

Minutes from 2007 Muskie Summit February, 24, 2007

In Attendance:

Aaron Kirkinburg	OHMC	
Fred Lederer	OHMC	ohmcpres@sbcglobal.net
Chris DePaola	MI Chapter 23 (Cleveland) & EMA	
Jack Moga	MI Chapter 23	mrmuskieparma@cox.net
Geoff Hetrick	At Large Invite	
Kurt Hahn	Central Ohio MI Ch. 41	
Tom Rankin	Central Ohio MI Ch. 41	
John Oldfield	Central Ohio MI Ch. 41	
Tom Dietz	Southwest OH MI Ch. 56	
Aaron Malore	Southwest OH MI Ch. 56	
Jason Tentler	MI Ch 19	
Gordon Selden	MI Ch 19	
Ray Petering	OH Div of Wildlife, Fish Group Administrator	
Scott Hale	OH Div of Wildlife, Fish Program Administrator	
Elmer Heyob	OH Div. of Wildlife, Fish Program Administrator	
Larry Goedde	OH Div. of Wildlife, Fish Supervisor D2 Northwest OH	
Ed Lewis	OH Div. of Wildlife, Fish Biologist D2 and OHMC Liaison	
Phil Hillman	OH Div. of Wildlife, Fish Supervisor D3 Northeast OH	

Time: February 24, 2007

Location: Buckeye Hall of Fame, Columbus OH, 1421 Olentangey River Road

Minutes: Larry Goedde will take minutes of the meeting and distribute.

Meeting Objective: To collect input on Ohio's muskie program and provide an update on current issues and opportunities related to managing and improving the program.

Introduction: Scott Hale substituted for Ray Petering explaining that Ray was running a little behind due to another commitment.

Last Summit Meeting with muskie groups was held in 1998.

In 1998 DOW received messages from the group about several topics: Stocking, Regulations, Potential Natural Reproduction, Other Concerns

Stocking Discussion in 1998:

- Group wanted quality fishing lakes rather than a high quantity of lower quality lakes
- Group wanted muskie lakes geographically distributed around the state so that each region of the state would have an opportunity to catch muskies reasonably close to home.
- Wanted a quality muskie lake in southwest Ohio
- Maintain a prioritization system to stock muskie in case of a poor production year.

Regulations Discussion in 1998:

- Group agreed that regulation should be set based on biological justification.
- Some members felt that we should have length limits?
- Some felt that we should have closed seasons at least to protect fish in lakes with potential natural reproduction.

Lakes with Potential Natural Populations Discussion 1998:

- Lake Erie
- Ohio River
- Other inland streams

Other Concerns in 1998:

- Catches by non-muskie anglers
- Conflicts with other boaters
- Loss of muskies over dams

Today's Meeting 2007 Muskie Summit

Ground Rules – for the meeting were set

Parking lot – if topics come up but are not pertinent to current discussion we will make note under a heading called Parking Lot and come back to them at the end.

Questions – you may interrupt for short questions during the presentations but save longer questions for open forum discussion at the end.

Agenda: topics were reviewed – STOCKING AND PRODUCTION, ANGLER PARTNERSHIPS WITH DOW, REGULATIONS, and OPEN FORUM.

STOCKING AND PRODUCTION – Elmer Heyob

Muskie Production

- **Capacity**—we have 6 hatcheries statewide and muskies are raised at 2 of them (London and Kincaid). Our hatcheries are currently at full capacity. When you make a decision to raise more of one species we would need to cut production of another fish species to open up a pond for production.

History of Production:

- Ohio began raising muskies in hatcheries in 1925 but not on a regular basis until after 1950's.
 - Before 1982, muskies were stocked in many locations, sizes varied but were generally small, and numbers stocked varied greatly.
 - In 1983, we switched to raising fewer but larger muskie (today's advanced fingerlings). The program goal was 21,000 from 1983 through 2004.
 - Tiger muskie production ended in 1985 after extensive research indicated that pure muskie did better in Ohio Lakes.
 - In 1990, 8 program lakes were selected to provide quality muskie fishing geographically around the state.
 - In 1999, we developed new production techniques to produce better muskie and the most reasonable cost. But, production of advanced fingerling muskies is still very expensive.
 - In 2004, we reduced stocking rates to 1 fish per acre because survival was so high with the advanced fingerlings and set a new production target of 17,000 advanced fingerling after completing our 5-year commitment to stock Pymatuning Reservoir .
 - We have met this target every year.
- **Stocking Strategies**—we raise advanced fingerling muskie (10 to 12-inches) stocked in the fall. Fewer fish but better survival of the fish stocked.
 - **Disease Concerns**—VHS (*Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia*) is a disease that poses a big threat to muskies as well as other fish species. Like other Aquatic Nuisance Species, VHS probably was introduced through ballast water.

