

**TERMS OF REFERENCE
FOR THE
FORAGE TASK GROUP (FTG) OF
THE LAKE ERIE COMMITTEE (LEC)**

Revised April, 2011

TITLE: The Lake Erie Forage Task Group (FTG)

BACKGROUND: The Lake Erie Forage Task Group was formed in 1986 to describe the status and trends of the forage base in Lake Erie. The main functions of the FTG are to: address charges from the Lake Erie Committee and the Standing Technical Committee; monitor and report on the status of forage by basin; and work to standardize assessment and agency reporting. Charges to the Task Group have included: bioenergetics simulations to estimate forage consumption; assessment of the pelagic forage fish community through basin-wide acoustic surveys; fishing power corrections for trawling vessels; and standardized lake wide lower trophic level monitoring and reporting. The FTG presents the results of these activities in an annual report and presentation at an annual meeting of the Lake Erie Committee.

MISSION STATEMENT: The Lake Erie Forage Task Group's philosophy will be based upon the following principles:

- **Sustainability** of Lake Erie forage fish stocks and invertebrates to support a healthy ecosystem,
- **Support** for efforts to rehabilitate native species that are at risk of extirpation, or those that have been extirpated, within reasonable economic, ecological, and technological constraints,
- **Promotion** of policies and actions that recognize the importance of a healthy and diverse ecosystem to provide maximum benefit to many different user groups.

To achieve this mission, the members of the Forage Task Group uphold the following tenets:

- **Membership-** LEC member agencies will provide personnel to address FTG charges. Task group members are selected by their parent agencies. Advisory and non-agency personnel can be appointed to the FTG at the discretion of the STC and LEC, following the Terms of Reference for LEC Task Group Responsibilities and Membership. If a member is withdrawn from the group, the parent agency may provide a replacement person.
- **Task Group Chairing** - A single chair or co-chairs will be selected by FTG consensus and approved by the STC and LEC. At least one chair must belong to an LEC member agency, but a co-chair may also come from other agencies signatory to the Joint Strategic Plan (USGS, DFO-Canada, USFWS, NMFS). These roles will alternate periodically at the discretion of the FTG, STC and LEC. Task group chairs will serve as the primary liaison between the Task Group, the

STC, and the LEC. In this capacity, task group chairs will serve to facilitate achievement and reporting on charges to the LEC, will administer the routine operations of the task group including the organization of meetings, conference calls, and recording of minutes, and will manage requests for task group data from outside agencies. Chairing commitments will extend a minimum of two years, and alternate periodically at the discretion of the FTG, STC, and LEC. See the LEC Task Group Responsibilities and Membership for further discussion and responsibilities of chairing.

- **Cooperation-** The members of the FTG will share responsibilities for collecting and collating interagency data, running analyses, producing reports and creating presentations. Data and intellectual property produced for the FTG by agencies and the task group will be distributed according to the defined Task Group's Data Sharing Protocol, and may only be released by the consent of the originating agency and all task group members.
- **Transparency-** The members of the FTG will share information with the STC, LEC, other Task Groups, and will communicate results to stakeholders and the public.
- **Technology-** The FTG will use the latest available technologies to assess the status of Lake Erie forage species and the ecosystem. This has included the development of a hydroacoustics survey program.

RECOMMENDED ALLOWABLE HARVEST: The FTG does not determine annual recommended allowable harvests for any forage species. The FTG will provide general recommendations and summary trends in abundance, growth, and related demographic information to support LEC endeavors in quota management of a forage species.

REPORTING: One co-chairperson or other designated task group member of the FTG will report formally at the annual meeting of the LEC on the activities of the FTG. In addition, the co-chairpersons of the FTG or individual task group members may be asked to report on critical issues to the Chair and/or LEC membership at other times, including the annual Pre-LEC meeting, seasonal LEC meetings, and/or STC business meetings, and other times as necessary. An annual written report summarizing FTG charges and activities toward those charges will be produced for the LEC, with the scheduled release to the public at the conclusion of the annual LEC meeting.

CONSENSUS APPROACH: FTG issues are resolved by consensus of the members. If consensus cannot be achieved on an issue, then it will be referred first to the STC and then to LEC for resolution.

DATA SHARING: All data used to create the FTG report are shared freely among agencies. The report is available to the public online at www.GLFC.org, and from the distribution of reports at the annual LEC meeting. Agencies may not share with the public any other agency and/or task group data or intellectual property without the expressed consent of the originating agency.

FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS: The FTG meets as deemed necessary by its' members, the STC members or the LEC, to address charges, with the intent to meet at least twice annually.

SUPPORT: Salary and traveling expenses of the members of the FTG will be the responsibility of the parent agencies, unless otherwise provided through an arrangement of the GLFC or other external funding sources.

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