

**Meeting Summary**  
**Muskie Program Summit**  
**Buckeye Hall of Fame, Columbus, OH**  
**February 28, 2009 9:30-11:30 AM**

Meeting summary prepared by Angela Latham ([angela.latham@dnr.state.oh.us](mailto:angela.latham@dnr.state.oh.us))

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**Attendees**

- Ohio Division of Wildlife
  - Ray Petering, Executive Administrator
  - Angela Latham, Administrative Assistant
  - Elmer Heyob, Hatchery Program Administrator
  - Scott Hale, Inland Fisheries Program Administrator
  - Jon Denlinger, Supervisor, Inland Fisheries Research Unit
  - Kevin Page, Biologist, Inland Fisheries Research Unit
  - Phil Hillman, Fish Management Supervisor, District 3 (Akron)
  - Curt Wagner, Biologist, District 3
  - Tim Parrett, Fish Management Supervisor, District 4 (Athens)
  - Debra Walters, Biologist, District 5
- Muskie Club Representatives
  - Fred Lederer, Ohio Huskie Muskie Club
  - Aaron Kirkingburg, Ohio Huskie Muskie Club
  - Chris DePaola, Muskies Inc. #23 (Cleveland)
  - Jack Moga, Muskies Inc. #23 (Cleveland)
  - Don Clowes, Muskies Inc. #23 (Cleveland/Shenango River Watchers)
  - Chris Creech, Muskies Inc. #56 (SOMA, Southwest Ohio)
  - Joel Johnson, Muskies Inc. #56, (SOMA, Southwest Ohio)
  - David Lloyd, Muskies Inc. #56, (SOMA, Southwest Ohio)
  - Rob VanGorder, Muskies Inc. #41 (Central Ohio)
  - John Oldfield, Muskies Inc. #41 (Central Ohio)
  - Mark Pauling, Muskies Inc. #41 (Central Ohio)
  - Jim Moore, Muskies Inc. #9 (West Virginia)
  - Larry Besant, Muskies Inc. #52 (Kentucky)
  - Gordon Seldon, Muskies Inc. #19 (Akron/Canton)
  - Dan Hanneken, Muskies Inc. #45 (Kentucky)
  - Tom Welter, Muskies Inc. #45 (Kentucky)
  - Dan Narsette, Muskies Inc. (International)

**Meeting Objectives**

To provide updates on the muskie program, including production, stocking and the “minnow fund”, review use of the *Muskie Angler Log*, and discuss other items as interest and time allows.

**Presentations**

Ray Petering – State Government News. Ray provided an update on the status of the state work environment, including current budget challenges during the next two years. In this environment, state employees are facing severe constraints in purchasing equipment, travel restrictions at all levels, and the potential of furlough days. Although the Division of Wildlife does not receive any general revenue funds, state restrictions on purchasing, travel, and workdays still apply to Division employees. At this point, Division programs are still secure and we plan to continue full support of the muskie program. Ray thanked the muskie clubs for their support and expressed appreciation for their interest in attending the muskie summit. This was the third consecutive year for the summit and it has proved a valuable information exchange.

Elmer Heyob – Production/Stocking Update. Elmer presented an overview of 2008 stocking, status of VHS (fish disease) in Ohio, and touched on the minnow fund. A total of 18,223 advanced fingerling muskie (9-12 inches long) were stocked in our 9 program lakes this year. This was quite an accomplishment given some potential constraints posed by hot and dry conditions at Kincaid Hatchery and detection of VHS in Clearfork Reservoir, which was the source of broodstock from London Hatchery. The bottom line is that our hatchery staff did a great job to meet our program goals during a very challenging year.

The presence of VHS in Clearfork Reservoir did not result in any fish mortality and sampling downstream from the outflow to the Ohio River did not result in further detection in fish. However, this did present a challenge for producing muskie since eggs from Clearfork had been brought into the London Fish Hatchery prior to receiving results from fish tested for the disease. Muskie raised at London were tested routinely through the summer and found to be VHS free, suggesting that either the disease cannot spread through eggs or our iodine treatments of eggs can be used to effectively minimize risk of bringing this disease into our hatcheries. Research currently conducted at OSU will provide additional insights regarding the effectiveness of these treatments. Extensive surveillance of all broodstock sources is being conducted in 2009. This year, due to VHS detection in Clearfork Reservoir, Ohio's two broodstock lakes for muskie will be Salt Fork and Leesville reservoirs.

