

OUTDOORS

Visiting families land Lake Huron catch



Courtesy photo

Aage Larsen's family from Menomonie, Wisc. and brother-in-law Paul Krihaki's family from Hainesport, N.J. chose Oscoda as the meeting place for a family reunion/anniversary celebration. A fishing trip with Capt. Bill Carmichael, Rainbow Charter Service, on July 22 supplied them with enough fish for their week-long stay at the Oscoda KOA campground. Aage's sons, Nathan and Daniel, joined their uncle and dad to land a catch of two king salmon, seven lake trout, and three pink salmon.

DNR: Lake Huron fishery on the rebound

LANSING – Populations and catch rates for lake trout, walleye, steelhead and other species are hovering near record levels in Lake Huron, said Department of Natural Resources officials last week.

The Lake Huron chinook salmon fishery declined dramatically beginning in 2003 – the result of a steep decline in a forage base of smelt and alewife, according to the DNR, triggered, in part, by an explosion in zebra and quagga mussels and round goby populations, which affected the lake's food web. Chinook feed heavily on alewife and smelt and subsequently dropped to historically low levels, greatly reducing angling opportunities.

According to the DNR, the Great Lakes fishery is valued at \$7 billion annually and is a driving economic force for many communities. Despite the opportunities available to anglers on Lake Huron, most aren't taking advantage of it, according to the DNR.

During 1997, the DNR documented more than 1.3 million angler hours during open water season on 10 ports surveyed each year, while in 2013 that figure dropped to just under 300,000 hours.

"Many fish species are thriving in Lake Huron, offering world-class fishing opportunities for anglers," said Todd Grischke, DNR Lake Huron basin coordinator. "Yet, we've seen a dramatic decline in angler use over the past 10 to 15 years. Essentially, the fish are there, but the anglers are not."

Following the decline in chinook, the Fisheries Division adapted its fisheries management to Lake Huron's changed ecosystem, starting with the near elimination of chinook salmon and all brown trout stocking, contending neither species was thriving in Lake Huron. The focus shifted to native fish species, such as lake trout and walleye, and to species not so dependent on the previous food web such as steelhead and Atlantic salmon.

These species have more diverse diets than chinook, a characteristic fisheries managers believed would translate into healthy populations and better opportunities for anglers, the DNR said.

According to the DNR, that approach has worked well, as several species (lake trout, walleye, steelhead and Atlantic salmon) have become excellent targets for anglers.

"What's really interesting about the Lake Huron fishery is the diversity of the catch," said Frank Krist, chair of the Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee. "It's not unusual to go out fishing and come back with three or four different species of fish. It's exciting to see the lake is beginning to stabilize and provide such varied fishing opportunities."

Lake trout

In partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Chippewa-Ottawa Resource Authority and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, DNR officials say it has been trying to rehabilitate lake trout in Lake Huron since the 1950s, with limited success. Lake trout actually benefited from the smelt and alewife decline as the fish turned to a different food source and didn't experience the reproductive limitations posed by a diet of alewives. This shift has spurred natural reproduction of lake trout annually and produced large numbers of adults.

Walleye

Working in cooperation with constituent organizations in the Saginaw Bay region, the DNR stocked walleye in the bay for more than two decades without significant wild reproduction. Within one year of the alewife decline on Lake Huron, walleye started to flourish thanks to natural reproduction. As a result, in 2008, the DNR said it documented the highest population and catch rate of walleye recorded in the last 30 years. Today, Saginaw Bay's population remains at near record levels and provides benefits throughout the lake, creating walleye fishing opportunities along much of the Lake Huron shore from Lexington to Cheboygan.

Steelhead

With chinook salmon as the primary fishery for 40 years, anglers didn't particularly target steelhead on Lake Huron. But since this species will eat a variety of prey items, it began to flourish with the help of stocking by the DNR. Annually about 500,000 steelhead are stocked in Lake Huron tributaries. The catch rate in 2012 was the highest recorded by the DNR in the 25 years data have been collected. While 2013 saw a slight drop in the catch rate, it was still the fourth-highest level recorded since 1997, according to the DNR.

Additional species

On top of steelhead, walleye

and lake trout, additional opportunities are plentiful in Lake Huron, including for Atlantic salmon and yellow perch, especially in the Drummond Island and Les Cheneaux Islands area, according to the DNR. Beginning in 2012, the DNR began an Atlantic salmon stocking program in Lake Huron and its tributaries, capitalizing on this species' feeding behavior and hoping to provide additional fishing opportunities for river, pier and offshore anglers.

To learn more about Lake Huron fishing, visit www.michigan.gov/fishing.

Send your fishing photos

Reader photographs of successful fishing trips are always welcome.

E-mail photos in original format to: editor@iosconews.com or editor1@oscodapress.com, or deliver a CD or 35mm picture to the offices of either the Oscoda Press or Iosco County News-Herald.

Please include the name of the angler and city of residence, also a contact number, the date and place the fish was taken, species, bait used and size.



LOST "Sgt." Scout My 7-year constant companion

Elderly gentleman offers a substantial reward for info on whereabouts or where he has decided to hold up.

He is a mix border collie-hound, very friendly. 45 lbs., and is black with rust-bronze markings. Believed to have stashed himself somewhere along the Oscoda shore area.

Any info would be greatly appreciated. Please call Lamar at Gaslite Cond. on Water Ave., #11

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Questions?

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