

# Recovery of Lake Erie Walleye Is Great Lakes Success Story

Lake Erie is often the most maligned of the Great Lakes. Pollution problems have plagued the lake, which hosts several industrial centers on its shores. The walleye fishery on the lake has gone bust, and boom as well.

Walleye fishing on Lake Erie was booming in the late 1980s, but then began a bust period in the 1990s that extended into the early part of this decade.

This prompted fishery managers from Michigan, Ohio, New York, Pennsylvania, and Ontario to respond to the alarming decline in the abundance of walleye. The agencies ordered a reduced harvest in 2004 by more than 30 percent in each jurisdiction.

Michigan is only responsible

## Lake Erie and her fisheries have a long history of boom and bust.

for 112 square miles of the 9,903 square miles of Lake Erie, but it is the western basin that Michigan is a part of that is considered the hot spot for walleye, along with the central basin.

Lake Erie and her fisheries have a long history of boom and bust. Industrialization of Lake Erie's shoreline in the early 20th Century was clearly contaminating the waters. However, the declining environmental conditions didn't dissuade a growing commercial fishery for walleye into the 1950s. But by 1956, the increasing threat of over harvest and habitat destruction had reached its peak



## Outdoor Matters

A column from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources

and in the early 1960s the bottom fell out of the commercial fishery. By 1970, fishery closures were common due to mercury contamination in walleye. The lake was considered dead by many who had relied on its abundance for years.

Several key events, though, were about to combine to help the lake recover. In 1975, the Lake Erie Committee (LEC), a binational committee of senior fisheries managers from each bordering state and Ontario, started working together to manage the lake's fisheries. Also, in the early 1970s, growing public awareness and concern in the United States for controlling water pollution would lead to the Clean Water Act of 1977. The Clean Water Act established basic structure for regulating the discharge of pollutants into the waters of the US, including the Great Lakes.

By the mid- to late-1970s, there were reports of not only cleaner water, but healthier fish. As the walleye population grew, so did the angler activity. By 1988, the sport catch was approaching the historical highs observed in the days of peak commercial fishing. Control of the fishing effort and harvest rates through the LEC wasn't working for a variety of social and political factors. Increased fishing efforts, sporadic hatching success, dwindling

spawning stocks, and newly discovered environmental and biological threats began to take their toll on the walleye population.

A walleye population that once boasted 70 million fish in the late 1980s was estimated to be only 16 million by 2000. In other words, where there used to be 7,000 fish per square mile, there were only 1,700.

As the final blow, in 2002, a complete year-class failure occurred during the hatching process. The failure ignited a debate between the bordering states and Ontario about whether or not harvest reductions were needed.

Harvest reductions were agreed upon in 2003. In Michigan, the daily bag limit for walleye on Lake Erie was reduced from six to five fish, and the minimum size limit was increased from 13 inches to 15 inches. Also, the season was closed in April and May.

The 2003 year-class of walleye in Lake Erie hatched like gangbusters, mostly due to favorable weather conditions. Fishery managers called it the strongest hatch in 20 years. Survival of the new fish also was high due to the fact that there was a reduced popula-



At left: DNR Fisheries Biologist Mike Thomas holds up a couple of beauties he caught recently in Lake Erie. Walleye are making a comeback after a near-collapse in the lake in 1990s. (DNR photograph by Mary Dettloff)

tion in the lake.

"The walleye spawning in 2003 was the best walleye year class in more than 20 years, and is primarily responsible for the improving strength of the walleye stocks in Lake Erie," said Kurt Newman, Lake Erie basin coordinator for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. "The bulk of these fish have matured to a harvestable age

this year, and walleye fishing in the Michigan waters of Lake Erie should be outstanding."

While the bag limit reduction of five fish and the minimum size limit remains at 15 inches, the

Commission (NRC) and will be followed by a public reception with NRC members and DNR staff.

This is the third in a series of workshops on deer population estimating that the DNR has held around the state. The others were in Marquette in April and in Big Rapids in May.

## DNR Deer Workshop Set for June 17

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will host a deer management workshop for northeast Michigan residents at 9:30 a.m. Saturday, June 17, at the Quality Inn at 2980 Cook Road in West Branch. The workshop will include a listening session with members of the Natural Resources

Commission (NRC) and will be followed by a public reception with NRC members and DNR staff.

