Inland Seas Angler

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Special Report – Lake Erie

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Highlights of the Annual Lake Committee Meetings

Great Lakes Fishery Commission proceedings, Saulte Saint Marie, Ontario

This first of a series of special reports is an extensive summary of Lake Erie. These lake committee reports are from the annual Lake Committee meetings hosted by the Great Lakes Fishery Commission. We encourage reproduction with appropriate credit to the GLSFC and the agencies involved. Our thanks to the staffs of the GLFC, OMNR, USFWS, USGS, ILDNR, INDNR, MDNR, MNDNR, NYSDEC, PAFBC, ODNR, and WDNR for their contributions to these science documents.

Lake Erie

Index of Reports

Abbreviation	Expansion
CPH	Catch per hectare
CWT	Coded Wire Tag
DEC	NY Dept. of Environment Conservation
DFO	Dept. of Fisheries and Oceans
LEBS	Lake Erie Biological Station
LEC	Lake Erie Committee
ODNR	Ohio Dept. of Natural Resources
OMNRF	ON Ministry Natural Resources, Forestry
OSU	The Ohio State University
SLCP	Sea Lamprey Control Program
USFWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
WTG	Walleye Task Group
YAO	Age 1 and older
YOY	Young of the year (age 0)

Lake Erie Poised for Another Year of Excellent Fishing

COLUMBUS, Ohio – Lake Erie anglers can expect the 2025 fishing season to offer continued world-class catches, according to the Ohio DNR. As walleye from Lake Erie's recent large hatches continue to grow, anglers can expect a breadth of sizes and increased trophy potential in the Walleye Capital of the World. Additionally, a stable yellow perch population in Lake Erie's west zone will provide good fishing in 2025, while lower catch rates are expected to continue in the central and east zones.

Successful walleye hatches from previous years have now reached Fish Ohio size (qualifying size 28 inches). In 2024,

anglers submitted 980 Fish Ohio walleye (longest measured at 34 inches) and 398 Fish Ohio yellow perch (13-inch qualifying size, longest measured at 15½ inches). Learn more about the Fish Ohio program at wildohio.gov.

Lake Erie walleye and yellow perch fisheries are managed through an interagency quota system. Each jurisdiction regulates its catches with annually determined harvest levels that ensure sustainability. The most recent quotas were announced by the Lake Erie Committee on Thursday, March 20. While most daily harvest limits remain unchanged in 2025, the yellow perch daily limit in Ohio's east zone, from Fairport Harbor to Conneaut, will decrease from 30 fish to 20 fish beginning on May 1, 2025.

Walleye
Lake Erie, The Walleye Capital of the World, continues to offer exceptional fishing. The walleye daily limit on Lake Erie is six fish per angler with a 15-inch minimum length requirement. Walleye hatch success has been well above average for seven of the past 10 years, including the three largest hatches ever surveyed. In 2025, anglers will mostly catch abundant 2- to 6-year-old-fish ranging from 15 to 24 inches. Larger fish from 2015 and earlier hatches will provide chances to reel in a Fish Ohio qualifying walleye (minimum 28 inches).

Abundant young fish will show up in the catch and range from 9 to 14 inches, with an increasing number of 2-year-olds reaching 15 inches as the season progresses. Anglers are encouraged to release sub-legal fish with as little handling as possible so they can contribute to the future fishery.

Yellow perch
Yellow perch abundance in the west zone, from Toledo to Huron, is stable as a large year class of 4-year-old fish will anchor the population in 2025. The best success is anticipated from July through mid-August when the water temperature is above 76 degrees, and again from mid-October through November as adult perch move to shallower water to feed at water temperatures below 60 degrees. Warm water during July and August provided a majority of angler yellow perch harvest in 2024. Abundant young perch from 7 to 10 inches will dominate the catch, with jumbo 12-inch and larger fish from older year classes also contributing to the catch.

