's ice-fishing season well under way, the DNR reminds anglers who harvest a muskie that there is mandatory registration. The muskie harvest limit is one fish per angler per license year. A muskie harvest must be reported within 24 hours of the catch. Reports can be made online through: michigan.gov/registerfish, toll-free at 844-345-FISH (3474), or in person at any DNR Customer Service Center during normal state business hours and with advanced notice of arrival.

The general possession season for muskellunge is open through March 15 for all Great Lakes and inland waters and the St. Marys River. For more info: michigan.gov/fishingguide or contact Cory Kovacs, 906-293-5131, ext. 4071 or Elyse Walter, 517-284-5839. ✧

Black Lake sturgeon season over in less than 80 minutes

The 2019 sturgeon season on Black Lake (Cheboygan County, Michigan) ended at 9:18 a.m. Saturday, Feb. 2 – after only 78 minutes of fishing.

The fishing season, including spearing or hook-and-line fishing, was scheduled to run February 2-6, or until the harvest quota had been reached. This year's allocation of sturgeon for Black Lake anglers was seven fish, although DNR officials set a harvest quota of six fish.

There were 403 registered anglers on the ice Saturday, slightly down from 422 the year before. Anglers of all ages again participated, including a good number of supervised youth.

The first four sturgeon harvested were males ranging from 52-60", and 25-47 lbs. in weight. The final two fish were females ranging from 61-72" long, and 54-80 lbs. in weight.

Three of the six fish taken had been captured before by Michigan State U. and the DNR during spring spawning runs in the Black River. A harvested 56" male originally was captured in the 2009 spring spawning run. A 60" male had been captured and tagged during the 2004, 2010 and 2017 spawning runs. The largest fish, a 72" female, had been captured and tagged during the 2003, 2007 and 2012 spawning runs.

Participating anglers were notified of the season closure in a variety of ways; including a fishing telephone hotline, text alerts to those who provided cell phone numbers, signal cannons, mortar rounds and fireworks. All methods were used to indicate the season's end within minutes of the final fish being harvested. DNR law enforcement officials and other department personnel again were embedded in the on-ice fishing communities and were able to quickly report harvested fish and contact all participating anglers about the season's close.

For more info on lake sturgeon in Michigan: Michigan.gov/Sturgeon. ✧

"Great Lakes and Mississippi River Interbasin Study" extended to **Feb 22**

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has extended the review period of "The Great Lakes and Mississippi River Interbasin Study (GLMRIS) - Brandon Road Integrated Feasibility Study." The end of the review changed from January 7, 2019 to **February 22, 2019**. The report is posted at <https://www.mvr.usace.army.mil/GLMRIS-BR>. For additional information, contact U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Rock Island District, ATTN: GLMRIS-Brandon Road EIS, Clock Tower Building, P.O. Box 2004, Rock Island, IL 61204-2004.

Also, **The Upper Midwest Invasive Species Conference and North American Invasive Species Management Association** 2018 joint conference presentations are now available for download as PDF files. You can scroll through by day directly on MIPN's [website](#) or view/search a comprehensive [PDF](#) that includes links to all available presentations. NAISMA's website has a link [here](#) as well ✧

Great Lakes meeting in East Lansing Mar 5

Registration is now open for the [2019 Great Lakes Conference](#) – attend to learn about key Great Lakes issues including fisheries history, Asian carp prevention, the cultural and ecologic significance of wild rice, best management practices in the Lake Erie Basin, water restoration efforts and Great Lakes wildlife. The annual conference highlights current and emerging issues, research and noteworthy Great Lakes information.

Date: Tuesday, **March 5, 2019**, 9–3:30 p.m., Kellogg Center Auditorium, East Lansing, **Cost:** \$15 in advance (March 1); \$20 at the door.

Registration: <http://events.anr.msu.edu/GreatLakes2019> ✧

DEC adopts plans to enhance access in St. Lawrence County's Grass River Region

The New York DEC announced the finalization of three management plans within St. Lawrence County's Grass River region. The plans will protect valuable natural resources and provide additional opportunities for camping and other recreation, as well as new access to trails with some of the best views in the Adirondacks.

DEC has finalized the Grass River Wild Forest Unit Management Plan (UMP) – encompassing approximately 14,000 acres of Forest Preserve lands in the towns of Clare, Clifton, Colton, and Fine in St. Lawrence County. The UMP designates new bicycle trails linking the Lampson Falls parcel and adjacent Downerville State Forest; establishes hiking trails and parking areas to provide access to several waterfalls along the South Branch of the Grass River on the Tooley Pond Tract; and opens several roads to public use to provide access to both Forest Preserve and adjacent conservation easement lands on the Tooley Pond Tract. [The UMP can be viewed online](#).

DEC has also approved two Recreation Management Plans (RMPs) in the region.

The Tooley Pond Conservation Easement is 23,946 acres located within the towns of Clifton and Clare. The RMP's enhancements include opening more than 20 miles of roads for better access to the property, a trail to a rock-climbing area, and the establishment of nine campsites, including one at Allen Pond.

The Grass River Easement consists of one large 50,262-acre parcel and two smaller parcels (1,122 and 566 acres) in the towns of Clare, Clifton, and Colton. The public can use designated corridors, roads, and trails on the easement, but not the lands in between.

The [RMP for the Tooley Pond conservation easement](#) and the [RMP for the Grass River conservation easement](#) can be viewed online. ✧

Tips to keep your dog from falling through the ice this winter

If you and your dog are outdoors types — or hey, maybe you guys are just working on your ice skating routine — you'll probably spend some time trekking through some tundra this season. In order to protect you and your pup from dangerous ice this winter, here are some helpful safety tips to keep everyone happy:

1. Measure the ice.

You can try to eyeball ice to see if it's thick enough to step on, but the best way to test it is to actually measure it. You can do this by stabbing an ice chisel into the ice and then measuring that depth with a rod. Or, you can use cordless wood drill.