VHS has killed muskies in the St. Lawrence Sea Way, Lake St. Clair, and the Detroit River.

VHS has even a greater impact than just killing muskies. A branch of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has taken regulatory authority in relation to this disease. This is the same group who is tried to stop the spread of the Emerald Ash Bore. **Rules that APHIS and other state Department of Agriculture's are imposing will make it difficult for us to purchase minnows to feed muskie in our hatcheries.**

These restrictions may also **prevent us from trading muskie eggs, fry, and fingerlings with other state agencies.** We may not be able to get muskies from Cave Run in Kentucky this year.

What is the Ohio Division of Wildlife doing?

1. We are working with APHIS to try to get them to relax restrictions and let State Agencies on the great lakes implement regulations that make more sense.
2. We will test ovarian fluid from female muskies that we collect eggs from.
3. We will test samples of muskies in our hatcheries (or other sources) before stocking them.
4. We are working on several strategies to obtain enough minnows to feed muskie fingerlings in our hatcheries including:
 - partnerships with clubs to purchase minnows. There may be only a few locations approved to ship minnows. That could drive the cost of purchasing minnows up substantially. We cannot accept money from clubs but we can accept minnows that they pay for.
 - We are trying to raise more minnows in our hatcheries but we have limited pond space for doing that.
 - We are trying to find other in-state locations to raise minnows.

ANGELR PARTNERSHIPS – Scott Hale

Ohio Huskie Muskie Club (OHMC)—The OHMC was started in Cooperation with the Ohio Division of Wildlife (DOW) in 1961 to assist DOW with improving muskie fishing in Ohio.

The OHMC Club

- Promoted muskie fishing in Ohio
- Promoted catch and release
- Promoted sportsmanship
- And, provided DOW with catch information to improve our management of muskie

DOW asked the OHMC to take scale samples and measure all the muskie they caught. Early in the program that information gave DOW growth, number of fish caught from each year class stocked, and number caught each year from each lake. Scales also offered some verification of an anglers catch. There have been applications that included largemouth bass scales rather than muskie scales. Other applications have been submitted with *Huskie Muskie* lengths but only had scales from a 3-year old muskies in the envelop.

Today, we are at a point in the management of muskie that we no longer need the scales.

We know what works:

1. stocking the advanced fingerlings in the right habitat;
2. after many years we know what growth rates are for our program lakes;

However, we would still like to know:

1. How many muskies are being caught from each lake.
2. date caught;
3. the length of each muskie caught;
4. whether they are kept or released.

We are proposing that we collect that information through a new ONLINE REPORTING SYSTEM.

Features of an ONLINE REPORTING SYSTEM:

- Each angler could log into our web site and enter their catch data into a secure account.
- Each angler would have a secure account that would be password protected. Only they could access the account. This is the same type of account that Cabela's has online for each individual customer.
- Recognizing that not all muskie anglers have access to a computer, we would also provide mail-in cards for providing catch information similar to the Huskie Muskie applications.
- We would ask the angler to report some basic catch information on each muskie caught: Where it was caught. When it was caught. How long was the muskie? And, if the fish was kept or released. This is the information that we would use.
- Optional—we would offer each angler a place to keep track of their own information such as bait used, water temperature or conditions, area caught in the lake, etc. This information would not be used by DOW.
- We could allow anglers to submit a photo of their catch.
- We could allow anglers to print out a catch certificate.
- We could provide summaries by angler to clubs if the angler agrees and the clubs want the basic information. We would **not** share

information in individual private records such as bait used, area caught, or trolling speed.

- This new reporting system would be convenient to DOW, anglers and clubs.
- This system would not provide for catch Verification to clubs for awards. DOW will work with clubs to verify catches for awards.
- Possible systems could include: photos of catch, witnesses, or DOW could continue to look at scale submitted for award winning catches to make sure the scales looked reasonable. This would be a club decision. This could change over time with what ever method makes the club members feel comfortable with results.

In the past DOW has not received as much catch information from members of other Muskies Inc. clubs. We hope that will improve under this new system.