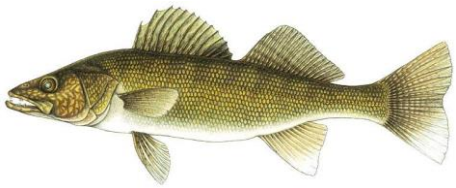
Lake Erie's central zone, from Huron to Fairport Harbor, continues to experience lower yellow perch abundance, primarily driven by poor to moderate hatches during the past decade. While catch rates are expected to remain low, late season fishing in 2024 provided some limits for anglers from Vermilion to Avon and off Cleveland.

In the east zone, from Fairport Harbor to Conneaut, a few moderate hatches from 2022 and earlier will provide seasonal catches. A reduction in the Lake Erie Committee's total allowable catch in this zone will decrease the daily limit to 20 fish per angler starting May 1, 2025. Catch rates are expected to remain low during the 2025 season, except for times such as late fall when adult perch congregate in larger schools near harbors. Ohio's east zone often provides opportunities for anglers seeking jumbo yellow perch. Conservative quotas ensure that sustainable spawning stocks allow for population recovery. Yellow perch daily limits for 2025 will be 30 perch in the west zone, 10 in the central zone, and 20 in the east zone.

Smallmouth bass and largemouth bass
Smallmouth bass and largemouth bass fishing in 2025 is expected to be exceptional, including trophy catches. The daily limit is five bass per angler, with a 14-inch minimum size requirement through April 30, 2025, and again from June 28, 2025, to Feb. 28, 2026. During the spawning season, from May 1 to June 27, 2025, anglers may harvest one bass per day with a minimum size requirement of 18 inches.

Lake Erie fishing reports, information on Lake Erie research and management programs, fisheries resources, maps, and links to other Lake Erie web resources are available at wildohio.gov. ✧

Lake Erie Walleye Task Group March 2025



This summary report highlights elements of the 2025 Walleye Task Group (WTG) annual report. The complete WTG report is available from the Great Lakes Fishery Commission's Lake Erie Committee website at http://www.glfc.org/lake-erie-committee.php, or upon request from a Lake Erie Committee, Standing Technical Committee, or WTG representative.

The WTG partitions the lake into five management units (MUs) for data analysis and managing Walleye (Fig 1). A statistical catch-at-age (SCAA) model is run for a combined west-central area (MUs 1 to 3) to produce abundance estimates that are used with reference points and a harvest control rule to generate a Recommended Allowable Harvest (RAH). The WTG assesses the status of Walleye and their resulting fisheries in MUs 4&5, but it does not generate an RAH due to uncertainties around the mixing of western and eastern basin populations.

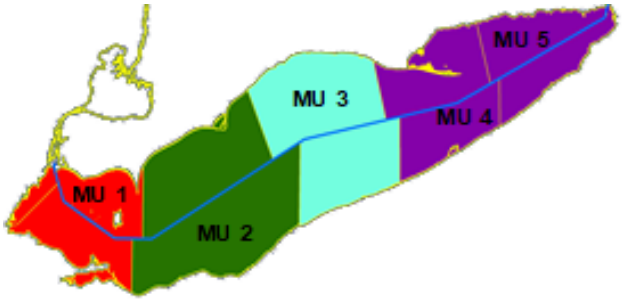


Figure 1. Lake Erie walleye management units

2024 Fishery Review

The total allowable catch (TAC) for 2024 in the quota area (MUs 1 to 3) was 12.858 million fish. This allocation represented a 5% decrease from the 2023 TAC. Total harvest in the quota area was 8.522 million fish, or 66% of the 2024 TAC. Harvest in the non-TAC area (MUs 4&5) was 0.788 million fish. Lake-wide Walleye harvest was estimated at 9.310 million fish. Both sport fishery (3.193 million fish) and commercial fishery (6.118 million fish) harvests were above long-term (1975-2023) averages (sport = 2.334 million fish and commercial = 2.362 million fish). Total lake-wide commercial fishery effort was 17,082 km of gill net, which increased from 2023 but remained below the 1975-2023 average (18,515 km). Commercial effort increased in MUs 2 and 4&5 but decreased in MUs 1 and 3. Lake-wide sport effort was 3.710 million angler hours, which is below the 1975-2023 average (4.946 million angler hours). Sport effort decreased in MUs 1 and 2 but increased in MUs 3 and 4&5. The 2024 harvest rates in the lake-wide sport fishery (0.81 fish/hour) remained high, as did those for the commercial fishery (358.2 fish/km gill net). Sport harvest rates increased in all MUs relative to 2023. Gill net harvest rates increased in MUs 1 and 2 but decreased in MUs 3 and 4&5. In all gear types combined, age 3 (39%; 2021year class), age 5 (23%; 2019 year class and older), and age 4 (14%; 2020 year class) Walleye were the most commonly harvested ages lake-wide.