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All responsible letters will be considered for publication and may be edited. They must be signed and a telephone number must be included for verification. Personal thank-you notes, personal attacks against other people, form letters, and letters promoting political candidates are not accepted, although letters for or against ballot proposals are welcome.

### Obituaries:

The St. Ignace News maintains a policy of not charging for obituaries and we sometimes add information or rewrite them for clarity and reader interest. Obituaries that the family wants published exactly as submitted can be placed in the newspaper for \$75. Photographs are welcome at no charge.

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## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### Tourism Professionals Can Solve Tourism Problems

To the Editor:

Knowing that in today's world, this letter is far too long, I sincerely hope it will be of help to everybody. In your recent edition's story stating the "experts are seeking new ideas to solve the state's tourism problems," it appears there will be public meetings to get input from those suffering in the throes of slowing business, and I have to ask, how many of the experts make a living in the actual business activity of the industry? Everybody is entitled to opinions, but experience is another thing.

Your article stated that the project is an "industry supported" one, and regardless of the fact that tourism has been in movement since 1945, it will finally come to fruition and this project now will solve the state's tourism problems. Who is actually "the industry" supporting this?

An essential missing ingredient in discussing our tourism problem is leader experience. For the interviewing group of experts to hope that listening to the needs of the industry's businesses, expressed in desperate measures at public meetings, will result in a meaningful solution is naïve. Recording these needs in organized, written form is redundant and indicative of a lack of depth in the understanding of this business.

When you are a professional in any business, you have to do things that work the first time, rather than proposing an endless series of trials that cost money and do not improve the bottom line in reasonably helpful time frames. Professionals are not hired to simply try things out; anybody can do that.

Not too long ago, I wrote to some of Michigan's travel authorities, offering my services as a field consultant to help solve the state's tourism difficulties and I am not hiding the fact that I do this for a living. I was told they were, because of the state's situation, cutting down rather than expanding staff at the time.

There were probably many reasons they were doing this, but, typically, when business is bad, it is not the time for any agency trying to stimulate it to cut down, to fade away and leave everybody to their own means. This is the time when the assisting agency systems are supposed to kick in to help the situation.

Computers do not change the basic principles of business, and neither does the current whim of the public change the basic principles of tourism. Healthy tourism is more about how money is being spent than about how much is being spent.

In this changing world, you must sell to all markets at the same time to attract enough volume to meet the competition. With the state project, there is no way to simply offer an "easy fix," or in terms of an old standard industry saying, "there is no such thing as a free lunch."

A number of years ago, in another letter to the editor, I suggested the key to solving the state's tourism problems lay in utilizing hands-on, experienced professionals and advised the state to spend some money and time in recruiting professional talent directly from the management bank of the industry.

I would also ask the committee to accept written input, in addition to the needed public hearings, to analyze and subsequently offer counter-suggestions to those attending the sessions, or maybe even take action to solve some of the problems prior to the hearings. In my opinion as a professional consultant, this would be more productive and give people a chance to express their thoughts more clearly and productively.

Also, it might save valuable time. It is costing those in the industry a lot of money every day that nothing is actually being done to alleviate their losses.

Leonard Trankina,  
Mackinac Island

Editor's Note: Mr. Trankina is former director of the Mackinac Island Tourism Bureau.

## Michigan Politics

By George Weeks



### McCain Helps State Polls

Arizona Republican Senator John McCain, chairman of the Senate Indian Affairs Committee, said Saturday he will soon release a report documenting the extent that tribes "were duped and exploited" by disgraced lobbyist Jack Abramoff and his cronies.

He said "in the next couple weeks" the committee would show that tribes, including the Mount Pleasant-based Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe, were charged a combined total of excessive fees "in the tens of millions of dollars" – well beyond previously reported figures.

I talked to McCain, winner of Michigan's 2000 presidential primary and a prospective contender in 2008, by phone before his fundraisers for U.S. Representative Joe Schwarz (R-Battle Creek) in Jackson, and state Representative Kelvin Elsenheimer (R-Bellaire) in Boyne Falls.

After the initial 2004 *Washington Post* report that Abramoff and publicist Michael Scanlon, with strong Republican ties, had received \$45 million in fees from tribes, McCain said: "What makes this tale apart, what makes it truly extraordinary, is the extent and degree of the apparent exploitation and deceit."

