

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

Division of Fish, Wildlife and Marine Resources



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Dear Sir/Ma'am,

We are writing to bring you up-to-date on New York and Ontario's effort to develop fish community objectives for the St. Lawrence River. First of all, we want to thank you for participating in our public outreach program this past summer. As you know, the responsibility for fisheries management in the St. Lawrence River is shared by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR). The Great Lakes Fishery Commission's (GLFC) Joint Strategic Plan for Management of Great Lakes Fisheries requires that NYSDEC and OMNR develop fish community objectives (FCO) for the St. Lawrence River. The FCO document will summarize our understanding of the major factors influencing the fish community and provide broad-based "goals" for what the St. Lawrence River fish community should look like. This document will be used to guide NYSDEC and OMNR in developing more specific fisheries, habitat, and watershed management plans in the future.

During July and August 2000, NYSDEC and OMNR held a series of six public meetings, three each in New York and Ontario. Total, combined attendance at the public meetings was 174, and was broken-down as follows:

Thousand Islands

Clayton, NY - 70
Mallorytown, Ont. - 39

Middle Corridor

Ogdensburg, NY - 23
Brockville, Ont. - 19

Lake St. Lawrence

Massena, NY - 15
Morrisburg, Ont. - 8

Current scientific information on the status of the St. Lawrence River fish community, fisheries, and major influences was provided to meeting participants through a series of discussion papers sent to registrants, posting on the GLFC internet web site, and in oral presentations at the meetings.

Participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire that was developed and analyzed by Cornell University's Human Dimensions Research Unit. With one exception, the questionnaire contained hypothetical management scenarios that are not actual fisheries regulation proposals.

If changes to regulations are proposed as this process progresses, OMNR and NYSDEC will conduct further consultation with the public and interest groups. The



exception dealt with a proposal to increase the minimum size limit for St. Lawrence River muskellunge from the current 44 inch regulation. Due to overwhelming support for an increase (see Table 13 below), OMNR will implement a 48 inch minimum size limit for St. Lawrence River muskellunge effective January 1, 2001. NYSDEC will propose implementing the same regulation effective October 1, 2002.

A total of 162 questionnaires were completed; 138 at public meetings and 24 submitted by mail. The break-down by residency and primary river segment of interest appears in Table 1 below. In addition to the questionnaire, questions and comments were solicited at the public meetings as well as by mail and electronic mail. Most of the comments dealt directly or indirectly with declining quality of St. Lawrence River sportfisheries. A general summary of comments received follows (not listed in order of importance, however, cormorants did receive the most attention).

NYSDEC and OMNR intend to submit a draft St. Lawrence River Fish Community Objectives document to the Lake Ontario Committee of the Great Lakes Fishery Commission (LOC/GLFC) in March 2001. Following approval by the LOC/GLFC, the draft document will be released for public comment. As part of the public comment process, we will be sending you a copy of the draft document for comment. We greatly appreciate your participation in this process, and hope that you will continue to assist us as this process progresses. Please feel free to contact us should you have any questions or require additional information.

Sincerely,

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Summary of Public Comments

Cormorants

- A very large number of people were concerned about the negative impact of cormorants on recreational fisheries
- There was also concern regarding negative impacts on nesting/roosting habitats, negative impact on both the commercial fish industry (parasites) and the bait fish industry
- Too many studies and not enough action by governments
- Agencies are asking anglers to make sacrifices and aren't doing anything about cormorants

Protection of Bass

- Considerable concern for the impact of pre-season fishing on bass
- Establishing bass sanctuaries received support from several people
- Mortality of released bass (tournament fishing(also displacement), use of live bait....) a concern
- Agencies don't pay enough attention to largemouth bass

Fishing Stocking

- Interest was expressed in stocking fish (bass, pike, walleye, muskellunge, salmonids were all mentioned) into the St. Lawrence River, particularly in Lake St. Lawrence.
- Concern expressed against stocking pike from Pennsylvania
- Local economy being hurt, can't wait any longer; stock fish now

