

Meeting Summary
Muskie Program Summit
Bridgewater Banquet and Conference Center, Powell, OH
February 26, 2011 9:30 AM – 12:00 PM

Meeting summary prepared by Tracy Fink (tracy.fink@dnr.state.oh.us), March 3, 2011

Attendees

- Ohio Division of Wildlife
 - Scott Hale, Executive Administrator, Acting
 - Elmer Heyob, Hatchery Program Administrator
 - Tim Parrett, Fish Management Supervisor, District 4 (Athens)
 - Kevin Page, Fisheries Biologist, Inland Fisheries Research Unit
 - Curtis Wagner, Fisheries Biologist, District 3 (Akron)
 - Ed Lewis, Fisheries Biologist, District 2 (Findlay)
 - Ethan Simmons, Fisheries Biologist, District 1 (Columbus)
 - Tracy Fink, Research Aide, Inland Fisheries Research Unit
- Muskie Club Representatives
 - Fred Lederer, Ohio Huskie Muskie Club
 - Paul Anderson, Ohio Huskie Muskie Club
 - Greg Hastings, Ohio Huskie Muskie Club
 - Rob VanGorder, Muskies Inc. #41 (Central Ohio)
 - John Oldfield, Muskies Inc. #41 (Central Ohio)
 - Jim Moore, Muskies Inc. #9 (West Virginia)
 - Gordon Seldon, Muskies Inc. #19 (Akron/Canton)
 - Scott Shampton, Muskies Inc. #56 (SOMA)
 - Cliff Honeycutt, Muskies Inc. #41 (Central Ohio)
 - Joel Johnson, Muskies Inc. #56 (SOMA)
 - Doug Kelble, Muskies Inc. #56 (SOMA)

Meeting Objectives

To provide an opportunity for meet-and-greet among club officers and Division of Wildlife fisheries staff, to provide updates on the muskie program, and to discuss other items as interest and time allows in an open forum.

Summit Overview

Curt Wagner gave a brief overview of the meeting and invited everyone to enjoy the refreshments.

Welcome

Scott Hale welcomed the group and informed attendees of the new administration changes within the Department of Natural Resources. David Mustine has been appointed the Director of the Department of Natural Resources while Glenn Cobb, who recently worked within the Division of Parks, has been appointed the Deputy Director of Recreation and Resource Management. In 2010 the Division of Wildlife faced a difficult year with many challenges. There have been many concerns regarding what new challenges the year 2011 may hold. After a recent meeting with the new Mustine Administration, the Division of Wildlife is feeling very positive about the administration changes. A main focus at the Mustine meeting was determining ways in which the Department can work with the Division to improve job efficiency and provide Division employees with needed job-related resources.

The new automated licensing system will go into effect in March 2011. The new system will be cost-efficient as well as user friendly allowing hunters and anglers the ability to purchase licenses and permits on the internet as well as at traditional agents. Deer and Turkey hunters will still be able to

check game at any license agent and also over the phone or internet. The Division of Wildlife feels confident that this system will provide a better means of communication. As the 2011 spring turkey hunt draws closer, the Division is looking forward to seeing the benefits of the new system.

Introduction

Curt Wagner began with a round of introductions from club members and the Division of Wildlife attendees. Club members were invited to request additional items to be added to the open forum discussion list in addition to those already listed on the agenda.

Presentations

Elmer Heyob – Production/Stocking Update.

Elmer presented overviews of the 2010 stocking, minnow fund, capital improvements, and VHS updates. The 80 degree weather in 2010 resulted in poor production requiring the Division of Wildlife to bring fry in from Kentucky. A total of 14,519 advanced fingerling muskie (9-12 inches long) were stocked in our 9 program lakes in 2010. These fish were very healthy and contained no parasites. In 2010 the brood stock came from Salt Fork, but in 2011 they will once again be coming from Leesville. The hatchery production capacity database has now been switched to a new system called OPASIS.

