



# Lake Michigan Committee

REPRESENTING THE FISHERY MANAGEMENT AGENCIES OF LAKE MICHIGAN

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CHIPPEWA-OTTAWA  
RESOURCE AUTHORITY

ILLINOIS DNR

INDIANA DNR

MICHIGAN DNR

WISCONSIN DNR

EMBARGOED UNTIL  
11:00 a.m., Eastern Time  
Oct. 11, 2016

## FISHERY AGENCIES ADJUST LAKEWIDE PREDATOR STOCKING TO PRESERVE LAKE MICHIGAN PREDATOR-PREY BALANCE

*Agencies seek to sustain diverse salmon and trout fishing opportunities into the future*

**ANN ARBOR, MI** – In response to persistent and comprehensive evidence of declining pelagic prey fish abundance, the Lake Michigan Committee today proposed stocking reductions to better balance trout and salmon predators with their pelagic prey for 2017, while also sustaining Lake Michigan’s diverse trout and salmon fishery. The five-member Lake Michigan Committee comprises all state management agencies that border Lake Michigan and the Chippewa-Ottawa Resource Authority. Recommendations from the committee represent the consensus of its members.

The stocking adjustments, which would commence in spring 2017, underscore the committee’s shared commitment to sustain Lake Michigan’s prized salmon and trout fishery as the lake’s ecosystem shifts. Extensive changes to the lake’s food web, driven primarily by invasive species such as quagga and zebra mussels, have reduced the amount of food available for pelagic prey fish like alewife and rainbow smelt. Other ecosystem changes include enhanced natural reproduction of key predators, especially Chinook salmon, and increasingly lake trout, which intensifies the pressure on a declining pelagic prey fish community. Ongoing research by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and state partners indicate that natural reproduction currently accounts for more than 60 percent of all Chinook salmon in Lake Michigan.

After engaging with respective governments, recreational anglers, charter fishers, partner agencies, community leaders and others, Lake Michigan Committee members will relieve pressure on prey fish by reducing salmon and trout stocking by the predator equivalent of more than 800,000 Chinook during 2017 and the predator equivalent of more than 900,000 Chinook in 2018 to provide sustainable and diverse fishing opportunities throughout the lake. Lakewide stocking of 1.32 million Chinook salmon will occur in 2017 -- a Chinook reduction of 27 percent -- recognizing that naturally produced Chinook salmon sustain much of the existing Chinook salmon fishery.

Lakewide lake trout stocking will be 2.74 million in 2017, a 12 percent reduction. In 2018, 2.54 million lake trout will be stocked. Under this consensus, each jurisdiction will have the ability to adjust stocking levels of certain species using “Chinook salmon equivalents” within its waters to meet the lakewide commitment to better balance predators with their prey. This approach to balancing the predatory demand on alewives and other pelagic prey fish will assist the Lake Michigan Committee with its goal to sustain a diverse salmon and trout fishery while simultaneously supporting its ongoing commitment to lake trout rehabilitation.

“We know from past experiences that these steps will enable us to follow through on our commitment to meet Fish Community Objectives for a multi-species salmon and trout fishery,” said Lake Michigan Committee Chair Jay Wesley, of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. “Carrying out these shared objectives has proven extremely challenging for our member management agencies. However, we believe this consensus stocking strategy, in conjunction with the growing contribution from natural reproduction of Chinook salmon and lake trout, will maintain a more stable predator – prey balance, and support diverse and sustainable fishing opportunities in Lake Michigan.”

Wesley said each state will implement the Lake Michigan Committee guidance with its own strategy in a spirit of collaboration consistent with the committee’s recommended framework.

To monitor effects of the stocking adjustments during 2017 and 2018, and to allow fishery managers to respond to changing conditions in the lake, the Lake Michigan Committee and partner entities will annually conduct comprehensive research and monitoring to evaluate the lake’s predator balance with its prey. These assessment efforts will produce a suite of biological indicators composed of long-term and short-term data collected and analyzed by state, federal, tribal and academic experts throughout the Lake Michigan basin. This collaborative process represents the best available science to promote sustainable and diverse fisheries for Lake Michigan.

The Lake Michigan Committee comprises fishery managers from the Chippewa-Ottawa Resource Authority, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan and Wisconsin. The Lake Michigan Committee’s work is facilitated by the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, a Canadian and U.S. agency on the Great Lakes. The committee meets regularly to share information and develop shared fishery management plans, objectives and policies.

For more information, visit the Lake Michigan Committee online at [www.glfsc.org/lakecom/lmc/lmchome.php](http://www.glfsc.org/lakecom/lmc/lmchome.php).

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