Catch-at-Age Abundance Estimate and Projected 2025 and 2026 Recruitment

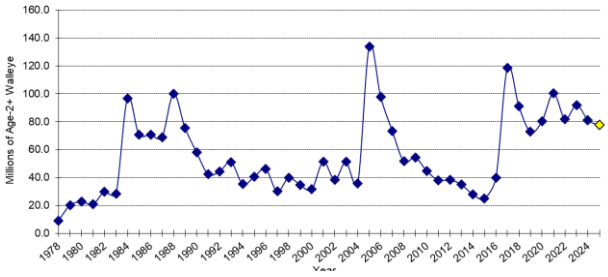


Fig 2. Population estimates of Walleye ages 2 and older 1978 to 2024 (blue points), and the projection for 2025 (yellow point), from the WTG's SCAA model

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Based on the 2025 SCAA model, the 2024 population estimate was 80.9 million age 2 and older Walleye (Fig 2). The abundance of age 2 (2022 year class) fish was estimated to be 20.5 million and was 2nd most abundant year class in 2024, with age 3 (2021 year class) being the most abundant. Using the 2025 SCAA model, the number of age 2 recruits entering the population in 2025 (2023 year class) and 2026 (2024 year class) were projected to be 25.1 million and 5.2 million fish, respectively. The projected abundance of age 2 and older Walleye in the MU 1 to 3 population is 77.4 million Walleye in 2025.

Age 2 Walleye from the 2023 cohort (25.1 million fish) are projected to be the most abundant year class in 2025 followed by age 4 (17.1 million; 2021year class) and age 3 fish (14.1 million; 2022 year class). The projected spawning stock biomass (SSB) for 2025 and 2026 is 69.732 and 59.196 million kilograms, respectively.

2025 Recommended Allowable Harvest (RAH)

Beginning in 2015, the current Walleye management plan was implemented and includes the WTG's SCAA model and a probabilistic harvest control rule (HCR). The HCR sets the target fishing rate at 60% of the instantaneous fishing mortality rate at maximum sustainable yield, with an accompanying limit reference point that will reduce the target fishing rate beginning at 20% of the unfished spawning stock biomass (20%). A probabilistic control rule, P-star (P*), was set at 0.05 and was incorporated to ensure that SSB in 2026 is not below the 20% threshold after fishing in 2025.

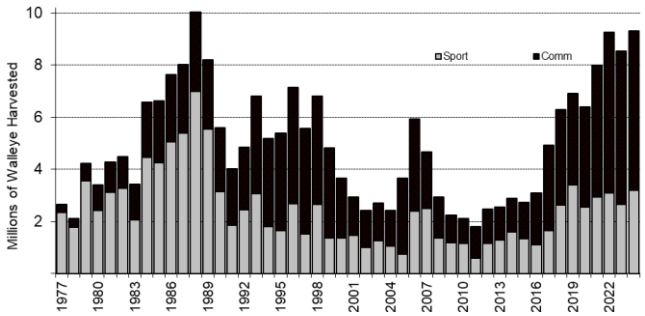

Fig 3. Lake-wide harvest of Lake Erie Walleye by sport and commercial fisheries during 1977-2024

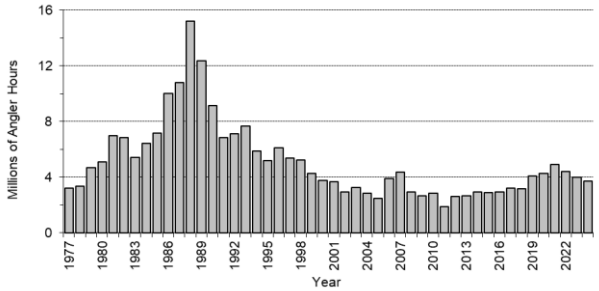

Fig 3. Lake-wide total effort (angler hours) by U.S. sport fisheries for Lake Erie Walleye during 1977-2024.