Muskie are reared at the London and Kincaid State Fish Hatcheries. London has 84 acres of production ponds, 10 raceways, and runs off of well water. Kincaid has 210 acres of production ponds and 10 raceways that run primarily off of spring water. St. Mary's and Senecaville State Fish Hatcheries produce minnows while the Hebron Hatchery produce brood carp. Muskellunge are started on common carp fry and are quickly switched to fathead minnows of appropriate and increasing size. If muskellunge fingerlings do not get the exact size they need at any given stage, they will quickly become cannibalistic. Consequently, having ample numbers of the appropriate size minnows is critically important.

The minnow fund is used by the Ohio Division of Wildlife in order to buy equipment and minnows which helps keep the Muskie stocking program going. In 2010 the Hugh C. Becker Grant Committee issued a large award to the minnow fund which has allowed the purchase of a new fish tank for a pick-up truck at the St. Mary's Fish Hatchery. This tank has proved to be a great new addition for handling large volumes of minnows.

Elmer discussed some capital improvement projects which have recently been completed at the London State Fish Hatchery. One of these projects resulted in an increased cold water flow. Another major improvement was the restoration of one of the old hatchery buildings. The advances made to the building include geothermal heating. This building is now much more efficient for fisheries' operations.

Lastly, Elmer gave a brief update regarding VHS concerns. Although the VHS virus has been confirmed in muskellunge at Clear Fork Reservoir, there has not been any fish kills due to the virus. VHS most generally attacks fish which are under stress. Of all fish species Muskie appears to be the most susceptible to the VHS virus.

In closing, Elmer thanked the clubs for their continual contribution to the minnow fund. The Division greatly appreciates these contributions.

Scott Hale - 2010 Muskie Catch Updates

Scott reported to the group three main topics: results, trophy trends, and the question – is a new state record possible? Over 2,226 muskie, 30 inches or larger, were reported to the Muskie Angler Log (MAL) by anglers during 2010. It is hopeful that the reported Muskie catches will more often

begin to fall into the 46 inch or greater range since only 2.4% of all reported catches are 46 inches or longer. It was stated that more fish were reported in the 30 inches catch range in 2010 than in 2009 in Alum Creek. It is especially important for Pymatuning Lake anglers to be encouraged to report their trips in the MAL because without these reports catch numbers aren't accurate.

From 1960-2010 1,605 trophy muskie greater than 46 inches were reported from reservoirs in Ohio. Of these trophies, 26% were taken from Leesville and 18% from Piedmont. A major interest to the Division of Wildlife as well as anglers is the fact that the muskie trophy trend peaked in the year 2000 and since then has declined. This is an especially intriguing question because the catch and release rate has been increasing, so why then is the number of trophies being caught decreasing? This brings up the question, can Ohio produce a new muskie state record?

Many questions and factors arise when asking, can Ohio produce a new state record fish? Would increased stocking rates be the answer? Overstocking causes disease, 1/ acre is already a very high stocking rate, hatchery capacity is limited, and advanced fingerlings are necessary. What might be some of the real issues prohibiting the production of a new state record? Could fish physiology, a rapid growth but a short lifespan, be a contributing factor? Could fish behavior, including: educated fish, genetic catchability, or the movement of fish in regards to staying in or leaving a reservoir, play a roll? Are incidental catches of non muskie anglers or angler awareness a contributing factor? Or are catch and release stressors including fish handling, time of the year the fish are caught, and repeated catch and release causing this decline in trophy muskie? Water management - typically flooding events and reservoir discharge is another possibility of the decline. Lastly, could fishing pressure such as fishing technology, educated anglers, or concentrated efforts be the problem? All of these questions need to be further studied in order to understand, if in fact, Ohio can produce a new state record muskie.

Questions and Comments – Jim Moore commented that perhaps forage fish might play a roll in the decline of trophy muskie in Ohio reservoirs, Joel Johnson suggested that a historical data of each water reservoir history be looked at in further detail. John Oldfield commented that Alum Creek is an unsafe reservoir and needs to have boating laws better enforced. Then Gerald commented that perhaps pollution and toxin levels could be a problem in certain muskie reservoirs. Another suggestion made by an angler was the idea of fish management creating one or two lakes which would be set aside as trophy lakes for muskie fishing in Ohio, admitting that this would be more for perception and ambiance than actual biological trophy potential.