2. Steer clear of ice that's less than three inches thick.

No matter how tiny you and your dog may be, if the ice is less than three inches, avoid it. Ice that's about four inches can usually sustain activities like walking. Nevertheless, it's important to keep in mind that ice conditions can change, especially

depending on how recently the ice formed. **You should also measure in more than one place.**

3. Look for cracks and colors.

Although measuring is one of the more useful tools, visually assessing the field is also helpful. If you see worrisome signs like cracks, dark regions, or slushy areas, these are indications that the ice is weak and can't support weight. Similarly, the color of the ice can often be a useful indicator of its safety. Clear, blue or green ice may be thick enough to walk on, whereas dark ice and white ice are weaker (because it likely has only air or snow trapped inside), and should be avoided.

4. Know rescue protocol.

If anyone/anything falls into icy water, the first thing to do is to call 911. While 911 is well-equipped for these situations, in the meantime, you can attempt to reach the person by using a stick, rope, or ladder — anything that is long-reaching.

Everyone should avoid standing up on the ice until they are far away, and those exposed to ice water should immediately receive hypothermia treatment.

5. Keep an eye on that pup!

Your dog loves you. So if he's watching you glide around on a frozen lake, he's going to want to join in the fun. Keep a close eye on your dog at all times, or better yet, put him on a leash. If you can't rely on your dog to stick close and come when called, your best option is to keep it on a leash.

6. Avoid poorly lit areas.

Don't get me wrong, a romantic moonlit skate sounds absolutely *divine*, especially if you're trying to reenact beautiful moments from beautiful movies. But with limited lighting, it's more difficult to detect the ice's safety. Falling into icy water can really ruin the mood, so if the lighting isn't great, it's better to hit the ice during the day. ✧

DEC releases draft management plan for Hudson River National Estuarine Research Reserve

New York DEC announced the release of the Draft Hudson River National Estuarine Reserve (HRNERR) Management Plan for public review and comment. The reserve is operated as a partnership between DEC and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the plan provides a necessary foundation to help manage the federally designated and state-protected sites.

The mission of the Hudson River National Estuarine Research Reserve is to improve the health and resilience of the Hudson River Estuary by conserving estuarine habitats through integrated education, training, stewardship, restoration, monitoring, and research programs.

The [2019 Draft Management Plan](#) is an update of the 2009 plan and will guide the management of the Hudson River National Estuarine

Research Reserve for the next five years. The draft plan provides a foundation for education programs, professional training, research, public access, and resource stewardship, and continues the reserve's commitment to the following core practices:

- Engaging local communities and citizens to improve stewardship of estuary resources;
- Understanding stakeholder needs and seeking meaningful partnerships to guide program planning and implementation;
- Using collaborative approaches to address complex estuary issues;
- Integrating staff activities to maximize the transfer of research and monitoring to inform decision making and community-based stewardship;
- Aligning with the Hudson River Estuary Program and other programs to promote stewardship of the Hudson River estuary;

- Informing decision-making in the mid-Atlantic and North Atlantic where appropriate through collaborations with other National Estuarine Research Reserves; and
- Leading by example through innovating, testing, and applying best management practices.

The public is encouraged to comment on the 2019 Draft Management Plan through **March 15, 2019**. DEC will review and address all comments received. The [draft management plan](#) is posted on the NYS DEC website.

Comments, questions: Heather Gierloff, Hudson River National Estuarine Research Reserve Manager, Norrie Point Environmental Center, 256 Norrie Point Way, P.O. Box 315, Staatsburg, NY 12580; (845) 2889-4745 x 118; or heather.gierloff@dec.ny.gov. ✧

Susquehanna River surveys on bass, etc.

In a pair of recent reports, Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) biologists concluded that the Susquehanna River is home to a healthy, abundant population of smallmouth bass and channel catfish.

From October 22-28, 2018, fisheries biologists conducted nighttime electrofishing surveys targeting adult smallmouth bass at four sites located within the middle portion of the Susquehanna River. Sites surveyed were near Clemson Island, Rockville, the Dock Street Dam and the Pennsylvania Turnpike Bridge near Highspire.

The catch rate of smallmouth bass in 2018 was the fifth-highest on record since standardized surveys began in 1990. The surveys revealed a strong population of adult bass ranging in size from 6 to 20-inches, as well as record numbers of trophy-sized bass measuring 18" or longer.

"The findings of this survey continue to reveal a strong smallmouth bass population," said Geoff Smith, PFBC Susquehanna River Biologist.

In a second report, PFBC biologists outlined the findings of adult channel catfish surveys conducted between 2016 to 2018. During this time, biologists surveyed eleven sites; six in the middle section of the Susquehanna River extending from Sunbury to York Haven, and five in the lower Susquehanna River from York Haven to the Columbia-Wrightsville Bridge.

Using commercial catfish bait, biologists collected thousands of channel catfish ranging in length from 12 to 31-inches. While equipment used in the survey is not capable of collecting younger fish, typically those under 12-inches, the number of catfish in the angler-preferred length of 24-inches or longer was good in both the middle and lower sections of the river with no evidence of overfishing.

The entire [smallmouth bass](#) report and [channel catfish](#) biologist reports can be found at www.fishandboat.com. ✧

DU, Illinois DNR add 250 acres of public land along Illinois River

PEORIA, Illinois – Outdoor enthusiasts in central Illinois have an extra 247 acres of public land to explore, hunt and hike because of a major Ducks Unlimited conservation effort with the Illinois DNR.

The Illinois DNR has purchased the tract of land from Ducks Unlimited and merged it into the Woodford State Fish and Wildlife Area in Woodford County, north of Peoria. Woodford is on the shores of Goose Lake and Upper Peoria Lake and is part of the major Illinois River corridor for migrating birds, including waterfowl.