In addition, there is a limitation of TAC variation from one year to the next of ± 20% to implement a measure of fishery stability. Using results from the 2025 SCAA model, the harvest policy, and selectivity estimates from the current fisheries, a mean RAH of 11.373 million fish was calculated for 2025, with a range of 9.209 to 13.537 million fish. The TAC range for 2025 based on the SCAA model, the harvest policy, and the ± 20% TAC constraint from the previous year is 10.286 to 13.537 million fish.

Table 3. Annual fishing effort for Lake Erie walleye by gear, management unit, and agency from 2014 to 2024. Means contain data from 1975 to 2023.

Table 3. Annual fishing effort for Lake Erie walleye by gear, management unit, and agency from 2014 to 2024. Means contain data from 1975 to 2023.

	Sport Fishery [a]															Commercial Fishery [b]				
	Unit 1				Unit 2			Unit 3			Units 4 & 5					Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Units 4&5	
Year	OH	MI	ON [c,d]	Total	OH	ON [c,d]	Total	OH	ON [c,d]	Total	ON [c,d]	PA	NY	Total	Total	ON	ON	ON	ON	Total
2014	1,552	131	101	1,683	459	85	459	441	71	441	70	171	187	358	2,940	7,351	4,426	2,911	254	14,943
2015	1,430	165	--	1,595	564	--	564	341	--	341	--	162	215	377	2,876	6,980	6,487	5,379	792	19,637
2016	1,514	236	--	1,750	439	--	439	397	--	397	--	141	217	358	2,944	6,980	7,969	4,523	1,448	20,920
2017	1,351	187	--	1,538	726	--	726	501	--	501	--	228	213	441	3,207	8,056	7,239	3,636	1,527	20,458
2018	1,239	261	--	1,500	813	--	813	354	--	354	--	248	229	477	3,144	5,215	7,421	2,636	1,896	17,168
2019	1,739	265	--	2,004	1,036	--	1,036	307	--	307	--	439	297	736	4,083	4,165	6,365	2,402	1,353	14,285
2020	1,111	301	--	1,413	1,511	--	1,511	659	--	659	--	395	279	674	4,257	5,759	6,576	3,049	1,738	17,122
2021	2,148	325	--	2,473	1,430	--	1,430	584	--	584	--	258	183	441	4,928	7,279	6,528	3,168	1,236	18,212
2022	1,891	275	--	2,166	1,219	--	1,219	498	--	498	--	306	224	530	4,412	7,017	7,013	2,642	924	17,596
2023	1,855	266	--	2,121	1,018	--	1,018	376	--	376	--	285	198	483	3,998	6,691	6,000	2,965	963	16,619
2024	1,352	249	52	1,601	944	147	944	651	108	651	74	303	211	514	3,710	5,904	6,827	2,873	1,478	17,082
Mean	2,754	618	102	3,426	799	62	812	423	111	450	106	233	231	303	4,946	8,502	5,746	4,260	831	18,515

[a] Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania and New York sport units of effort are thousands of angler hours.

[b] Estimated Standard (Total) Effort in kilometers of gill net = (walleye targeted effort x walleye total harvest) / walleye targeted harvest.