Law Enforcement/Fishing Regulations

- Members of the public were interested in seeing increased enforcement of fisheries regulations and fish habitat infractions on the St. Lawrence
- General support for consistent regulations in NY and Ontario waters of the River
- Imposition of size limits in Ontario waters may increase hooking mortality
- Proposed 54 inch muskie size limit too high
- Interest in OMNR's Fish and Wildlife Guardian program
- Support for sale of "conservation" license in NY
- Sale of hook and line caught fish should be ended or licensed/regulated
- Fines/penalties should be increased

Water Levels

- Lake St. Lawrence water level regulation has negative impact on fishery and boating
- Public felt those agencies responsible for dams and seaway should be responsible for restoration of the fishery.
- Agencies should be more involved with International St. Lawrence River Board of Control

Toxins

- Not enough known on impacts of toxins on fish populations and humans
- Shouldn't allow sale of "toxic" fish to local restaurants
- Log removal from river bottom will release contaminants

Habitat/other issues

- Habitat loss due to filling-in from shoreline and road salt pile at Johnstown
- Spawning ground at Butcher’s Creek blocked by beaver dam – on Parks property?
- St. Lawrence Seaway Devel. Authority should share responsibility for habitat loss
- Zebra mussels, increased water clarity and algal growth hurting fisheries

Summary of Questionnaires - The following are tables that summarize the results of questionnaires filled out at the public meetings and those submitted by mail after the meetings. Tables are excerpted from the report “Public input to St. Lawrence River Fish Community Objectives” by Brown et al. 2000 (Human Dimensions Research Unit, Cornell University, HDRU Series No. 00-13).

Table 1. Number of attendees and mail responses by residence and section of the St. Lawrence River of primary interest.

	Primary River Segment of Interest				
	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence
Meeting Attendees	88	50	83	36	21
Mail Responses	8	16	13	8	2
Totals	96	66	96	44	23

Table 2. Profile of attendees of St. Lawrence River community planning meetings

	Primary River Segment of Interest					MEETING TOTALS	MAIL TOTALS	
	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence			
<u>Interest or perspective</u>								
Charterboat operator or guide		19.3%	18.0%	24.1%	11.1%	4.8%	18.8%	0%
Marina owner		1.1	0	1.2	0	0	0.7	8.3
Restaurant, motel, other business	4.5		2.0	3.6	5.6	4.8	4.3	8.3
Angler		81.8	68.0	73.5	83.3	81.0	77.1	95.8
Boater		59.1	42.0	51.8	52.8	61.9	53.6	75.0
Cottage/second home owner		28.4	16.0	31.3	11.1	14.3	23.6	25.0
<u>Percent fishing for each species in a typical year:</u>								
Smallmouth bass		86.4%	82.0%	83.1%	86.1%	95.2%	85.7%	95.8%
Northern pike		83.0	72.0	84.3	86.1	52.4	80.0	91.7
Walleye	78.4		60.0	66.3	80.6	76.2	71.4	87.5
Yellow perch		78.4	62.0	69.9	77.8	81.0	73.6	91.7
Largemouth bass		43.2	52.0	51.8	41.7	33.3	46.4	62.5
Muskellunge		45.5	28.0	43.4	41.7	14.3	38.6	45.8
Bluegill, sunfish, or rock bass		33.0	12.0	30.1	22.2	19.0	26.4	25.0
Bullhead		34.1	28.0	25.3	41.7	38.1	31.4	41.7
Crappie		19.3	28.0	20.5	27.8	19.0	22.1	20.8
Carp		4.5	10.0	2.4	11.1	14.3	6.4	4.2

