

Walleye Stocking Update

By Tim Lathrop and Phil Wolbrink

I'm watching the forecast daily and have been for weeks. Eagerly awaiting "ice out" for the season. (Note: this article was penned April 28th looking out on Thousand Island.) We have a local contest on our peninsula to guess the day/time the ice goes out. The winner gets bragging rights and is owed an Old Fashioned by all the participants. I had 4/22 picked. I guess I'll owe someone a beverage. The winner this year will be owed 34 Old Fashioneds. It's going to be a good summer for someone. The excitement builds for more time on the Chain and the walleye opener!



My neighbor, Jim, this winter. They do exist!!!

Phil and I are working together on securing walleye fingerlings this year. It has been an education for me and I thank Phil! You may be aware that the CCROA has struggled procuring walleye fingerlings for the last 3 years due to a variety of reasons. First, I figured it would be good to share some information about the mighty walleye. It takes about 3 years for a walleye (either sex) to grow to 12" in "Northern" waters. The female fish begin to mature at 4 years/15" and the males begin to mature at 3 years/12" and reach sexual maturity at around 16" (5 years). The females become sexually mature (breed) at about 7 years/ 20". You can expect a 25" female to be about 10 years old and a 30" female to be 20 years old. I'm not a fish biologist. I gathered this information from a MN DNR site. Some of you may be thinking the same thing I am, why is the walleye size limit (MI) 15"? Neither gender are reproducing at that size! Perhaps a topic for later discussions.

The fingerlings that have historically been stocked are in the 7-8" range. We might expect that the last fish we were able to procure for stocking are still not breeding. If our stocks are decreasing, the gap from our last stocking in 2019 is likely to begin impacting the walleye biomass next year when those 2019 males are sexually mature.

Below is the history of the CCROA walleye stocking program from the Michigan perspective:

Release Lake	Strain	Date	Number	Avg. Length
THOUSAND ISLAND LAKE	Bay De Noc	10/7/2019	2666	7.09
LINDSLEY LAKE	Bay De Noc	10/7/2019	2666	7.09
EAST BAY LAKE	Bay De Noc	10/7/2019	2666	7.09
THOUSAND ISLAND LAKE	Bay De Noc	10/10/2018	8000	7.09
THOUSAND ISLAND LAKE	no data	10/17/2017	2500	7.09
EAST BAY LAKE	no data	10/17/2017	2500	7.09
THOUSAND ISLAND LAKE	Bay De Noc	10/17/2016	5000	8
THOUSAND ISLAND LAKE	no data	10/19/2015	5000	6
THOUSAND ISLAND LAKE	Bay De Noc	10/3/2014	5000	7
CISCO LAKE	Bay De Noc	10/18/2013	5000	7.5
CISCO LAKE	Bay De Noc	10/15/2012	5000	6.69
CISCO LAKE	no data	10/26/2011	6500	7.01
THOUSAND ISLAND LAKE	Bay De Noc	6/20/2003	9516	1.02
CISCO LAKE	Bay De Noc	7/5/2000	5565	2.09
CISCO LAKE	Bay De Noc	6/24/1999	10237	1.57
THOUSAND ISLAND LAKE	Bay De Noc	7/14/1998	8000	3.35
CISCO LAKE	Bay De Noc	6/19/1998	13703	1.54
THOUSAND ISLAND LAKE	no data	10/24/1997	5300	7.01
CISCO LAKE	no data	10/24/1996	4200	7.13
THOUSAND ISLAND LAKE	Bay De Noc	6/28/1995	25023	1.42

In the last 10 years we've released about 41,000 walleye. This raw data was gathered from the MI DNR website.

So, why have we not stocked any fish since 2019? The three years following our last stocking were tough years for the fishery that is our source for the fingerlings. COVID shut 2020 down, predators knocked out the 2021 class, and a catastrophic pond failure wiped out the 2022 class. Is there only one source, you may ask? No. There are other fishery sources for walleye; however, the DNR requires that we source the "Bay de Noc" genetic strain of walleye for our waters. This limits our opportunities to seek fish from many aquaculture fisheries. We did find a source for 8,000-10,000 fingerlings for planting right now, but they are the "St Marys" strain. At this point the DNR has stated that we are to attempt to procure the Bay de Noc strain this Fall. If we are not successful, we have been given the green light to procure the St Marys strain for Spring of 2024. We have the budget, and we want the fish!