[c] Ontario sport effort values were estimated with a lake-wide aerial (2014) and access point (2024) creel surveys. Values are in thousands of rod hours

[d] Ontario sport fishing effort is not included in area and lake-wide totals due to effort reporting in rod hours

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Yellow Perch Task Group Report March 2025

The lakewide total allowable catch (TAC) of Yellow Perch in 2024 was 6.554 million pounds. This allocation was less than a 1% decrease from a TAC of 6.573 million pounds in 2023. For Yellow Perch assessment and allocation, Lake Erie is partitioned into four management units (MUs; Fig 1). The 2024 TAC allocation was 2.861, 0.572, 2.654 and 0.467 million pounds for MUs 1 through 4, respectively. The lakewide harvest of Yellow Perch in 2024 was 3.500 million pounds, or 53% of the total 2024 TAC, which was a 19% decrease from the 2023 harvest of 4.305 million pounds. Harvest from MUs 1 through 4 was 2.057, 0.352, 0.798, and 0.293 million pounds, respectively. The portion of TAC harvested was 72%, 62%, 30%, and 63% in MUs 1 through 4, respectively. In 2024, Ontario harvested 2.255 million pounds, followed by Ohio (1.072 million lbs.), Michigan (0.072 million lbs.), Pennsylvania (0.058 million lbs.) and New York (0.043 million lbs.).

In 2024, targeted (i.e., small mesh) commercial gill net effort in Canadian waters decreased from 2023 effort by 9%, 33% and 5% in MU1, MU3 and MU4, respectively, and was nearly unchanged in MU2. Sport angling effort in U.S. waters during 2024 was highest in MU1 and lowest in MU3. Angler effort in 2024 increased 699% in MU2 and by 143% in MU3, while it decreased 43% in both MU1 and MU4 compared to 2023. Although angler effort went up a large percentage in MU2 and MU3, angling effort in U.S. waters of these management units were still low for the time series. Fishing effort by jurisdiction and gear type is presented in Table 2. Ontario targeted commercial gill net harvest rates in 2024 increased by 28% and 12% relative to 2023 rates in MU1 and MU2, respectively, while decreasing in MU3 by 12% and MU4 by 22%.

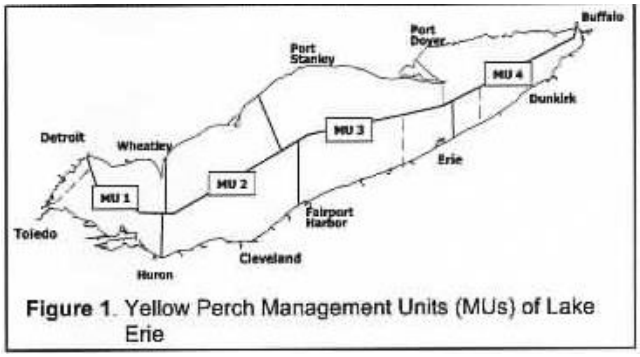
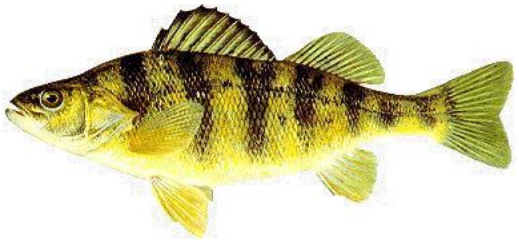


Figure 1. Yellow Perch Management Units (MUs) of Lake Erie



Trends in angling harvest rates (fish harvested per angler hour) for 2024 compared to 2023 were not consistent across states within MUs. Harvest per angler hour decreased in both Michigan (-32%) and Ohio (-19%) waters of MU1. In the central basin, the sport angler harvest rate increased in the Ohio waters of MU2 (+17%) although the rate of 0.8 fish/hour is still one of the lowest in the time series. In MU3, the sport harvest rate in Ohio waters decreased (69%) and was the second lowest catch rate in the time series, while increasing in Pennsylvania (900%) waters of MU3 from the lowest value observed in 2023. In MU4, harvest rates increased slightly in New York waters (2%) while declining 55% in Pennsylvania waters. In 2024, trap net harvest rates in U.S. waters increased from 2023 rates by 22% in MU2 and 5% in MU4 and decreased 2% in MU1 and 14% in MU3.