Percent ranking each species
their favorite to fish for

Smallmouth bass	34.1%	14.0%	31.3%	25.0%	19.0%	27.9%	29.2%
Northern pike	18.2	22.0	20.5	22.2	9.5	19.3	25.0
Walleye	17.0	12.0	9.6	13.9	38.1	15.0	20.8
Yellow perch	12.5	12.0	10.8	16.7	14.3	12.9	12.5
Largemouth bass	4.5	6.0	9.6	0	0	5.7	4.4
Muskellunge	4.5	6.0	6.0	5.6	0	5.0	4.2
Bluegill, sunfish, or rock bass	1.1	0	1.2	0	0	0.7	0
Bullhead	1.1	0	1.2	0	0	0.7	4.2
Crappie	0	0	1.2	2.8	0	1.4	0
Carp	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Species preference means
(5-Point scale; 1=favorite)

Smallmouth bass	2.65	3.04	2.67	2.81	2.90	2.74	2.04
Northern pike	3.01	3.18	2.88	2.89	3.95	3.04	2.74
Walleye	3.14	3.72	3.70	3.03	2.52	3.35	3.13
Yellow perch	3.27	3.92	3.54	3.53	3.05	3.46	3.35
Largemouth bass	4.34	4.00	4.02	4.36	4.62	4.20	3.91
Muskellunge	4.18	4.34	4.12	4.31	4.67	4.25	4.17
Bluegill, sunfish, or rock bass	4.57	4.82	4.57	4.78	4.76	4.65	4.74
Bullhead	4.61	4.72	4.70	4.58	4.62	4.66	4.39
Crappie	4.73	4.66	4.73	4.64	4.71	4.71	4.78
Carp	4.95	4.90	4.98	4.89	4.86	4.94	4.96

Table 3. Mean degree of concern, by species (1=little concern; 4=great concern).

	Primary River Segment of Interest						TOTALS	TOTALS
	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence	MEETING MAIL		
Smallmouth bass	3.55	3.28	3.46	3.53	3.20	3.44	3.70	
Northern pike	3.64	3.33	3.63	3.73	2.78	3.53	3.73	
Walleye	3.24	3.17	2.96	3.66	3.45	3.20	3.45	
Yellow perch	3.01	2.61	2.66	3.23	3.05	2.86	3.17	
Largemouth bass	2.90	2.61	2.73	2.90	2.65	2.76	3.24	
Muskellunge	3.15	3.44	3.33	3.21	3.06	3.26	3.43	
Bluegill, sunfish, or rock bass	2.01	1.80	1.75	2.46	1.75	1.93	1.74	
Bullhead	2.16	2.18	1.95	2.57	2.07	2.13	1.86	
Crappie	2.16	2.32	2.05	2.50	2.31	2.21	2.47	
Carp	1.39	1.66	1.37	1.56	1.64	1.46	1.11	
Lake sturgeon	2.63	2.54	2.43	2.79	3.06	2.62	3.06	
American eel	2.12	2.10	2.12	1.96	2.41	2.13	1.94	

Table 4. Percent willing to have bass harvest limited beyond current regulations in order to improve the quality of the bass fishery.

	Primary River Segment of Interest						TOTALS	TOTALS
	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence	MEETING MAIL		
Yes	71.3	82.6	78.8	72.2	75.0	76.5	83.3	
No	21.8	15.2	15.0	25.0	20.0	18.4	12.5	

opinion	4.5	0.8	3.7	0.7	0.7	5.1	4.2
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Table 5. Percent willing to support a 3 bass per day creel limit in principle if it increased the abundance of bass of all sizes.

	Primary River Segment of Interest					TOTALS	TOTALS
	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence		
Yes	77.0	79.6	79.5	75.0	85.0	79.1	75.0
No	18.4	18.4	16.9	22.2	10.0	17.3	25.0
No opinion	4.6	2.0	3.6	2.8	5.0	3.6	0

Table 6. Percent willing to support a 14 inch minimum size limit in principle if it increased the number of large bass available by 20%.

	Primary River Segment of Interest					TOTALS	TOTALS
	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence		
Yes	64.4	85.4	73.5	68.6	80.0	73.2	70.8
No	31.0	10.4	22.9	22.2	20.0	22.5	29.2
No opinion	4.6	4.2	3.6	8.6	0	4.3	0

Table 7. Percent who would support changing opening day of bass season in New York from the third to fourth Saturday in June.