Ducks Unlimited will reinvest the \$885,000 from the land sale back into its Illinois River Valley conservation efforts, including increased support of public waterfowl management areas. The Illinois DNR was happy to be able to offer more public access.

"One of the missions of the DNR is to expand our public lands in the Illinois River Valley, and this property will be an excellent addition," said Tony Colvin, site superintendent at the Woodford and Marshall State Fish & Wildlife Areas. "We look forward to managing this prime tract of property to benefit waterfowl and other wetland flora and fauna. The DNR is excited to work with Ducks Unlimited in the immediate future to develop this area into a high-quality wetland habitat," he said.

Ducks Unlimited used funding support from Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation, Grand Victoria Foundation and Doris Duke Charitable Foundation to buy the land back in 2010.

"Jenkins Marsh is one of the flagship projects of Ducks Unlimited's [Big Rivers Initiative](#)," said Michael Sertle, Ducks Unlimited regional biologist in Illinois. "Improving the quality of public land in the Illinois River Valley region is a priority for Ducks Unlimited." ✧

2018 Wadeable Streams Report

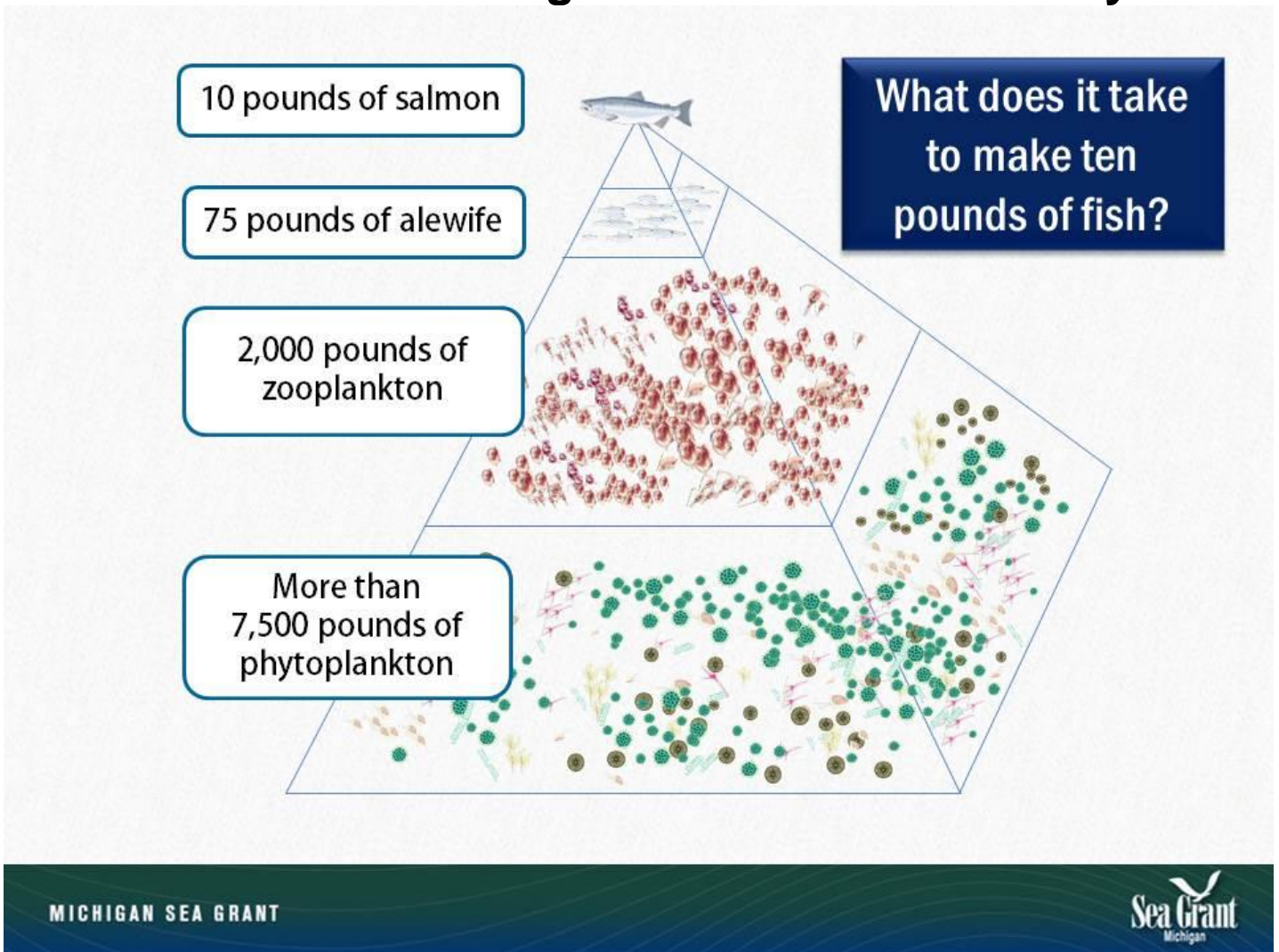
In 2018, the Wisconsin DNR conducted electrofishing surveys on wadable streams located in Adams, Green Lake, Marquette, Shawano, Waushara, and Waupaca Counties in order to provide insight and direction for the future management of these waters. Primary sampling objectives of these surveys were to characterize relative abundance and size structure for all gamefish species and overall ecological integrity through an index of biotic integrity (IBI). The following report is a summary of all streams and sites surveyed in 2018. Individual summary reports are also available for each stream surveyed. Contact the county fisheries biologist to request them.

All streams are sampled according to WDNR wadable streams monitoring protocols.