Table 1. Lake Erie Yellow Perch harvest by jurisdiction (pounds) and gear type for 2024

MU	Harvest by jurisdiction (lbs)								Total (lbs)
	Michigan	Ontario	Ohio		Pennsylvania		New York		
	sport	all commercial*	sport	commercial trap net	sport	commercial trap net	sport	commercial trap net	
1	71,968	1,181,781	366,987	436,029					2,056,765
2		247,363	27,227	77,788					352,378
3		578,286	6,921	156,864	2,777	52,808			797,656
4		247,988			1,948	0	31,709	11,686	293,331
Total	71,968	2,255,418	401,135	670,681	4,725	52,808	31,709	11,686	3,500,130

* small mesh, large mesh, trap net and trawl harvest combined

Table 2. Lake Erie Yellow Perch fishing effort by jurisdiction and gear type for 2024.

MU	Effort by jurisdiction							
	Michigan	Ontario	Ohio		Pennsylvania		New York	
	sport (angler hours)	commercial (km gill net)*	sport (angler hours)	commercial (trap net lifts)	sport (angler hours)	commercial (trap net lifts)	sport (angler hours)	commercial (trap net lifts)
1	91,154	6,542	493,672	7,169				
2		1,591	32,063	285				
3		3,955	7,903	1,648	3,719	203		
4		1,570			2,305	0	16,672	172
Total	91,154	13,659	533,638	9,102	6,024	203	16,672	172

Abundance Estimate for 2025

Population size for 1975 to 2024 for each MU was estimated by statistical catch-at-age analysis (SCAA). The SCAA model incorporates a recruitment index that is used to project total abundance estimates to 2025. Using the model, 2025 age-2-and older Yellow Perch abundances are projected to decrease by 12%, 8%, and 19% in MU1, MU2, and MU4, respectively, relative to the 2024 abundance estimates and increase 35% in MU3. The 2025 Age-2-and-older Yellow Perch abundance projections are 39.926, 42.303, 66.633, and 6.584 million fish in management units 1 through 4, respectively.

Recommended Allowable Harvest (RAH) for 2025

Harvest control rules (HCR) are comprised of:

- Target fishing mortality as a percent of the fishing mortality at maximum sustainable yield (Fmsy)
- Limit reference point of the biomass at maximum sustainable yield (Bmsy)
- Probabilistic risk tolerance, P*=0.20
- A limit on the annual change in TAC of ± 20% (when P(SSB≤Bmsy) < P*)

Target fishing rates and limit reference points are estimated annually using results from the SCAA models. Limit reference points and target fishing rates for each management unit are presented in Table 2. Target fishing rates are reduced when the probability of the projected spawning stock biomass being equal to or less than the limit reference point (Bmsy) is greater than 0.20 (P*). Fishing rates are applied to population estimates and standard errors, to determine minimum, mean, and maximum RAH values for each management unit.