	Primary River Segment of Interest					TOTALS	TOTALS
	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence		
Yes	83.7	95.8	84.1	97.1	90.0	88.3	87.5
No	15.1	2.1	14.6	2.2	5.0	10.2	12.5
No opinion	1.2	2.1	0.7	0	5.0	1.5	0

Table 8. Percent willing to have northern pike harvest limited beyond current regulations in order to improve the quality of the pike fishery.

	Primary River Segment of Interest					TOTALS	TOTALS
	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence		
Yes	83.7	85.7	88.0	82.9	75.0	84.8	87.0
No	12.8	12.2	10.8	14.3	15.0	12.3	13.0
No opinion	3.5	2.0	1.2	2.9	10.0	2.9	0

Table 9. Percent willing to support a 2 pike per day creel limit in principle if it increased the abundance of pike by 30%.

	Primary River Segment of Interest					TOTALS	TOTALS
	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence		
Yes	80.5	79.6	81.9	75.0	85.0	80.6	83.3
No	14.9	18.4	16.9	22.2	0	15.8	16.7
No opinion	4.6	2.0	1.2	2.8	15.0	3.6	0

Table 10. Percent willing to support a 24 inch minimum size limit in principle if it increased the number of large pike greater than 24 inches by 20%.

	Primary River Segment of Interest					TOTALS	TOTALS
	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence		
Yes	81.4	89.8	86.6	83.3	80.0	84.8	83.3
No	12.8	6.1	12.2	8.3	5.0	10.1	16.7
No opinion	5.8	4.1	1.2	8.3	15.0	5.1	0

Table 11. Percent who would support changing the closing day of pike season in New York from March 15 to March 31 to have common dates with Ontario.

	Primary River Segment of Interest					TOTALS	TOTALS
	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence		
Yes	45.9	72.3	65.4	35.3	55.0	56.3	66.7
No	45.9	14.9	29.6	50.0	25.0	34.1	25.0
No opinion	8.2	12.8	4.9	14.7	20.0	9.6	8.3

Table 12. Percent who would support agency efforts to build dikes to manipulate water levels in specific wetlands to benefit pike and a number of other species, knowing this would restrict boating access to these areas.

	Primary River Segment of Interest					TOTALS	TOTALS
	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence		
Yes	87.4	86.0	92.2	82.4	76.2	87.1	91.7
No	5.0	9.3	5.2	17.6	4.8	8.3	8.3
No opinion	4.6	4.7	2.6	0	19.0	4.5	0

Table 13. Percent who would support various minimum size limits for muskellunge.

	Primary River Segment of Interest					MEETING MAIL TOTALS	TOTALS
	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence		
54 inch	39.3	79.6	56.8	42.9	75.0	55.9	56.5
48 inch	32.1	12.2	21.0	37.1	15.0	24.3	26.1
44 inch	20.2	2.0	13.6	14.3	5.0	12.5	13.0
No opinion	8.3	6.1	8.6	5.7	5.0	7.4	4.3

Table 14. Percent believing walleye populations are favorable to anglers in section of the river where the meetings were held.

	Primary River Segment of Interest					MEETING MAIL TOTALS	TOTALS
	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence		
Agree	37.2	36.2	35.4	35.3	45.0	36.8	22.7
Unsure	36.0	25.5	34.1	29.4	30.0	32.4	36.4
Disagree	20.9	19.1	20.7	26.5	10.0	20.6	36.4
No opinion	5.8	19.1	9.8	8.8	15.0	10.3	4.5

Table 15. Percent believing yellow perch populations are favorable to anglers in section of the river where the meetings were held.

