



MINUTES—MUSKIE PROGRAM SUMMIT
The Makoy Center, 5462 N. Center, Hilliard, Ohio 43026
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Prepared by: Kevin Page (kevin.page@dnr.state.oh.us) & Tracy Fink (tracy.fink@dnr.state.oh.us)

ATTENDEES: DIVISION OF WILDLIFE—Kevin Page (IFRE), Curt Wagner (D3), Tim Parrett (Fish Administration), Scott Hale (Fish Administration), Mike Greenlee (D4), Deb Walters (D5), Nick Radabaugh (D1), Rich Carter (D1), Tracy Fink (IFRE)

ANGLING CLUBS—Paul Anderson (OH Huskie Muskie Club), Dan Hanneken (Muskie Inc. #45 KY), Elmer Heyob (Muskie Inc. #41 Central Ohio), Cliff Honeycutt (Muskie Inc. #41 Central Ohio), Joel Johnson (Muskie Inc.), Gerald Kelble (Muskie Inc. #56 SW Ohio), Jeff Ferjutz (Ohio Huskie Muskie Club), Rick May (Muskie Inc. #56 SW Ohio), Tad Martinez (Muskie Inc. #19 (Akron/Canton), Jim Moore (Muskie Inc. #9 WV), Scott Shampton (Muskie Inc. #56 SW Ohio), Louis Shampton (Muskie Inc. #56 SW Ohio), Rob Vangorder (Muskie Inc. #41 Central Ohio), Greg Wells (Muskie Inc. National), Tom Welter (Muskie Inc. #45 KY), Jay Zahn (Muskie Inc.), Max Machuta (Muskie Inc.)

MEETING OBJECTIVES:

1. Meet-and-Greet with club officers and Division of Wildlife fisheries staff
2. Provide updates on the muskie program
3. Discuss other items as interest and time allow in an open forum

Summit overview (Page)

Kevin welcomed everyone to the meeting, thanked everyone for attending, and provided the following ground rules for the meeting:

- Respect the opinions of others – expect differences
- Share this information with your club members
- Convey the thoughts of your club members – we could not invite everyone
- Understand that there are muskie anglers that are not represented by clubs

Introductions & Open Forum Topics (Page)

Kevin began with an around the room introduction. Next, attendees shared the following topics to be discussed during the open forum:

- Fish Ohio Size
- Statewide Size Limit
- Trophy Lake – No Take Lake
- Minnow Fund Event
- Lake Erie Program
- Stocking
- Stocking Process – Boat Ramp Releasing

Welcome and state updates (Hale)

Scott announced that current Division of Wildlife lake maps are being reviewed in preparation for moving exclusively to full-color maps. In preparation for updating the existing maps, everyone is invited to share their comments and ideas on how to enhance these maps. Ideas can be sent via email to Scott. Next, a couple of state-wide updates were made. Jim Zehinger is the new director of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources and Scott Zody is the new Chief of the Division of Wildlife.

Production/Stocking Update (Parrett)

Tim gave a general overview of the Division of Wildlife's hatcheries. Each hatchery plays a role in muskie production. London and Kincaid are the primary muskie facilities. All other hatcheries raise minnows for muskie production. The program goal for the nine muskie lakes is set at 20,000 advanced fingerlings. In 2011, 66% of this goal was produced. In 2012, the Division of Wildlife (DOW) plans to modify techniques used to induce carp spawning, in addition to the installation of a new water heater at London to aid in carp spawning. Attempts to raise a small number of muskie at the St. Mary's State Fish Hatchery will be made in 2012.

Next, Tim gave an overview of muskie culture from egg collection to pond draining. Leesville will continue to be the brood source for the muskie production. Muskie culture is arguably the most difficult of all the species raised by the DOW, timing is everything. Infrastructure improvements at the Kincaid hatchery (new hatchery building and pond consolidation) have improved culture of muskie at that facility. A renovation of the London hatchery is planned to start in 2013 – 2014.

Money raised by the clubs (Minnow Fund) as well as grants are greatly appreciated, helping staff tremendously and ultimately aiding in muskie culture.