- TREND survey sites are sampled annually while ROTATION sites are sampled on a rotational frequency (3, 6 or 12 years).
- All sampling sites are electrofished with either a towed barge or backpack shocker.
- Sampling distance is at least 35 times the mean stream width or a minimum of 330 feet (100 meters), whichever is greater.
- All gamefish are identified to species, measured, and examined for fin-clips. In at least one survey site per stream, all fish species are collected and counted. If multiple sites are designated for a stream only one site needs to be sampled for all fish.
- Metrics used to describe fish populations include catch per unit effort (CPUE), length frequency distribution and index of biotic integrity (IBI).

To read the full report: <https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/fishing/documents/reports/WaupacaCentralWisconsinCounties2018WadeableStreamsReport.pdf> ✧

Mechanics for enhancing our Great Lakes Fishery



Successful fall stocking season means more great fishing statewide



The DNR's 2018 fall fish-stocking totals are in! From September through December, fisheries crews stocked nine different species: more than 1.1 million fish that weighed in at over 17 tons. These fish were stocked at 153 different locations throughout Michigan and – when combined with spring and summer efforts – bring the total number of fish stocked last year to more than 22 million!

Species stocked this fall included Atlantic salmon, channel catfish, brook trout, brown trout, coho salmon, rainbow trout (Eagle Lake and Michigan strain steelhead), lake sturgeon, walleye and muskie (northern and Great Lakes strains).

See [breakdown of which state hatchery stocked which fish](https://www.michigan.gov/Fishing) at [Michigan.gov/Fishing](https://www.michigan.gov/Fishing).

Several other management units also stocked fall fingerling walleye last year, including 15,564 Muskegon strain (1,554.2 lbs.) and 7,437 Bay de Noc strain (555.1 lbs.).

Two additional species of coolwater fish also were stocked in 2018 – 50 adult channel catfish (181.8 pounds) and 585 fall fingerling lake sturgeon (20.7 lbs.).

Wondering if any fish were stocked in your favorite spots? Visit the DNR's fish stocking database at [MichiganDNR.com/FishStock/](https://www.michigan.gov/FishStock/).

Ohio's Wildlife Diversity Conference

COLUMBUS, OH – Prepare to get your groove on at the 35th annual Ohio Wildlife Diversity Conference as we examine restoration work being done throughout the Buckeye State. Hosted by the Ohio DNR, the conference will be held on Tuesday, **March 5**, at the Ohio Union on The Ohio State University's campus in Columbus.

This year's keynote speaker is Dr. Chris Vandergoot from the U.S. Geological Survey. Vandergoot has been heavily involved in efforts to re-establish lake sturgeon in the Maumee River. This past fall, 3,000 juvenile sturgeon were released into the river, with more releases planned in future years.

Doors open for registration at 8 a.m., and the conference, titled "Stayin' Alive," will run from 9 a.m.-3:30 p.m. The Ohio Union is located at 1739 North High Street, Columbus 43210 (on Ohio State's campus). Conference attendees should park in the attached Ohio Union South parking garage for \$10.

Register now at wildohio.gov or call 800-WILDLIFE (945-3543). For a **discounted registration** rate of \$25, people should register by Friday, **March 1**. The cost to register is \$35 after March 1 or the day of the conference. A reduced-price student registration is also available for \$10. Those who pre-register before the day of the conference will have the option of signing up for lunch. ✧

New Indiana Fishing Guide is out

Pick up your hard copy of the 2019-20 Indiana Fishing Guide this week from one of our properties or retailers. The guide will be available online soon. Highlights of the new guide will include: 2019 free fishing weekends, 2018 Fish of the Year and State Record Fish, new public access sites, an overview of largemouth bass and an overview of the Lake Michigan salmonid program. ✧

Cook County Forest Preserves Fishing

The Forest Preserves manages over 40 waterbodies for sport fishing. The Forest Preserves Fisheries Section, in cooperation with the Illinois DNR, [stocks a number of lakes](#) with sport fish on an annual basis. Twice a year, spring and fall, rainbow trout are stocked. Some fishing locations [allow the use of approved private watercraft and Boating Centers offer rentals, bait and food](#). The [Forest Preserves fishing guide](#) lists all fishing and boating regulations, locations, maps, etc. Printed fishing guides are available at the [Forest Preserves General Headquarters](#) in River Forest, IL and all six [Nature Centers](#). <http://fpdcc.com/recreation/fishing/>

VIEW FISHING MAP **DOWNLOAD FISHING GUIDE** ✧

Regulation change affects smelt fishing

If you're fishing for smelt this year, make sure you know about a legislative change, signed at the end of 2018, that alters how anglers can target smelt in Michigan.

The previous state statute let people use any number of hooks attached to a single line, while fishing for smelt, alewife or other bait fish in the Great Lakes or recognized smelt waters. Now, anglers fishing for those species can use no more than three lines per person, with no more than six hooks or lures on all lines.

All hooks attached to an artificial bait or "night crawler harness" are counted as one hook (note: for crappie/perch rigs and umbrella rigs, each hook is counted as part of the total six allowed). This means anglers may use up to six hooks on one line or spread the six hooks out over up to three lines.

For more information on fishing regulations, see the current Michigan Fishing Guide, available at fishing license vendors and online at michigan.gov/fishingguide.

Questions? Contact [Christian LeSage](#), 517-284-5830 or [Elyse Walter](#), 517-284-5839. ✧

Largemouth bass virus confirmed in more Michigan lakes

The largemouth bass virus has been found in two additional lakes in Michigan's northern Lower Peninsula, following an initial discovery this past October in Cedar Lake (Iosco County). This time LMBV was found in smallmouth bass in Beaver Lake (Alpena County) during the investigation of a fish kill and in Avalon Lake (Montmorency County). These latest discoveries indicate the virus is spreading northward in Michigan.