In closing, Elmer thanked the clubs for contributing to the minnow fund and Rob VanGorder for coordinating this effort. Although the fund is called the minnow fund because it was originally established to buy minnows (the most expensive part of muskie production), it has proven invaluable in providing the hatcheries with equipment directly purchased by the clubs. The Division greatly appreciates these contributions given the current economic climate and existing constraints on purchasing equipment vital to producing muskie.

Kevin Page – Muskie Angler Log. Kevin reviewed the 2008 launch of the Muskie Angler Log (MAL), Ohio's online reporting system for recording muskie catch records and allowing anglers to confidentially track the individual details of their fishing. He provided some background on the MAL development, highlights from the first year of use, and updates on potential improvement in the offing. The MAL was launched in 2008 to replace the scale sample program, which had been successfully used since 1960 to report over 47,000 catches and provide scale samples. The catches and scale samples allowed the Division to learn more about stocking success and had provided significant guidance for the program over the years. However, during the 2007 Muskie Summit, the Division ask the muskie clubs if they would be interested in changing from the scale program to an online log. This approach would provide the Division with the same information critical to tracking success of reservoir stocking and fishery development, but scale samples were no longer needed. By working with Ohio's clubs, the MAL was developed in launched in March 2008.

Launch of the MAL was very successful during 2008. During its first year of use, 2,142 muskie catches were reported and the average size of fish reported was similar to that reported during the past, indicating the reporting program did not miss a beat with the transition from the scale sample program to the online log. A total of 657 anglers registered on the MAL.. Overall, 89% of catches in the MAL were reported online, whereas 11% were recorded though cards mailed into the Division. Anglers are encouraged to use the MAL online if they have computer access. As in previous years, 99% of muskie 30-42 inches were released, and nearly as many fish of 42 inches or greater were released. Top lakes were Leesville (616 muskie), Piedmont (324 muskie), and Alum Creek (270 muskie). The most fish 42 inches or greater were from Leesville (94 muskie), West Branch (34 muskie), and Caesar Creek (27 muskie).

Future improvements in the MAL are expected after one more year of use and review. An upgrade might include a "quick add" feature that would allow anglers to simply report catch records rather than step through the detailed trip creation process, activation of icons (which has caused some confusion), improved navigation, catch querying and statistical reports by month, lake specific information regarding catches and related trip-planning information, and the addition to the user profile of a field which allows anglers to indicate whether they record "no catch" trips and their hours

of fishing accurately. Accurately reporting "no catch" trips and hours of fishing can help the Division monitor muskie fisheries, but only if records are accurate. During 2008, confusion over this approach indicated the need for improvement in this area. Clubs were reminded that both the reporting of trips when fish were not caught and the total hours fished on those days and the days when fish were caught can be important if rates of catches (that is, how many hours it takes to catch a fish, on average) are to be calculated.

## Open Forum

*Scott Hale, Kevin Page, and Rob VanGorder were at the podium during the open forum session, when the topics of the muskie angler log, minnow fund, Fish Ohio muskie length, surplus muskie stocking, and volunteering to help the program were discussed.*

### Muskie Angler Log

Kevin Page lead a discussion about use of the MAL cards, first asking how many years the mail-in cards should continue.

Discussion included the following:

The overall feeling was that use of the cards should continue indefinitely because:

- Anglers that see the cards at the docks are introduced to the program.
- Not everyone has or will have a computer to enter their information into the log.

The following suggestions were made:

- Club members could contact anglers who turned in the cards last year and find out why they did not use a computer to help with the decision of continuing card use.
- A telephone reporting system could be developed to replace cards (Scott Hale responded that this would be too expensive).
- Anglers already enter muskie catch information into the MI database, so maybe we can find a way to link MI and MAL so anglers only enter information once. Dan Narsette suggested that maybe MI could help out here. Elmer Heyob and Scott Hale agreed that there may be some potential for working with MI on our website, perhaps by linking databases. Scott Hale later looked into this and found that due to state government restrictions, the Division could push data outside of its firewall to MI for club use, but cannot make an active connection between MI and Division servers due to state policies related to security issues.

Kevin Page also indicated that the Division has received reports that cards are not always available at the docks, and ask who should be responsible for checking and filling the cards.

Discussion included the following suggestions:

- Clubs could hand out/mail cards to anglers and fill the boxes at the docks when empty. **As an action item from the forum, all club members that wish to assume responsibility for distributing cards at lakes should contact Kevin Page and he will send them to you. Kevin will keep a list of those who have volunteered and which lakes they will be responsible for maintaining.**
- Put out news releases/web info on how to get cards from the clubs.