Discussion

- *Question:* What makes the Castalia hatchery nonviable for raising muskie? *Response:* Castalia's water is too cold for raising muskie. It is utilized for raising trout.
- *Question:* Does the DOW know how many fry that are dumped survive? *Response:* No. The conditions have to be perfect for the fry to survive.
- *Question:* Could the DOW use other strains of fish in order to support better growth and production? *Response:* The Ohio River strain is native to this region, so it is the exclusive source for our programs, which only stock fish in the Ohio River watershed.
- *Question:* The Great Lakes strain can achieve longer total lengths. Is there any harm in exploring these strains? *Response:* Because these stocked fish could potentially end up in the Ohio River, we do not want to mix strains with fish that aren't naturally found there, also the Great Lakes strain has been infected with VHS.
- Elmer Heyob presented information about the minnow fund and provided a hardcopy to a representative from each club. He also stated that more grants will be applied for in the future.
- Scott Hale asked the anglers how the DOW should allocate the money from the minnow fund. Rob Vangorder indicated that the DOW should prioritize a wish list that describes what is needed. He also commented that the Minnow Fund strives to support the DOW the best way that it can.
- *Question:* If the Minnow Fund and other grants continue to purchase equipment for the DOW will the budget the DOW receives from the state decrease? *Response:* No, not at all. Gifts will never affect the over-all budget.
- It was discussed among club members that perhaps the name of the Minnow Fund should be changed. Elmer indicated that the name could be changed if anyone can come up with a better name.

2011 Muskie Catch Update (Wagner)

Curt reported on statistics regarding the Muskie Angler Log (MAL) for 2011. A Muskie Angler Log 2011 pamphlet (attached) was handed out to every attendant.

MAL Revision (Page)

The MAL has been a very successful catch reporting system, with 1,280 active anglers currently registered. This success is due to the close partnership between the Ohio DOW and muskie anglers. Muskie anglers were a vital component in the development and testing of the MAL – it is as much a tool for anglers as it is for the DOW. Since the MAL was launched in 2008, questions and comments

by anglers have helped us maintain the MAL and conduct “tweaks” to the system to make sure it continues to be functional and serve both the DOW and anglers effectively. In 2013, the DOW is looking to launch an upgrade of the MAL that improves functionality and provides anglers with more resources. During February 2012, officers (up to 2) from each club will be invited to attend a meeting with the DOW to discuss changes to the MAL. We want to keep the group small in order to be productive. Some of the changes that will be discussed include:

- ❑ Adding a “Quick Add” option to the Welcome page of the MAL that will allow anglers to enter vital information on there fishing trips (when, where, duration, number and sizes of muskie caught [if any]) without having to enter the MAL. This is a useful option for those anglers interested in providing the DOW important catch information, but are not interested in entering and organizing catch details within the MAL.
- ❑ Add a solar/lunar phase tool.
- ❑ Adding an information tool that provides the locations, directions, catch information, and fishing maps for muskie lakes.
- ❑ Changing the “My Trips” page of the MAL to represent only individual days fished. This removes the need to create a “separate trip record” under which anglers enter there actual fishing days. Anglers currently create a trip record and then enter in any number of fishing days under that record. This has caused confusion among anglers and has made it difficult at times for the DOW to summarize catch records. For the new version, a trip will be a single day fished and those days will be displayed on the “My Trips” page.
- ❑ Guest fish option. When anglers enter a fish, they will have the option of identifying a fish as a “guest fish” not caught directly by them, but by someone else in their boat. This will provide anglers information on how many fish were caught by their “boat” and provide numbers of fish captured to the DOW that were previously unreported. Discussions on how to prevent duplicate entry will be discussed at the MAL revision meeting.

Discussion

- *Question:* Could a “Quick Add” option be installed to report fishing trips when fish were not caught in order to measure effort? *Response:* Yes, that would be easy to add.
- *Question:* How do we avoid having to enter record entries in both MI and MAL? *Response:* The DOW can not link the two. Greg Wells reported that they can link them together on their end. Ways for sharing data between MI and the MAL were discussed. The DOW will continue to work with MI to explore ways to report catches registered with MI in the MAL.