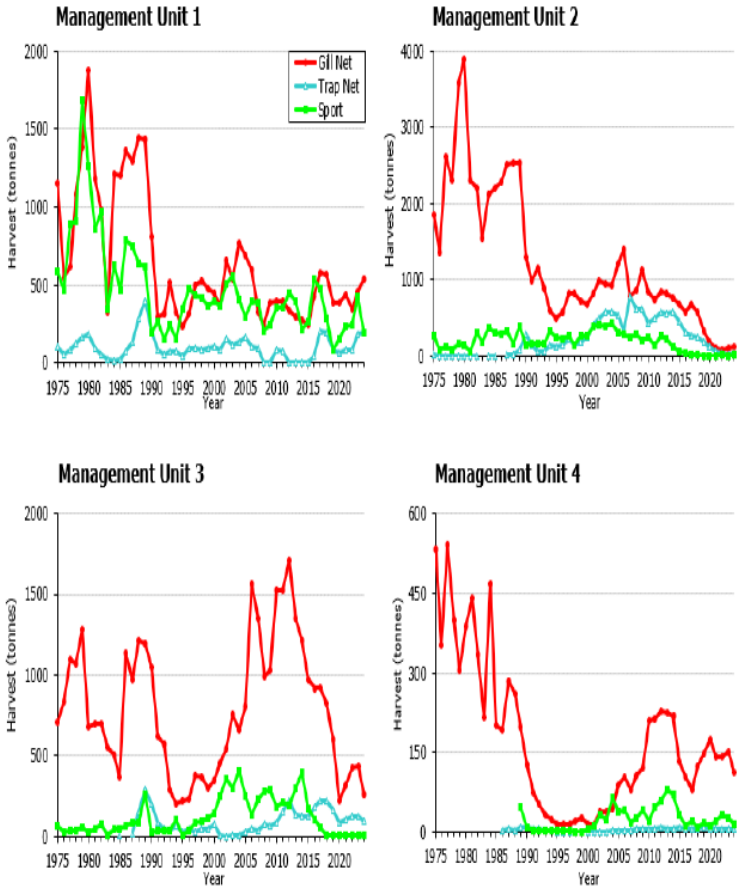


Figure 1.2. Historic Lake Erie Yellow Perch harvest (metric tonnes) by management unit and gear type.

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Table 1.1. Lake Erie Yellow Perch harvest in pounds by management unit (Unit) and agency, 2015-2024

		Ontario*		Ohio		Michigan		Pennsylvania		New York		Total
	Year	Harvest	%	Harvest	%	Harvest	%	Harvest	%	Harvest	%	Harvest
Unit 1	2015	541,938	48	485,744	43	94,225	8	--	--	--	--	1,121,907
	2016	947,052	42	886,068	40	397,044	18	--	--	--	--	2,230,164
	2017	1,277,587	46	1,239,575	45	255,605	9	--	--	--	--	2,772,767
	2018	1,262,229	54	956,016	41	107,789	5	--	--	--	--	2,326,034
	2019	847,476	69	357,533	29	15,745	1	--	--	--	--	1,220,754
	2020	857,561	64	391,231	29	84,613	6	--	--	--	--	1,333,405
	2021	959,259	58	625,787	38	69,575	4	--	--	--	--	1,654,621
	2022	770,476	51	658,935	44	67,667	5	--	--	--	--	1,497,078
	2023	1,016,545	43	1,254,927	53	104,388	4	--	--	--	--	2,375,860
	2024	1,181,781	57	803,016	39	71,968	3	--	--	--	--	2,056,765
Unit 2	2015	1,489,433	57	1,131,993	43	--	--	--	--	--	--	2,621,426
	2016	1,283,379	62	792,869	38	--	--	--	--	--	--	2,076,248
	2017	1,498,437	70	643,554	30	--	--	--	--	--	--	2,141,991
	2018	1,271,365	69	559,122	31	--	--	--	--	--	--	1,830,487
	2019	740,490	63	433,477	37	--	--	--	--	--	--	1,173,967
	2020	407,553	60	268,213	40	--	--	--	--	--	--	675,766
	2021	205,377	63	121,200	37	--	--	--	--	--	--	326,577
	2022	177,919	60	117,860	40	--	--	--	--	--	--	295,779
	2023	210,716	73	76,269	27	--	--	--	--	--	--	286,985
	2024	247,363	70	105,015	30	--	--	--	--	--	--	352,378
Unit 3	2015	2,131,211	77	572,736	21	--	--	77,558	3	--	--	2,781,505
	2016	2,020,470	76	522,549	20	--	--	107,972	4	--	--	2,650,991
	2017	2,027,235	77	504,223	19	--	--	107,335	4	--	--	2,638,793
	2018	1,807,645	78	460,797	20	--	--	54,085	2	--	--	2,322,527
	2019	1,328,966	79	320,756	19	--	--	38,953	2	--	--	1,688,675
	2020	478,837	71	175,550	26	--	--	18,022	3	--	--	672,408
	2021	704,636	75	220,127	23	--	--	18,938	2	--	--	943,701
	2022	932,682	77	211,444	18	--	--	63,872	5	--	--	1,207,998
	2023	959,420	78	222,369	18	--	--	54,538	4	--	--	1,236,327
	2024	578,286	72	163,785	21	--	--	55,585	7	--	--	797,656
Unit 4	2015	297,716	77	--	--	--	--	10,055	3	76,597	20	384,368
	2016	231,063	87	--	--	--	--	6,791	3	28,078	11	265,932
	2017	179,730	76	--	--	--	--	16,078	7	39,598	17	235,407
	2018	272,733	90	--	--	--	--	1,452	0	29,159	10	303,344
	2019	326,179	85	--	--	--	--	1,485	0	56,219	15	383,883
	2020	384,737	91	--	--	--	--	2,664	1	36,083	9	423,484
	2021	311,866	84	--	--	--	--	1,677	0	57,567	16	371,110
	2022	314,039	79	--	--	--	--	533	0	84,399	21	398,971
	2023	336,237	83	--	--	--	--	1,035	0	68,691	17	405,963
	2024	247,988	85	--	--	--	--	1,948	1	43,395	15	293,331
Lakewide Totals	2015	4,460,298	65	2,190,473	32	94,225	1	87,613	1	76,597	1	6,909,206
	2016	4,481,964	62	2,201,486	30	397,044	5	114,763	2	28,078	0	7,223,335
	2017	4,982,989	64	2,387,352	31	255,605	3	123,413	2	39,598	1	7,788,958
	2018	4,613,972	68	1,975,935	29	107,789	2	55,537	1	29,159	0	6,782,393
	2019	3,243,111	73	1,111,766	25	15,745	0	40,437	1	56,219	1	4,467,278
	2020	2,128,688	69	834,994	27	84,613	3	20,685	1	36,083	1	3,105,063
	2021	2,181,138	66	967,114	29	69,575	2	20,615	1	57,567	2	3,296,009
	2022	2,195,116	65	988,239	29	67,667	2	64,405	2	84,399	2	3,399,826
	2023	2,522,918	59	1,553,565	36	104,388	2	55,573	1	68,691	2	4,305,135
	2024	2,255,418	64	1,071,816	31	71,968	2	57,533	2	43,395	1	3,500,130