"The largemouth bass virus likely compromised the immune system of smallmouth bass in Beaver Lake, causing secondary bacterial infections to become more lethal and allowed the virus to be a direct factor in the fish kill," said Gary Whelan, the DNR Fisheries Division's research manager. "Because these latest detections are at the northern edge of where LMBV has been found, we may see different responses than what was documented in southern Michigan."

Largemouth bass virus can't be eradicated from lakes and infected fish cannot be treated. The best way to halt the virus is by anglers and boaters properly cleaning their equipment and doing their part to prevent the spread. Simple steps include:

- Cleaning all fishing equipment between trips.
 - Not moving fish or fish parts from one body of water to another.
 - Handling bass gently if you intend to release them.
 - Refraining from keeping bass in live wells for long periods of time if you plan to release them.
 - Minimizing the targeting of largemouth bass during very hot weather.
 - Reporting dead or dying adult largemouth bass, particularly when they're in numbers of 25 or larger – reports can be made online at Michigan.gov/EyesInTheField.
- For more information on fish diseases, visit the DNR webpage Michigan.gov/FishHealth ✧

Michigan state parks: 100 years young and going strong

With 103 state parks – from Milliken State Park in Detroit, to Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park on the western end of the Upper Peninsula – Michigan's enviable collection of outdoor recreation destinations is a draw for more than 27 million visitors every year. But it didn't happen by accident.

Almost 100 years ago, Michigan's state parks system was established, moving forward a vision to acquire lands for great outdoor spaces where the public could enjoy leisure time in some of the most



beautiful woods and water found anywhere in the country. Today, no matter where you are in Michigan, you're never more than a half-hour away from a state park, state forest campground or state trail system!

"Over the past 100 years, we are all fortunate for the vision and passion of those who had the foresight to secure these priceless natural treasures for future generations," said DNR Parks and Recreation Chief Ron Olson. "During this centennial celebration year, we invite old friends and first-time visitors to explore four seasons of fun. It's time to get to know your Michigan state parks all over again."

Take advantage of this yearlong celebration by visiting michigan.gov/stateparks100 to learn more about the rich history, find events near you, listen to podcasts, watch videos, and many other ways to enjoy and support Michigan's award-winning state parks system. For more information, contact [Maia Turek](mailto:Maia.Turek@dnr.state.mi.us), 989-225-8573. ✧

PA Lake Management Society 29th Annual Conference Mar 6 & 7

The 29th Annual PALMS Conference will be held at the Ramada Conference Center in State College, located at 1450 S. Atherton Street, State College, PA 16801. For more info: www.ramadasc.com. Keep an eye out for the conference agenda that will be released soon. Conference registration is now available [here](#). Early bird registration ends **February 27, 2019**. Conference fees include conference materials, breakfast, break refreshments, lunch, and networking opportunities. One-year membership to the Pennsylvania Lake Management Society is included with the Exhibitor Registration, Full Conference General Attendee, Full Conference Presenter, and Student registration options. Lodging and dinner costs are not included in conference fees. ✧

Free fishing days

This year's four free fishing days are **April 20, May 18, and June 1-2**. Indiana residents do not need a fishing license or a trout stamp to fish in public waters on these days. Several fishing events will be going on throughout the state.

[Find out more >>](#)



Camping Reservations

Make reservations for campsites and shelters for many Illinois state parks and other IDNR sites for 2019. Reservations can be made online through the Reserve America website at www.reserveamerica.com. ✧

Hunter and Boating Safety Education Courses

Register now for Hunter and Boating Safety Education courses from the IDNR. Spring classes are being scheduled. Check for class dates and locations: <https://www.dnr.illinois.gov/safety/Pages/VolunteerServiceCoordinators.aspx> ✧

Snowshoe or hike by candlelight at Lake Bemidji State Park, Feb. 15

The candlelight snowshoe or hike event at Lake Bemidji State Park has been rescheduled due to extreme cold to **February 15**. Drop by any time between 6:30 and 9:30 p.m. for snowshoeing or hiking as stars twinkle overhead and candles flicker in the snow. The 1.5-mile trail starts at the visitor center and is suitable for beginner-level snowshoers or hikers of all ages.

Snowshoes can be rented or checked out at the park on a first-come, first-served basis. Call 218-308-2300 in advance to confirm the availability of equipment.

The evening wraps up with a cup of hot cocoa or cider near a crackling bonfire.

Save time: Get vehicle permits in advance online

A vehicle permit is required to enter Minnesota state parks. Although permits are available at the park, save time by getting one in advance. Visit mndnr.gov/reservations, log in (or create an account), click on "entry permit," select a duration of "one-day" (\$7) or "year-round" (\$35), and continue as directed. An email will be sent with a permit that can be printed and displayed in vehicles during park visits.

In the event of severe weather, call 218-308-2300 for updates or check the visitor alert online at www.mndnr.gov/lakebemidji.

Find more candlelight events in the online calendar

Other candlelight events will take place throughout the state in January and February, offering a variety of terrain and scenery. For the complete schedule, visit mndnr.gov/candlelight.

For more information, email info.dnr@state.mn.us or call the DNR Information Center at 651-296-6157 or 888-646-6367 between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. Monday through Friday and Saturday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. ✧

Free Ice Fishing Clinic **Feb. 20**, at Glimmerglass State Park

New York DEC and the State Parks are hosting a **free ice fishing clinic 9-3 p.m. on Wednesday, Feb. 20**, at Glimmerglass State Park in the town of Springfield, Otsego County.

Anglers can expect to catch yellow perch and chain pickerel. Sunfish, black crappie, rock bass, black bass, walleye, and lake trout are also present in Otsego Lake. A warming area and refreshments will be available. DEC will supply bait and tackle, but experienced anglers are encouraged to bring their own fishing gear. There will be a short lesson on the basics of ice fishing and filleting your catch, and DEC and State Parks staff will be on hand to assist participants on the ice.

