

# Lake Erie Committee

REPRESENTING THE FISHERY MANAGEMENT AGENCIES OF LAKE ERIE AND LAKE ST. CLAIR

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## 2013 Walleye and Yellow Perch Catch Levels Recommended for Lake Erie

### *Recommended allowable walleye and yellow perch harvest to remain relatively stable in 2013*

**NIAGARA FALLS, NY** – Fishery managers from Michigan, New York, Ohio, Ontario, and Pennsylvania, meeting as the Lake Erie Committee, recommended a 2013 total allowable catch (TAC) of 3.356 million walleye and 12.237 million pounds of yellow perch<sup>1</sup>. These recommended harvest levels represent a decrease in allowable walleye and yellow perch harvest for 2013 and reflect that fish hatches in recent years have been weak. These TAC recommendations were produced after extensive lakewide biological assessments, analysis, discussions, and consultations with stakeholders. The primary mechanism to discuss walleye and yellow perch management in Lake Erie is called the Lake Erie Percid Management Advisory Group, or LEPMAG. Through this process, stakeholder input directly informs the development of harvest strategies. This structured stakeholder engagement reflects the committee's interest in involving the fishing community in discussions related to management of the lake's walleye and yellow perch fisheries.

The Lake Erie Committee recommends establishing TACs at levels consistent with Lake Erie's biological conditions while also providing commercial and recreational fishers with a level of stability, as informed through LEPMAG discussions. However, as reported in previous years, the committee remains concerned about changing environmental conditions in Lake Erie and the potential for future production, particularly in western Lake Erie.

### **WALLEYE**

Using an interim harvest policy developed through the LEPMAG process, the Lake Erie Committee recommended a 2013 walleye TAC of 3.356 million fish, compared to the TAC of 3.487 million fish in 2012. In 2013 it is anticipated that the 2010 year class will be the major contributor to the fishery, along with moderate contributions from other year classes including the exceptional 2003 cohort. Due to a series of poor year classes, the population in 2014 is expected to decline, potentially leading to lower TACs in future years as the fish from the strong year classes age and the total size of the walleye stock decreases. The decreased TAC recommendation for 2013 reflects the committee's goal to manage the lakewide fish stocks sustainably, recognizing stakeholder input.

The TAC is recommended by the Lake Erie Committee and is allocated to Ohio, Michigan and Ontario by an area-based sharing formula of walleye habitat within each jurisdiction in the western and central basins of the lake. Under a 2013 TAC of 3.356 million fish, Ohio will be entitled to 1.715 million fish, Ontario 1.445 million fish, and Michigan 0.196 million fish. The majority of harvest comes from the west end of Lake Erie and, as such, the walleye fisheries of eastern Lake Erie remain outside the quota management area. Harvest limits in that area are established separately by Ontario, Pennsylvania, and New York.

<sup>1</sup> Walleye are allocated by number of fish; yellow perch are allocated in pounds.

The recommended TAC is based on updated walleye abundance estimates (incorporating suggestions from LEPMAG) from the Walleye Task Group, comprising scientists and field biologists from Ontario and the Great Lakes states who work together to share data and reach consensus on biological conditions. Senior fishery managers consider the biological condition and socioeconomic factors in determining a TAC recommendation. Each jurisdiction is responsible for implementing the TAC.

## **YELLOW PERCH**

The Lake Erie Committee recommended a 2013 binational TAC of 12.237 million pounds of yellow perch, a 10% decrease from last year's allocation of 13.637 million pounds. The Yellow Perch Task Group, made up of biologists from all jurisdictions on the lake, estimated yellow perch abundances in Lake Erie and reported to the Lake Erie Committee. As the Lake Erie Committee deliberated on the yellow perch TAC, it considered that harvestable stocks are lower than last year; the TAC for 2013 reflects the committee's consideration of the importance of relative stability of harvest.

The five jurisdictions on the lake divide Lake Erie's allocation of yellow perch based on formulas by management unit. Under the 2013 TAC recommendation, Ontario will receive 5.969 million pounds, Ohio 4.896 million pounds, Michigan 0.164 million pounds, New York 0.259 million pounds, and Pennsylvania 0.949 million pounds.

## **THE LAKE ERIE PERCID MANAGEMENT ADVISORY GROUP (LEPMAG)**

The LEPMAG, first convened by the Lake Erie Committee in 2010, is a new method to enhance stakeholder involvement in the Lake Erie walleye and yellow perch decision-making process. The primary purpose of LEPMAG is for fishery managers and stakeholders to work together to update the harvest policies for walleye and yellow perch. This group consists of stakeholders from all jurisdictions surrounding Lake Erie, Lake Erie managers, and agency staff. LEPMAG is facilitated by Michigan State University's Quantitative Fisheries Center.

From November, 2010 through February, 2012, LEPMAG members were involved in a series of five facilitated workshops that defined common fisheries objectives for the Lake Erie walleye population and described the current assessment programs, data sources, stock assessment model, and Lake Erie Committee harvest policy. During the final workshop of the first round of LEPMAG meetings in February 2012, a Technical Review Panel, comprised of modeling and fisheries management experts, reviewed the statistical catch at age stock assessment model and made recommendations for the LEPMAG to consider with respect to potential improvements within the stock assessment model. The Quantitative Fishers Center incorporated these recommendations into a formal walleye management strategy evaluation.

## **LAKE ERIE COMMITTEE**

The Lake Erie Committee comprises fishery managers from Michigan, New York, Ohio, Ontario and Pennsylvania. The committee's work is facilitated by the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, a Canadian and U.S. agency on the Great Lakes. Each year the committee recommends a total allowable catch for walleye and yellow perch. Total allowable catch represents the number or weight of fish recommended to be caught by sport and commercial fishers without putting the fisheries at risk. The individual agencies implement the recommended total allowable catch. For more information, visit the Lake Erie Committee online at [www.glfc.org/lec](http://www.glfc.org/lec).