DOW feels that we no longer need the scale samples, however, Partnerships are very important to us and we do not want to jeopardize our partnership with any of the clubs. This change to an online system does not need to occur this year. For clubs like the OHMC that may need to change their bylaws we will plan on continuing to take scale samples for this year or however, long they need to transition to a new system. We want each club to feel comfortable with the change and DOW will work with the clubs. These will be individual club decisions and should be made with input from the membership.

REGULATIONS—Scott Hale

Length Limits:

Purpose of length limits for any fish species is to:

1. increase the size of fish caught
2. increase the number of fish thereby reducing the time it takes to catch a fish

Requirements for length limits to be effective for any fish species:

1. Good growth rates (reach the length limit and beyond in a reasonable time)
2. Recruitment—new fish being introduced into the population each year—must be reliable (consistent with reasonable numbers).
3. Natural death must be low
4. Fishing death (harvest of kept fish) must be high.

Muskie lakes in Ohio meet the first three requirements but do not meet the fourth requirement in any of our muskie lakes. There are very few muskies kept. Those that are kept are usually a very large trophy fish, a fish that died, or perhaps an angler's first muskie. There may be more incidentally caught muskies that are kept but the numbers of incidentally caught muskie are low. If

they were catching many muskies, muskie anglers would probably start using their baits and methods. It just does not happen that often.

DOW's position on length limits is that there is no biological support for a length limit--they would NOT improve muskie fishing in Ohio. The harm--they could keep an angler from keeping a dead muskie, or a new angler from keeping a first muskie (including children). These new anglers could become new muskie fishermen or club members in the future.

Creel or Daily Bag Limits:

Current bag limit is 2 muskies in Ohio. An angler keeping two muskies in a single day is very rare...

Purpose of Daily Bag limits for any species is to limit the overall harvest (walleye on Lake Erie) or to distribute the harvest to more anglers (inland crappie).

DOW could reduce the Daily Bag Limit from 2 muskie to 1 muskie per day.

This regulation change would not reduce the numbers of muskie kept appreciably (and probably not at all) and it would not distribute the harvest to more anglers. So from a biological perspective it would have no merit. However, it would put Ohio in line with most other states and there is not much harm in making this change. So we are open to club input on this change.

Closed Seasons:

Closed Seasons are typically only used in lakes with successful natural reproduction. All of Ohio's fisheries are maintained through stocking.

OPEN FORUM—Scott Hale

Jake Moga—Why don't we put more in the Fishing Regulations Digest about reporting muskie catches, promoting release, and other information?

Fred Lederer—Agreed we should even be promoting muskie fishing trying to recruit more muskie fishermen since it cost so much to produce this fish. Maybe we could get more reporting from everyday anglers.

Scott Hale—We are limited to the amount of information that we can put in our fishing regulations. Space is limited they are expensive to produce.

Jeff Hetrick—Is there another better way to get information out to all anglers, to increase reporting?

Jack Moga—perhaps clubs could offer an incentive to report catches?

Aaron Kirkingburg—Could we get more information or offer more information when an angler purchases a fishing license. Questions like the HIP.

Tom Dietz—thought that was an excellent idea. No problem in doing it at Gander Mountain.

Jack Moga—since space is a problem in fishing regulations publication, perhaps we could insert a separated sheet as a handout?

Ray Petering—We would like to get a lot more information in our fishing regulations that we think would benefit our anglers. We have been very limited for space in the past. We have been required to put fish consumption advisory information in this publication which took up substantial space. That requirement may be eliminated in the future which will free up space. We are looking at other possibilities as well. Some states sell ads to defer cost of the publication which would allow you to make it a larger publication with more information. That would take a change in legislation but it is a possibility.

Jeff Hetrick—regarding length limits, what is the percentage kept by non-muskie anglers?

Larry Goedde—we don't have actual percentages because we can't accurately measure incidental muskie catch. The biggest reason we can't measure it is because it is so infrequent.

Chris DePaola??—would it make sense to have closed season when water temperatures are hot and stress on muskies is peak?

Ray Petering—that would make sense except how could you enforce it? You could have some angler out there trolling a big muskie lure and say they are fishing for largemouth bass.

Chris DePaola—maybe we should “police ourselves” by promoting no fishing when it is hot within our clubs and not scheduling any club fishing events when water temperatures are above a certain temperature?

Fred Lederer—maybe we need more education on better release methods?