Pre-registration is appreciated but not required. Participants can pre-register by calling State Parks at 607-547-8662. While a DEC fishing license is not required for this event, all other statewide and special regulations for Otsego Lake remain in

effect. Normally, anyone age 16 or older is required to obtain a fishing license to fish or assist with fishing in fresh waters of New York State.

The ice fishing clinic supports Governor Cuomo's NY Open for Fishing and Hunting Initiative, an effort to improve recreational opportunities for sportsmen and women and to boost tourism activities throughout the state. In support of this initiative, \$10 million in NY Works funding has been dedicated to fish hatchery repairs and 50 new land and water access projects such as boat launches, hunting blinds, trails, and parking areas.

This is a great opportunity to try ice fishing for the first time or for experienced anglers to take friends ice fishing for the first time. Beginning ice anglers are encouraged to download the [Ice Fishing Chapter \(PDF\)](#) of DEC's [I FISH NY Beginners' Guide to Freshwater Fishing](#) for information on how to get

started ice fishing. [Additional information](#), including a list of waters open to ice fishing, can be found on the DEC ice fishing web page and the [Public Lakes and Ponds map](#).

Anglers are reminded that four inches of ice is usually safe for accessing ice on foot. Double that thickness for traveling on white ice. Ice thickness can vary on every body of water or even within the same body of water. Anglers should be particularly wary of areas of moving water and around boat docks and houses where bubblers may be installed to reduce ice buildup. The presence of snowmobile tracks or footprints on the ice should not be taken as evidence of safe ice conditions. Individuals are strongly encouraged to check ice conditions and avoid situations that appear to present even a remote risk. Testing the thickness if ice can easily be done with an auger or ice spud at various spots. ✧

Three Fishing & Boating trends to watch for in 2019

Fishing and boating participation is on the upswing! The team at RBFF will continue to promote fishing and boating as the antidote to the stresses of modern life, and here is what we hope the entire industry looks out for in 2019 and beyond:

Multicultural inclusion.

Data shows that Caucasians are more likely to participate in outdoor activities (73% versus 62% for the general population). But if we only focus on that group, the industry we love so much will be left behind. The multicultural audience is rapidly growing and it's our duty as a community to welcome and engage with this audience. Specifically, [Hispanic](#) and female participation in fishing is on the rise. RBFF will continue to focus on these groups in 2019, expanding upon our [successful](#)

[women's initiative, Making Waves.](#)

Retention and reactivation

While RBFF, the fishing and boating industry and other groups are doing a fantastic job at bringing new participants to the water, we need to pay even closer attention to the retention and reactivation pieces of the R3 puzzle. New anglers are still highly likely to lapse out of the sport after just their first year. We must all work together to ensure the entire fishing and boating experience—from the license and registration process, to the retail counter, to the way our waterways are managed—is as seamless and enjoyable as possible. RBFF is helping this by partnering with retail partners, state agencies and Grow Boating to ensure these new customers are engaged and have great experiences at every

touchpoint.

Our world is becoming increasingly connected.

Fishing and boating can continue to be the antidote to modern life, but that doesn't mean we can overlook the new technologies our audience is using to consume media. Adults in the United States are consuming more data than ever—up more than one hour per day to a total of 11. We must all gain a better understanding of where our audience spends time in this connected world and make sure we are effectively reaching them on those channels.

The trends show that fishing and boating is as relevant as ever. Now is the time to capitalize on this ever-expanding audience and make sure our favorite pastimes stay top-of-mind for American consumers. ✧

\$570,000 available in New York Ocean Research Grants

Grants Support New York's Ocean Action Plan

In partnership with New York Sea Grant, New York State DEC announced nearly \$570,000 in ocean research grants awarded to three investigative teams including Stony Brook U. (SBU), CUNY York College, and the Wildlife Conservation Society. The teams will work to identify the biodiversity of the offshore ecosystem of the New York Bight and investigate the species and uses of New York's ocean environment.

"The ocean research grants announced support the research work necessary to better understand of the impacts of climate change to marine resources, including ocean acidification and rising sea temperatures," said DEC Commissioner Basil Seggos. "It is vital that we work together with our partner agencies, researchers, and investigators to proactively protect our natural resources from changing ocean chemistry and safeguard the long-term sustainability of our fisheries."

"Understanding our oceans is of utmost importance to our coastal communities," added NYSG Interim Director Kathy Bunting-Howarth. "Sea Grant is pleased to support these projects and to bring the results to life with the vast array of coastal stakeholders who rely on these resources."

Through New York State's comprehensive 10-year Ocean Action Plan (OAP), supported by the Environmental Protection Fund's Ocean and Grant Lakes funding, the state has prioritized dedicated research to inform long-term monitoring programs and to improve science-based understanding of how interrelated components of the ocean ecosystem function off New York's coast.

The 2019 - 2021 grant awarded projects will begin in March and represent the first of two rounds of requests for proposals (RFP) from a five-year, \$1.1 million cooperative agreement between DEC and NYSG.

A second RFP will fund projects in 2021-23. Goals for the research outlined below will assist in defining the relationship between human use of the ocean and the natural processes that drive the offshore environment:

- **Ocean acidification in the New York Bight: Associations with eutrophication processes and implications for shellfish populations - \$195,000**

Researchers Chris Gobler, Michael Frisk, Lesley Thorne, SBU School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences (SoMAS), will investigate the impacts of ocean acidification on shellfish, crustaceans, fish, and zooplankton in the New York Bight and possible connections to oceanic eutrophication. Ocean eutrophication begins with the increased load of nutrients to coastal waters and can stimulate an explosive growth of algae (algal blooms) that depletes the water of oxygen when the algae die and are eaten by bacteria.