Kevin Page - Comparing Muskie Angler Catch Reports to Trap Net Data within Clear Fork Reservoir

From 1982-2006 the Division of Wildlife (DOW) has been monitoring muskie fisheries by collecting information from muskie anglers including lake and date fished, fish lengths, numbers caught, and numbers released. A major question has been, how does the angler catch compare to what is really in the reservoir? The lengths of muskie caught by anglers in Clear Fork Reservoir and by DOW research nets, also in Clear Fork Reservoir over the same time frame, show a very similar relationship; differences in large and small fish frequencies are likely due to anglers tendency to under-report small fish. The domination of male fish in the sex ratio was exactly the same in the DOW findings when compared to the angler findings. It is unclear if angler catch numbers can be used as a relative surrogate to indicate actual population size of muskellunge in reservoirs because the findings between the DOW and the angler catch in Clear Fork Reservoir did not track well. Further, data for this Clear Fork Reservoir exercise only included angler catch numbers, not actual catch rate (fish per some amount of effort). Perhaps if anglers would consistently report all trips, successful and unsuccessful, into the MAL in the future, data could then start to be examined to see if angler catch rates represent the actual population size within a given reservoir.

When looking at the recapture and recycling rates of the 4,744 netted and tagged fish by the Division of Wildlife, 2,399 fish were recaptured by DOW netting crews. The percentage of muskie tagged by the Division of Wildlife and caught by anglers is less than 8% on a yearly basis. Between 1982 and

2006, 84% of DOW tagged muskie that were caught by anglers were caught only once, 13% were caught twice, 3% were caught three times, and less than 1% were caught up to four times.

Questions and Comments – Gerald commented on the use of tags and Scott Hale explained the use of PIT tags which are now used by the Division of Wildlife. Jim Moore recommended that clubs buy and use their own PIT tag scanners in order to help gather data as the clubs have done in West Virginia. Jim also explained lake recorders, which some of the clubs in West Virginia have found useful.

Open Forum

Curt Wagner began the open forum in which the topics of the minnow fund, muskie angler log, stocking of new areas, and frequency of the summit were discussed.

Ohio Statewide Minnow Fund

Rob VanGorder, the Minnow Fund Coordinator, reported that the minnow fund is now three years and one month old. The fund has given \$33,500 in support of the muskie program. This included buying 6 fresh flow agitators and brood minnows. Rob also reported that he is always looking for more organizations wanting to donate money to the fund, and that \$9,900 of the money donated has come from the Hugh C. Beckers Grant. Rob also offered his assistance in helping anyone who wished to apply for a Becker Grant. He reported that 25% of what has been given through the minnow fund has come from the Becker grant and the other 75% has been provided through the clubs. Rob can be reached at 740-225-1152 or rcv@kokosing.biz

Elmer Heyob commented that the reports given at the summit were excellent. He stated how extremely important it is for everyone to convince anglers to record fish in the muskie angler log in order to help manage fisheries and to support research. It was stated by club members that many anglers don't want to report caught fish because they are afraid of losing their sweet fishing spots. A question for everyone to answer is how can we dispel these myths?

Scott Hale reported that in the near future it will be easier for everyone to report information into the muskie angler log and the goal is to make the log more accessible to all anglers. Scott explained that anglers need to realize that muskie are managed using catch information and reporting is key for continued program success.

Joel Johnson wondered if there are any bodies of water which could be cleaned up in order to produce new stocking areas or production areas. Elmer suggested getting watershed committees involved in order to improve water qualities.

Scott Hale asked the group three questions: what their opinion was on the frequency of the summit, if the Division of Wildlife is doing a good job of relaying information at the summit, and if they had any ideas of how to get more clubs involved.

The club members responded with several comments including the following:

- The information reported is good to pass onto other anglers.
- The summit is enjoyable as well as informative.
- It's important to keep an active relationship between the Division of Wildlife and club members.
- The frequency of the summit is good and it should continue to be held once a year.

Jim Moore suggested that since female muskie are normally the state records, why not just target stocking females. Scott Hale indicated that most fish over 36 inches are indeed female, however tailoring stocking to produce females is impractical.

In closing, Joel presented Elmer Heyob with a gift in celebration of his retirement and in honor of his many years of service to improve and grow the muskie program in Ohio. Elmer thanked the clubs and stated that he still plans to work with the muskie program which he loves.