Kevin Page remarked that entering cards sent to the Division can be time consuming, particularly when they are sent late in the year, and all at once.

Discussion included the following suggestions:

- Possibly designate a club/member that will be in charge of entering information for each lake. As the cards are mailed into Fish Management, they could then be distributed to the appropriate club/member. (This way the address on the cards

would never have to change as the club/member entering information changes over the years).

- Currently, Angela Latham (Division of Wildlife) assigns a username and password for each angler that turns in a card. Would it be possible to create a general username and password for each club or lake to make data entry easier?

Kevin Page also discussed the importance of improved “non-catch” reporting and recording actual hours of fishing if catch rates (an estimate of the number of hours it takes to catch a fish) are to be used to learn more about success of the muskie program.

Discussion included the following suggestions:

- Create a pop-up somewhere during the data entry process asking the angler if they have ‘non-catch information’ to report.
- Survey the clubs to find out which anglers are entering all data correctly and use them as a sub-set, or ask for volunteers to be the focus group.
- Add information on the sign-in screen to remind anglers to enter non-catch data if available.
- Send a mass e-mail to all anglers registered in the MAL to remind them to enter non-catch data throughout the season.
- Create a non-catch button on the log in screen.
- Create an “Empty Net” award to be presented at the Muskie Summit each year that recognizes the angler with the most non-catch days.

Rob VanGorder discussed the Minnow Fund and provided an update. Rob has served as the coordinator of the fund for the last few years. He stated that the purpose of the minnow fund is to group funds together to support the Division to produce healthier muskie with home grown minnows. Checks from clubs go directly to the vendor; therefore, it is important not to send funds as they are raised. A report on how much money is available from each club is sufficient until a piece of equipment is ready to be purchased. Rob thanked the clubs for their contributions and indicated that everything was going smoothly. The Division expressed appreciation to the clubs and Rob.

Scott Hale responded to a question from Chris DePaola regarding stocking surplus muskie in Pymatuning Lake. Scott indicated that surplus muskie will be stocked in Pymatuning if there are 500 or more fish available. If not, it is more cost effective to stock surplus in Alum Creek Lake or Clear Fork Reservoir. The question came up during this discussion regarding muskie regulations at Pymatuning. Scott Hale indicated that although Ohio has reduced the daily limit to one fish and some statewide changes have been made in Pennsylvania, current regulations printed in the fishing digest specifically for Pymatuning Lake are as stated and remain the same.

Scott Hale indicated that there had been some discussion at last year’s Muskie Summit regarding the Fish Ohio length for muskie (36 inches).

The discussion included the following:

- Some division staff suggested that the purpose of the Fish Ohio program is to promote fishing and therefore the Fish Ohio pin for a muskie should be achievable for everyone and not just experienced muskie anglers.
- Some club members indicated that the 36 inch length in the Fish Ohio program could make new anglers think that a 36-inch muskie is a trophy length and encourage keeping fish, rather than releasing them.
- Some club members ask if it would be possible to have the pin available just for catching a muskie no matter what the length.
- Scott Hale and Ray Petering suggested that the Division should likely look at our current program and consider adjustments because some Fish Ohio catches are relatively easy to achieve, whereas other are very difficult.

- No specific discussion following regarding specific lengths of qualifying catches.

Scott Hale and Elmer Heyob responded briefly to a question regarding clubs volunteering to help the Division with the muskie program.

The following suggestions are the most useful ones, although not all of these were made during the Muskie Summit:

- Encourage all anglers to participate in the MAL, and in particular, enter their catches online. Participation and entry of accurate information is critical to the muskie program. This might include entering information in the MAL for non-computer users.
- Provide suggestions for improvement of the MAL during the next year.
- Distribute cards to anglers and refill cards at the docks.
- Sponsor youth programs to encourage children to fish. The future of our sport depends on it.
- Consider contributing to the Division of Wildlife website (contact Scott Hale).

A question was asked regarding placing fish attractors/structures in lakes. This can, in some cases help anglers catch fish, but if clubs are interested in doing so, they should first contact the specific lake's controlling authority (for example, the US Army Corps of Engineers, Ohio State Parks) and the local district fish management supervision from the Division of Wildlife.

A final question was asked regarding clubs providing assistance with egg treatment or in assisting with hatchery production work. Although these are challenging times for the Division, the work done to raise fish is specialized and this is not a particularly good avenue for volunteers.

Ray Petering provide closing remarks, again thanking clubs for their participation, reminding them that our doors are always open for discussion, and wishing everyone good fishing in 2009.

The meeting adjourned at 12:15.