- **Effects of current and projected climate conditions on Atlantic Surfclam (*Spisula solidissima*) - \$200,000**

Investigators Bassem Allam, Robert Cerrato, Emmanuelle Pales-Espinosa, Kamazima Lwiza, SBU SoMAS, will study environmental impacts to this shellfish fishery, as well as the implication for other marine life species regime shifts occurring in the New York Bight with an increase in global temperatures and potential ocean acidification.

- **Applying environmental DNA analysis to biodiversity assessment and long-term ecological monitoring across New York's marine waters - \$174,000**

Assessing the rich and biodiverse marine life of the New York Bight and the submarine Hudson Canyon will begin to characterize the offshore ocean ecosystem and the creatures that inhabit or visit New York ocean waters. An additional focus on outreach to communicate these findings at the New York Aquarium is the focus for researchers Elizabeth

Alter, CUNY York College; and Howard Rosenbaum, Merry Camhi, Wildlife Conservation Society.

New York State Ocean Action Plan

New York's long-understudied inshore and offshore ocean waters contain a wealth of information on the health, biodiversity, and resiliency of marine organisms and their ocean habitat. To achieve New York's goals in ensuring the ecological integrity of the ocean ecosystem and the goods and services it provides, the state must first explore the questions pertaining to the ecosystem and collect data needed to inform future decisions on how we use the ocean environment.

Maritime commerce, commercial and recreational fishing, tourism, and other recreational business are key components to New York's economy that rely heavily on the health of the state's ocean and estuarine ecosystems. Understanding the current baseline conditions of the ocean ecosystem and how these are changing is a key factor as new and traditional uses of the offshore area expand with new technologies and new resources. It is imperative to measure environmental changes occurring with ocean ecosystems to understand the scope of climate change in the New York Bight, as well as the new uses designed to reduce those impacts.

As a partner with DEC in the OAP Research Program, NYSG's mission is to help New York's diverse coastal communities respond to rapid economic and environmental changes. [NYSG](#) has been funding research for nearly 50 years on issues of critical importance to New York's coastal communities and stakeholders. Sea Grant is partnering with DEC in administering the research awards.

For more info on [New York's OAP](#) and OAP's [Ocean Monitoring Project](#), visit DEC's website.

To read the full article: [New York announces Nearly \\$570,000 in New York Ocean Research Grants](#) - 01/31/19 ✧

Ohio DNR closes major poaching ring

COLUMBUS, OH – The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) has closed the adjudication phase of what has become the largest case in the 146-year history of the ODNR Division of Wildlife. The case, dubbed Operation North Coast, culminated in March 2016 with the execution of search warrants, arrest warrants and dozens of simultaneous interviews. The case primarily concerned the illegal taking and sales of Lake Erie sportfish and white-tailed deer meat products in counties along the Lake Erie shoreline. Since the takedown, state wildlife investigators have spent 2.5 years attending court hearings in Cuyahoga, Lorain, Lucas, Richland, Ottawa and Wood counties.

Following the initial search warrants and interviews, state wildlife investigators reviewed thousands of documents, conducted approximately 200 interviews, executed additional search warrants, examined hundreds of digital and physical evidence items that were seized and attended approximately 100 court hearings. Of the items seized were one vehicle, 96 deer and turkey mounts, 35 sets of antlers, more than 200 pounds of filleted sportfish and 400 pounds of de-boned venison and processed deer meat.

Nine defendants, including one in Wood County and eight in Cuyahoga County, were subsequently charged with engaging in a pattern of corrupt activity and associated crimes for operating as a criminal enterprise. The ODNR Division of Wildlife asserted that members of the group took deer illegally, often not tagging or reporting the harvests as required by law. The group would also create false harvest records by checking deer in the names of others to cover illegally taken deer meat and/or antlers. The agency further asserted that the deer meat was laundered into venison “smokies” that were sold or bartered for taxidermy and other services.

In Cuyahoga County, John Zayac, John Stofan and Terrance

Ankrom harvested 39 deer, including 22 bucks, or antlered deer, over the two-year course of the investigation. (The bag limit is one buck per year per person.) The group would have their spouses and family members commit communications fraud and falsify records in the ODNR Division of Wildlife’s game check system. The deer were then de-boned and transferred to Zayac, who would take the de-boned venison to Smokin’ T’s, a meat processor in Ashtabula County for processing.

During the scope of the case, approximately 2,000 pounds of boneless venison were taken to Todd Neczeporenko, who owns Smokin’ Ts meat processing. Smokin’ Ts was charged with money laundering for converting the boneless venison into products that were later sold by members of the enterprise, primarily Zayac. The racketeering cases in Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Court were the last to conclude in late 2018. Assistant Prosecutor James Gutierrez coined the group as “racketeers in camouflage.”

The following penalties were assessed by the Honorable Judge Michael Donnelly in plea agreements. John Zayac paid \$40,000 in restitution, had his hunting privileges revoked for seven years, forfeited a truck and 44 of the 54 seized deer mounts were forfeited to the ODNR Division of Wildlife. John Stofan was ordered to pay \$25,000 in restitution, lost his hunting privileges for five years and 31 of the 35 deer mounts were forfeited to the ODNR Division of Wildlife. Terrence Ankrom was ordered to pay \$6,800 in restitution, forfeited a truck and lost his hunting privileges for five years. Todd Neczeporenko’s business pleaded to a lesser charge and was ordered to pay \$15,000 in restitution.

In Wood County, Mandon Freeworth would harvest white-tailed deer illegally and have others commit communications fraud, a third-degree felony, by reporting the harvest as their own in the ODNR Division of Wildlife’s game check system.