	Primary River Segment of Interest					MEETING MAIL TOTALS	TOTALS
	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence		
Agree	43.0	52.1	57.3	31.4	25.0	46.0	25.0
Unsure	17.4	18.8	17.1	22.9	10.0	17.5	16.7
Disagree	34.9	10.4	18.3	31.4	50.0	26.3	54.2
No opinion	4.7	18.8	7.3	14.3	15.0	10.2	4.2

Table 16. Opinion regarding the sale of hook-and-line caught yellow perch or panfish (percent)

	Primary River Segment of Interest					MEETING MAIL TOTALS	TOTALS
	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence		
Support	29.1	17.4	28.9	6.1	36.8	24.4	4.2
Do not support	62.8	78.3	63.9	87.9	52.6	68.1	79.2
No opinion	8.1	4.3	7.2	6.1	10.5	26.3	16.7

Table 17. Satisfaction with the current status of the bluegill and pumpkinseed, sunfish, and rock bass fisheries (percent).

	Primary River Segment of Interest					TOTALS	TOTALS
	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence		
Generally satisfied	29.1	40.4	37.3	23.5	36.8	33.8	37.5
Unsure	26.7	23.4	22.9	29.4	26.3	25.0	16.7
Dissatisfied	15.1	8.5	14.5	11.8	5.3	12.5	29.2
No opinion	29.1	27.7	25.3	35.3	31.6	28.7	16.7

Table 18. Satisfaction with the current status of the crappie fishery.

	Primary River Segment of Interest					TOTALS	TOTALS
	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence		
Generally satisfied	16.5	17.0	19.3	18.2	0	16.3	8.3
Unsure	35.3	25.5	32.5	27.3	36.8	31.9	37.5
Dissatisfied	14.1	23.4	13.3	21.2	26.3	17.0	25.0
No opinion	34.1	34.0	34.9	33.3	36.8	34.8	29.2

Table 19. Extent of support for uncommon or unique species such as pugnose shiner, mooneye, and sand darters (percent).

	Primary River Segment of Interest					TOTALS	TOTALS
	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence		
Strongly support	26.7	37.5	29.3	20.0	52.6	30.1	26.1
Moderately support	33.7	20.8	22.0	42.9	31.6	28.7	26.1
Do not support	17.4	25.0	24.4	14.3	10.5	19.9	21.7
No opinion	22.1	16.7	24.4	22.9	5.3	21.3	26.1

Table 20. Extent of support for lake sturgeon management efforts (percent).

	Primary River Segment of Interest					TOTALS	TOTALS
	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence		
Strongly support	44.8	61.7	46.3	48.6	66.7	50.0	54.2
Moderately support	34.5	29.8	28.8	42.9	28.6	32.4	29.2
Do not support	16.1	0	15.0	2.9	4.8	10.3	8.3
No opinion	4.6	8.5	10.0	5.7	0	7.4	8.3

Table 21. Extent of support for American eel management efforts (percent).

	Primary River Segment of Interest					MEETING TOTALS	MAIL TOTALS
	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence		
Strongly support	25.0	41.7	32.1	27.8	33.3	31.2	37.5
Moderately support	23.9	20.8	19.8	33.3	19.0	23.2	20.8
Do not support	40.9	22.9	38.3	27.8	28.6	34.1	25.0
No opinion	10.2	14.6	9.9	11.1	19.0	11.6	16.7

Table 22. Rating of quality of information contained in discussion papers (percent).

	Primary River Segment of Interest					MEETING TOTALS	MAIL TOTALS
	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence		
Very informative	50.0	63.0	58.8	45.5	66.7	56.2	57.1
Somewhat informative	42.3	37.0	39.1	40.8	33.3	38.8	42.9
Not very informative	7.7	0	2.1	13.7	0	5.0	0

Table 23. Rating of quality of information presented at meetings (percent).

	Primary River Segment of Interest					MEETING TOTALS	MAIL TOTALS
	New York Residents	Ontario Residents	Thousand Islands	Middle Corridor	Lake St. Lawrence		
Very informative	37.6	56.3	36.3	41.7	80.0	44.1	40.0
Somewhat informative	56.5	39.6	60.0	47.2	20.0	50.7	50.0
Not very informative	5.9	4.2	3.8	11.1	0	5.1	10.0