

## **A Strong Step Forward for Walleye in the Cisco Chain**

**By Tim Lathrop, CCROA Board Member**

The Cisco Chain of Lakes—spanning the Michigan-Wisconsin border—has long been a haven for outdoor enthusiasts and anglers, with walleye at the heart of the fishery. Thanks to the dedication of local riparian owners and volunteers, walleye stocking efforts have continued for decades. Now, we're proud to share that those efforts are receiving renewed validation and support from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR).

### **DNR Endorsement Backed by Data**

Earlier this year, MDNR's newly appointed Fisheries Biologist, Kris Nault, conducted a comprehensive review of decades of survey data from the MDNR, WDNR, and GLIFWC. His findings confirm what many of us have long believed: **targeted walleye stocking is not only viable—it's essential for parts of the Chain.**

#### **Key Findings:**

- **Uneven Populations:**
  - *North Lake Group:* ~5,761 adult walleye (1.9/acre)
  - *South Lake Group:* ~35,062 adult walleye (17.5/acre)
- **Growth Trends:**
  - Walleye growth in the north was slightly below state averages
  - Growth in the south was slower, likely due to overpopulation and competition
- **Declining Natural Reproduction:**
  - Natural reproduction has fallen in Cisco and Thousand Island Lakes since the late 1990s
- **Stocking Impact:**
  - 72% of Cisco Lake and 64% of Thousand Island Lake walleye are from past stocking efforts

### **What's Next: A Collaborative Plan**

MDNR's new strategy—developed in alignment with CCROA's goals—charts a sustainable future for the Cisco Chain fishery:

1. **Fall 2025:**  
CCROA may stock up to 10,000 fall fingerlings in Cisco or Thousand Island Lakes using approved strains

2. **Biennial Stocking Cycle:**

Stocking every other year allows time to assess effectiveness and maintain balance

3. **State-Sponsored Stocking (2027):**

MDNR will submit for state-led stocking, beginning in 2026 for deployment in 2027

4. **Ongoing Monitoring & Research:**

Collaboration between MDNR and other agencies will help guide adjustments over time

5. **Stocking Flexibility:**

Stocking may be paused if it risks harming naturally reproducing populations

*Note: Lindsley and Fishhawk Lakes will not be stocked due to high walleye density and poor growth rates.*

**A Community Milestone**

This progress is the result of years of persistence and collaboration among CCROA members, volunteers, and state agencies. Special thanks go to Kris Nault for his transparent, data-driven leadership and partnership.

As we prepare our 2025 permit application and track the state's 2026 proposal, we encourage all CCROA members to stay engaged. Your continued support—financial and otherwise—fuels this important work.

Together, we're building a healthier, more sustainable fishery for future generations.