Escapement/Tagging Study (Page)

A new muskie tagging study is planned to start in fall of 2013. The reason for this study is to determine the fate of muskie stocked into program reservoirs. Muskie caught by anglers provides useful information on what is “available” in the fishery and the quality of the fishery. However, caught muskie can be considered the “outcome” or “product” of muskie stocked years earlier. It is unknown what happens to muskie after stocking or after being caught by an angler. Muskie can die from various causes or be lost through dams. In particular, loss of muskie through dams represents a loss in opportunity to anglers and a waste of hatchery production. For this study, all stocked advanced fingerling muskie will be tagged with an external tag and muskie stocked in 3 reservoirs will receive an additional Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) tag. The study will last 10 yrs and rely heavily on angler reports of tagged fish. There are four main components of the study:

- ❑ Preparation: during 2012 and early 2013, the DOW will be preparing for this study by making sure the correct tags, equipment, and analyses will be used. The DOW will also be conducting some preliminary experiments. In fall of 2012, the DOW will be tagging and monitoring muskie

within the hatchery to make sure tagging will not cause undue stress and mortality to these fish and evaluate tag application procedures.

- ❑ Tagging: starting in fall of 2013, for the next 10 years, all muskie stocked into the 9 program reservoirs will be tagged with an external tag and for three reservoirs, a PIT tag as well. The external tag can be read by all anglers; the PIT tag can only be read by anglers with a hand-held reader and unmanned reader systems placed below the three dams. These tags will provide information on survival, angler capture rates, recapture rates (recycling), harvest rates, and escapement through the dams. Only the PIT tags can be read by readers and are used to monitor muskie escaping through the dams and can help to estimate possible loss of external tags.
- ❑ Monitoring: the DOW will be asking all anglers to report any externally tagged fish either through a phone “hot-line” or using the MAL. Given that PIT tags, and the equipment used to read them, are expensive (\$2.80/tag) we can only provide PIT tag readers to 15 anglers (5 per reservoir). These anglers will be requested to scan all muskie caught and report tag numbers within the MAL. The DOW will also be conducting trap-netting each spring on Leesville Lake to recapture tagged muskie.
- ❑ Evaluation: muskie detection histories will be developed from the recapture data. These histories will show when and how a muskie was detected over the 10 year study. By looking at the number and when muskie were recaptured or escaped, we can develop estimates of survival, the escapement rate and what environmental factors cause escapement, angler capture and recapture, and harvest rates. There are powerful data analysis programs that help us estimate these rates. ***By knowing these muskie “fates”, we can develop a better understanding of what is happening to muskie in Ohio’s program reservoirs, and look for opportunities to improve muskie fishing.***

Discussion

- *Question:* Would it be helpful for club members to purchase additional pit tag readers and capture extra data for the DOW, or would that off set the findings of the DOW? *Response:* It would be helpful for club members to have additional pit tag readers to capture data. The more information gathered the better.
- *Question:* Will the tags attached be easy to read or will the fish be kept out of water too long while the tag number is deciphered? *Response:* The DOW is searching for a tag which will be the most effective.
- Scott Hale described the importance of understanding how reservoirs are managed by the Corps of Engineers. The DOW needs to compile a scientific data set and present it to the Corp. so they may see evidence of how the fishery is directly impacted by their actions. The pit tags will be a key factor in compiling this data set. The DOW normally doesn’t use any other tool for sampling muskie such as netting or trapping. Due to the fact that they are such an expensive fish, the DOW handles them as little as possible.
- *Question:* Could the DOW just look at pit tagging in Alum Creek in order to keep the cost down? *Response:* The study will be conducted across 3 reservoirs in order to make describe escapement among all reservoirs.
- *Question:* Would a dorsal tag that would be clipped and sent to the DOW by the angler be a possibility? *Response:* The advantage to not removing the tag will be the ability to follow the fish over time. This information will allow the DOW to put a value on the stocking of one individual fish. The question of how many times can a fish be caught could be answered. This information will prove the value of each fish that passes thru the dam. Also, it is preferred that tags not be removed as this may injure fish.

Open Forum

A period for open comments was provided for interaction between Division staff and muskie club members/anglers.