Jeff Hetrick—that would help but there would still be a lot of stress on the fish just being caught when water temperatures are hot. I think we are as a group a lot better at releasing fish than we used to be.

Aaron Kirkingburg—maybe we could get better information about stress mortality if we report dead fish we find in the online reporting system. We could record temperature, and then track how many are being reported in the hot weather months.

Elmer Heyob—just be careful that several people are not reporting the same dead fish.

Jack Moga—maybe we should consider closed seasons in the spring to protect the big females in water areas where we might get some natural reproduction? (Pymantuning).

Fred Lederer—probably not necessary since most of our lakes are stocked.

Chris DePaola—closed seasons probably would not work because you could not enforce it anyway.

Jack Moga—I would like to see DOW do more muskie surveys.

Scott Hale—we have a pretty good idea what is going on with our muskie populations through anglers reporting their catch (OHMC) and with our Inland Management System (IMS) Surveys. The reporting of catches from you guys can give us better information than surveys if you are diligent at reporting your catches.

Kurt Hahn—after we talk to our club members how should we report back to the DOW?

Scott Hale—you can call us at Fountain Square or any of our District offices to give us feedback, either in person or in writing.

Scott Hale—what do you guys think about doing away with scales? Especially the OHMC?

Aaron Kirkingburg—If you don't need scales then we shouldn't take them. But, what if you start up a new lake? Would you want scales just from that lake?

Scott Hale—Perhaps, but I really don't think we would need them with the IMS data that we have now on prey densities and lake productivity, along with the information that we hope you anglers will provide us.

Fred Lederer—could we print out catch certificates online like they do for Fish Ohio program? Could we do it for each club?

Scott Hale—absolutely - we could give each angler an option to print certificates and they could be customized.

Phil Hillman—Fred, would OHMC be able to change bylaws to make changes for this coming fishing season?

Fred Lederer—I would need to review the bylaws and talk to the other OHMC members.

Aaron Kirkingburg—I was just talking to Larry Goedde on the side. Our biggest concern will be verification of fish caught outside our contest for awards. Would it be possible for DOW to look at scales from just Huskies Muskies or potential award winning fish?

Fred Lederer—I don't want OHMC to be the only muskie club requiring scales if DOW does not need them. We are going to get cheating no matter what we do.

Ray Petering—the OHMC should not feel pressured to make changes immediately. I want your club to feel comfortable with any transition and changes you make. Talk to your members and get back to us. If we continue doing things the same for another year or two that is OK.

Scott Hale—Any other comments or suggestions?

Jason Tentler — I think this meeting has been great. Would it be possible to have one of these meetings annually rather than wait so long until the next one?

David Cates--Suggested that all the muskie clubs work together and form an Alliance like they have done in Illinois.

Meeting Wrap UP—Ray Petering

I want to reiterate that maintaining Partnerships with all of the clubs is very important to us. Our job is to work for you our anglers. We may not do exactly what you want us to do all of the time as individual clubs because we have to take into account the best interest of all anglers and the resource. But, we do want to hear from you and we do care about the views and concerns of all of you. We will proceed with the development of an online reporting system. We will need input from some of you for it and we will want some of you to try out a beta (test) version and to give us feedback. Fred, please talk to the OHMC membership and let us know the best way to proceed for your club.

I wanted to bring you up to date on the current status of commercial fishing on Lake Erie. Just Friday, a new commercial fishing Bill was introduced into the

Senate SB 77 by Senator Grendell from the 18th Senate District. We appreciate all the effort and support (emails, letters and phone calls) that you made this past fall in support the commercial fishing legislation. This new legislation does not buy out the commercial industry but it does have a lot of teeth to address the major problems with some of the bad players. When it comes time we will be contacting you all again to ask for your support and to contact your legislatures.

New DNR director—I had the opportunity to spend some time with our new director at meetings and in the car on the way up to Detroit recently. I am here to tell you that up to this point he has been nothing but OUTSTANDING!! He cares about issues that affect us and our fisheries and he is not afraid to tackle any of them.

Editor's Note: March 13th is a Legislative Reception hosted by the US Sportsmen's Alliance. It will be at the Athletic Club of Columbus from 5:30 to 7:30 PM. The Athletic Club is located at 136 E. Broad St. in downtown Columbus. Ohio legislators will field questions and listen to opinions of their sportsman constituents in an informal atmosphere. This would be a great time to meet your legislators and let them know that there are a lot of concerned sportsmen in Ohio. Several of our Division Staff members will be in attendance.