Although Democrats also are tainted by the current lobbyist scandal, McCain said Saturday the wave of allegations of corruption represent "a downside" in Republican efforts to retain control of the House and Senate.

"The way things look now, it could be a rough year for Republicans," he said.

Back in 2000 when he won the Michigan primary, McCain was out of sync with the party establishment, which supported George W. Bush.

This year, he's a helpmate for the Michigan GOP, raising money for local party organizations and 2006 Republican candidates, including Attorney General Mike Cox and Secretary of State Terri Lynn Land. He was the draw at a Land fundraiser Friday in Grand Rapids.

John Yob, a Grand Rapids-based consultant who is a six-state director for McCain's Straight Talk America political action committee, said the PAC has so far in this election cycle donated \$140,000 in Michigan, including contributions ranging between \$500 and \$5,000 to all GOP county and district organizations.

Yob said McCain has helped raise "in the neighborhood of \$1.5 million to \$2 million" for Michigan Republicans and will be the headliner at a June 26 fundraiser for the state party, expected to produce at least \$1.5 million.

Michigan, according to Yob, leads other states in this election cycle in number/duration of McCain visits, and in the amount of money he has raised/contributed.

Up North, Kelvin Elsenheimer is an interesting sidebar in the tale of The Michigan Journeys of John McCain.

In 2000, attorney Elsenheimer was the Antrim County Republican chairman – and county chairman for Bush's presidential campaign. (McCain outpolled Bush there, 2,194 to 1,807).

Both McCain and Elsenheimer laughed off the irony of McCain coming to Antrim County to help the man who helped McCain's opponent there in 2000. So it is in politics.

The late Saturday event was a fundraiser (\$25 at the reception door and \$500 for a smaller meeting with McCain) for "Forward Michigan," a fund that Elsenheimer established to raise money for GOP legislative candidates.

Some of the Elsenheimer funds are likely to be at play against 107th District Representative Gary McDowell (D-Rudyard), and in the race for the open seat of term-limited Representative Rich Brown (D-Bessemer) in the sprawling six-county 110th District.

### Battlefield Buddies

Navy officers Joe Schwarz and John McCain did not cross paths during the Vietnam War, but have forged a close bond as mavericks in the political battlefield. Schwarz chaired McCain's 2000 presidential campaign in Michigan.

Each was once a Lone Ranger. In 2002, McCain campaigned for Schwarz in his losing gubernatorial primary race against Dick Posthumus, the choice of Governor John Engler and most others in the GOP establishment.

In 2004, McCain helped Schwarz win a tough six-candidate GOP congressional primary. Now he's helping Schwarz in what likely will be the year's toughest challenge of a House member from Michigan – the GOP primary.

His sole opponent is former state Representative Tim Walberg of Tipton, who finished third in the 2004 primary when he was among four conservative contenders. Walberg now carries the conservative flag, but the state and national party leaders are with Schwarz.

My bet is on Schwarz. George Weeks recently retired after 22 years as political columnist for *The Detroit News*. His weekly *Michigan Politics* column is syndicated by *Superior Features*.

## The St. Ignace News

and Les Cheneaux Islands Weekly Wave

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USPS Periodical Publication Number - 462-380

ESTABLISHED 1878

Published each Thursday at Saint Ignace, Mackinac County, Michigan

Entered in Saint Ignace, Michigan Post Office as Periodical Mail Matter, Act of March 3, 1879

Periodical Postage Paid at Saint Ignace, MI • Additional Postage Paid at Gaylord, MI

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to St. Ignace News, PO Box 277, St. Ignace, MI 49781

Volume 127, Number 10, Thursday, June 15, 2006

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Publisher 1975-1995

Wesley H. Maurer, Sr. (1897-1995)



### Subscriptions:

\$35 in Mackinac, Chippewa, Emmet, Luce, and Cheboygan counties.

\$42 elsewhere in the United States and military post offices.

\$30 for the Web edition at [www.saintignacenews.com](http://www.saintignacenews.com)

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The quotation under the flag of *The St. Ignace News* on Page 1 is from the 10 triads written by Dr. Fred Newton Scott, creator and teacher of the first continuous course in journalism in the United States at the University of Michigan in 1890. The 10 triads are chiseled on the parapet of the Detroit News Building at 615 Lafayette Boulevard, Detroit. They were headed "Ideals of the Press" or "The Newspaper in a Free Society," and serve as a reminder of what a free press means to us.