- *Comment:* The Fish Ohio size for muskie should be changed to a greater length. *Response:* What is the best approach? Angler recognition is the purpose of the Fish Ohio certificate. The idea behind the certificate is to make anglers feel good and to keep people interested in fishing. An online survey gathering information on people's opinions may be needed to explore changes to Fish Ohio sizes.
- *Comment:* A statewide size limit should be established. *Response:* The daily catch limit was changed from 2 to 1 in the past. Release rates are very high with this species.
- *Comment:* Education will reduce the amount of fish being kept. *Response:* Education is important. Anglers' understanding the effect of catching muskie in hot summer temperatures is significant. The DOW is available to attend club meetings to communicate information to all members.
- *Question:* Could one trophy lake be established where some of the following stipulations are made: slot limit, 50" keep limit, no take between 42"-52", muskie fishing is shut off during hot temperatures. *Response:* If the DOW felt anglers were taking out too many fish and it was affecting the fishery, something would definitely be done. The fact that release is so high the DOW feels a trophy lake is likely not needed.
- *Comment:* In order to raise money for the minnow fund, a state event could be held where a registration fee is charged and all money made goes to the fund. Paul Anderson is willing to organize the event and would like to see more organization between clubs. *Response:* The event is a great idea.
- *Question:* Could a muskie fishery be established in Lake Erie? *Response:* Lake Erie has huge habitat issues at the present time due to high phosphorous levels. Water quality is vital to fishery success. This is a huge social issue and it is important to keep fisheries up front and center and keep the public aware of the importance of clean water. Aquatic invasive species is also a problem in Lake Erie. The quality of all fisheries hinges on water quality. Water quality issues needs to be addressed first, and as habitat improves, natural reproduction would likely build populations of native muskie.
- *Comment:* Jay Zahn commented that the Fox River is a water quality success story. Due to a water quality turn around, muskie are now being caught where carp were previously found. In Lake Erie, water quality was very poor in the 1960s, but through clean water legislation that addressed nutrient loading, the lake improved very quickly and that experience gives us great hope for turning things around now.
- *Question:* Would muskie have higher survival rates if stocked in different locations throughout the reservoirs as opposed to all being stocked in one place? *Response:* Fish can reach the habitat they need in just 2 days after being stocked. Fish are stressed when stocked but their confusion subsides after approximately one hour. Predators at the stocked area will begin eating on them but will get their fill shortly after, whereas if you stocked in several different locations you would be feeding many more predators in many more locations. Also, spreading out stocking locations would increase muskie handling time adding more stress to the fish.
- *Question:* Would adding immediate coverage, such as Christmas trees, to the stocking area aide in muskie survival? *Response:* This would create more habitat for the predators as well.
- *Question:* Will the DOW stock muskie in Cowan Lake? *Response:* The DOW received very few reports of muskie being caught in Cowan Lake and therefore removed Cowan Lake as a program reservoir. Because there are limited amounts of fish to stock, the DOW stocks bodies of water where there is retention and much of this information is gathered thru input received by the MAL. Maintaining a smaller number of high quality lakes has been the program goal for

many years. This approach is in response to angler feedback and a clear preference for high quality vs. high numbers of fisheries.

Closing Remarks (Hale)

Scott conveyed that the DOW appreciates the interest, interaction, and participation of the muskie club members and anglers.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Kevin Page, Fisheries Biologist, Inland Fisheries
Research Unit; 10517 Canal Road, Hebron,
Ohio 43025; Tel: (740) 928-7034x222; E-mail:
kevin.page@dnr.state.oh.us

Curt Wagner, Fisheries Biologist, District 3; 912
Portage Lakes Drive, Akron, Ohio 44319; Tel:
(330) 245-3018; E-mail:
curt.wagner@dnr.state.oh.us

Mike Greenlee, Fish Management Supervisor,
District 4; 360 East State Street, Athens, Ohio
45701; Tel: (740) 589-9944; E-mail: mike.
greenlee@dnr.state.oh.us

Scott Hale, Inland Fisheries Program
Administrator, Central Office; 2045 Morse
Road, Building G; E-mail:
scott.hale@dnr.state.oh.us

Nick Radabaugh, Fisheries Biologist, District 1;
1500 Dublin Road, Columbus, Ohio 43215; Tel:
(614) 644-3925; E-mail: nick.radabaugh@dnr.state.oh.us

Rich Carter, Fish Management Supervisor,
District 1; 1500 Dublin Road, Columbus, Ohio
43215; Tel: (614) 644-3925; E-mail:
rich.carter@dnr.state.oh.us

Tim Parret, Hatchery Program Administrator,
Central Office; 2045 Morse Road, Building G;
E-mail: tim.parret@dnr.state.oh.us

Deb Walters, Fish Management Supervisor,
District 5; 1076 Old Springfield Pike, Xenia,
Ohio 45385; Tel: (937) 372-9261; E-mail:
deb.walters@dnr.state.oh.us