Freeworth was charged with 16 counts including the following 10 felonies: engaging in a pattern of corrupt activity, discharging a firearm from a motor vehicle, felony sales of wildlife, possessing weapons under a firearms disability, improper handling of a firearm in a motor vehicle, tampering with records and drug abuse. He was also charged with six misdemeanors including possessing weapons while intoxicated, licensing violations, improper handling of a firearm and three counts of selling venison. Freeworth pleaded to 10 of the charges and served 22 months in prison. He paid \$5,513.03 in restitution and has lost his privilege to hunt, fish and trap until 2035.

An additional 21 associates of Freeworth were charged with 39 crimes including misdemeanor purchases of wildlife (processed venison), providing false information to the division’s game check system, possessing weapons under a firearms disability, tampering with records and hunting without permission.

In a unique case documented by investigators, Matthew Langlois and Lawrence “Andy” Turner committed theft by deception when they entered and won a walleye tournament on the Maumee River. The fish they had entered had actually been caught on Lake Erie, yet they entered the fish and won \$375 in prize money. In addition to their \$250 fine and 30-day suspended jail sentence, the two had to reimburse Maumee River Bait and Tackle for the prize.

In Lorain County, Carl Taylor Jr. and Alexander Lenz sold more than 100 pounds of sport-caught perch, walleye and white bass to investigators, which is a felony by statute. Taylor pleaded to the 11-count indictment and was ordered to pay \$10,700 in restitution. Lenz was ordered to pay \$2,500 in restitution, and both lost their fishing privileges for one year.

Also charged in Lorain County Common Pleas Court were Dennis and Andrew Urig for felony sales of white-tailed deer meat. Investigators

documented the pair selling processed deer products from a storefront they owned. The two pleaded to the cases. Dennis Urig paid \$3,663.30 and lost his hunting and fishing privileges for six years. Andrew Urig was ordered to pay \$1,340 and lost his hunting and fishing privileges for three years.

In Richland County, Ron Gasparac was charged with three felony counts of selling yellow perch fillets. During the investigation, Gasparac was documented six times of over-harvesting yellow perch on Lake Erie, at times more than twice the daily bag limit. He would then clean and sell the fish. Gasparac's

attorney challenged the state's wildlife restitution law to the appeals court, but the court ruled in favor of ODNR, supporting the legal process the agency uses to establish the values of wild animals. Gasparac was sentenced to pay \$6,120 in restitution to the ODNR Division of Wildlife for the value of the yellow perch and two years community control (probation).

In all, the cases resulted in 46 defendants being charged with 91 felonies and 73 misdemeanors. These 46 individuals were assessed a combined \$131,763 in fines and restitution, sentenced to 8.6 years of jail with the majority suspended,

received 79 years of hunting and fishing revocation and paid more than \$18,000 in court cost.

The ODNR Division of Wildlife would like to thank the concerned citizens who reported information to state wildlife officers and through the Turn-In-a-Poacher (TIP) hotline at 800-POACHER (762-2437). In addition, the division would like to acknowledge the Ohio Department of Public Safety's Ohio Investigative Unit; Will Ogden, an Ohio Buckeye Big Bucks official scorer; Henry County Prosecutor Gwen Gebers-Howe; and Cuyahoga County Assistant Prosecutor James Gutierrez.

✧

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

[Invasive species dying off because of cold snap](#)

One bright side of the bitter temperatures caused by the polar vortex is the negative impact on terrestrial and aquatic invasive species, which come from regions of the world that typically aren't as cold as the Great Lakes in winter.

[County receives grant funds for Pike River restoration work](#)

Kenosha County in Wisconsin has received a \$75,000 grant, provided by the Fund for Lake Michigan, for restoration work along the Pike River

['If you can't beat 'em, eat 'em:' University of Illinois serves invasive Asian carp for dinner](#)

Illinois' contract fishermen have pulled 7.5 million lbs. of Asian carp out of the Illinois River since 2010. Most of it is made into fish bait, fertilizer and pet food. There's never been a market for Asian carp as food but now the U. of Illinois wants to change that.

[Kavanaugh has already had an impact on the Supreme Court starting with gun rights](#)

When Justice Kavanaugh took his seat on the Supreme Court, following a tumultuous confirmation process and allegations of sexual assault, discussions turned to the future of the court, experts across the political spectrum mined Kavanaugh's record in

[West Nile virus detected in ruffed grouse](#)

West Nile virus was detected in three of 16 ruffed grouse that were found sick or dead and submitted by the public to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources for testing from October through December 2018.

[Lake Michigan could get a new national park](#)

Indiana Senators Todd Young and Mike Braun and Representative Pete Visclosky have reintroduced legislation in Congress that would designate the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore as a National Park

[Anglers express frustration over new Lake Superior fishing agreement](#)

Some sports anglers on Lake Superior said they aren't happy with how Wisconsin state officials and two tribes reached a newly negotiated Lake Superior Fishing Agreement, saying fishermen were left out of the process.

[New Minn. DNR commissioner outlines challenges, priorities and opportunities as she begins new job](#)

Sarah Strommen is the new commissioner of the Minnesota DNR, replacing Tom Landwehr, who had been at the DNR helm since 2011.

[U.S. Supreme Court may decide public's access to Great Lakes' shorelines](#)

The Supreme Court will soon decide if it wants to answer the question of whether public access to Great Lakes shorelines extends to the ordinary high-water mark, with ramifications for access to thousands of miles of Great Lakes shoreline

[Ontario Ice Caves along Lake Superior named top spot to visit in 2019](#)

The Ontario ice caves along Lake Superior ranked No. 10 on the New York Times' "52 Places to Go in 2019" list

[Costly effort to fight invasive Asian Carp includes 'Carp Cowboys' and high-tech dam project](#)

Asian carp have been deemed the enemies of America's waterways, threatening to take over the Great Lakes and create a disaster in the ecosystem. Now, the battle against the invasive fish is becoming more aggressive