

Fisheries Update: 2016

By Bryan J. Beck, Fisheries Committee

With the help of Brian Gunderman, from the Fisheries Division of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (the “DNR”), the GLQO endeavored to research historical and current fisheries management activities on Gull Lake. Some interesting information uncovered during the process included the following:

- There are records of fish stocking on Gull Lake going back to 1877, a year during which 18,000 lake trout “swim-up fry” were stocked. “Swim-up fry” is a biological term denoting the very early life stage of the lake trout.
- Through the years, the following fish species have, at one point or another, been stocked in Gull Lake:
 - Lake Trout
 - Lake Whitefish
 - Walleye
 - Largemouth Bass
 - Smallmouth Bass
 - Warmouth
 - Bluegill
 - Yellow Perch
 - Rainbow Trout
 - Rainbow Smelt
 - Splake
 - Brown Trout
 - Atlantic Salmon
- The most recent comprehensive DNR fish study on Gull Lake involving trap nets, gill nets, and electrofishing methods was conducted in the summer of 2002. The following 26 fish species were recorded during the study (the number in parenthesis next to each species represents the number caught during the study):
 - Bluegill (1,705)
 - Bluntnose Minnow (481)
 - Sand Shiner (415)
 - Rock Bass (330)
 - Largemouth Bass (197)
 - Logperch (148)
 - Brook Silverside (125)
 - Yellow Perch (96)
 - Northern Pike (78)
 - Black Crappie (38)
 - Smallmouth Bass (35)
 - Pumpkinseed (28)
 - Iowa Darter (23)

- Bowfin (20)
 - Longnose Gar (20)
 - Brown Bullhead (19)
 - Rainbow Darter (17)
 - Hybrid Sunfish (15)
 - White Sucker (14)
 - Blackchin Shiner (12)
 - Yellow Bullhead (12)
 - Johnny Darter (10)
 - Blacknose Dace (5)
 - Golden Shiner (2)
 - Emerald Shiner (1)
 - Green Sunfish (1)
- The most recent creel survey on Gull Lake was also conducted by the DNR during the summer of 2002. A creel clerk worked on the lake during randomly selected shifts, interviewing anglers and counting fishing boats. The creel survey suggested anglers caught the following species: bluegill, rock bass, largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, northern pike, yellow perch, and black crappie. According to the anglers, roughly 2/3rds of all caught fish were released. Despite the fact that thousands of brown trout and rainbow trout had been stocked in the lake between 1998 and 2002, no trout were observed during the creel survey. The complete lack of trout during the summer fishery suggests that survival of stocked brown trout and rainbow trout was poor.
 - In 2011, the DNR conducted an assessment of largemouth and smallmouth bass population dynamics in Gull Lake. During the survey period, a total of 2,542 captures of largemouth bass were recorded. The study indicated that the largemouth bass achieved the legal size limit at 5.7 years of age and that the mean population length was 9.27 inches. A total of 171 smallmouth bass encounters were recorded. Smallmouth bass achieved the legal size limit at 4.2 years of age. 14% of the catch was of legal size.
 - The most recent “Fishery Management Prescription” set forth by the DNR involves the stocking of adult lake trout when available and yearling lake trout every year through 2019. Angler reports suggest that people have been successful at catching the adult lake trout that were stocked in recent years. However, the Plainwell DNR office has not received many reports of anglers catching smaller lake trout from the stocked yearlings. Because lake trout typically live in deep offshore parts of the lake, they are not easily collected during fisheries surveys. Fishing reports from anglers are a valuable source of information that can help the DNR evaluate trout stocking programs.

FISH TALES

Apart from the 2011 bass study referenced above, there is very little recent DNR data related to Gull Lake’s fish populations. The GLQO would welcome any fishing reports from its readership and the angling community with respect to the species of fish that individuals are catching on the lake. We would also welcome any thoughts related to improving the fisheries experience on Gull Lake. Please send an email to info@glqo.net with any fishing reports, observations, or improvement ideas.