*processor weight (quota debit weight) to 2001; fisher/observer weight from 2002 to 2024 (negating ice allowance).

Coldwater Task Group Report March 2025

Introduction

Three charges were addressed by the CWTG during 2024: (1) Report on the status of the cold-water fish community, (2) Participation in the Integrated Management of Sea Lamprey Process on Lake Erie, outline and prescribe the needs of the Lake Erie Sea Lamprey management program, and (3) Maintenance of an electronic database of Lake Erie salmonid stocking information. The complete report is available from the Great Lakes Fishery Commission's Lake Erie Committee Coldwater Task Group website at http://www.glfc.org/lake-erie-committee.php or upon request from an LEC or CWTG representative.

Lake Trout

A total of 250 lake trout were collected in the Coldwater Assessment Survey in 2024. Adult (age 5+) relative abundance decreased to 1.29 fish per lift, below the target of 2.0 described in the 2021 Lake Trout Management Plan. The 3-yr running average remained at target therefore no management actions related to adult abundance are being recommended for 2025. There were 21 age classes and four strains captured in 2024. Lake trout ages 4, and 14 were the dominate cohorts. Ages 5,9,12,15,16, and 17 also contributed notably. Lake trout older than age-10 continue to increase in abundance and comprised 50% of the total catch. Finger Lakes and Lake Champlain strains comprised the majority of the population. The Partnership Survey changed design in 2024 targeting waters less than 30m in depth and no longer fished the Pennsylvania Ridge.

Lake Whitefish

Lake whitefish harvest in 2024 was 81,222 pounds, distributed between Ontario (83%), Ohio (15%), and Pennsylvania (2%). Harvest decreased 60% from 2023 and remains low compared to previous decades. Gillnet fishery age composition ranged from ages 3 to 9 with ages 5, 4, and 3 representing the majority of the harvest. Relative to recent decades, lake whitefish survey and fishery status indicators in 2024 were moderate or better. Assessment surveys caught lake whitefish from ages 1 to 22, with age compositions that partially overlapped the 2024 gill net fishery. Bottom trawl and gillnet survey indices forecast modest recruitment of age 3 lake whitefish in 2025 and 2026.

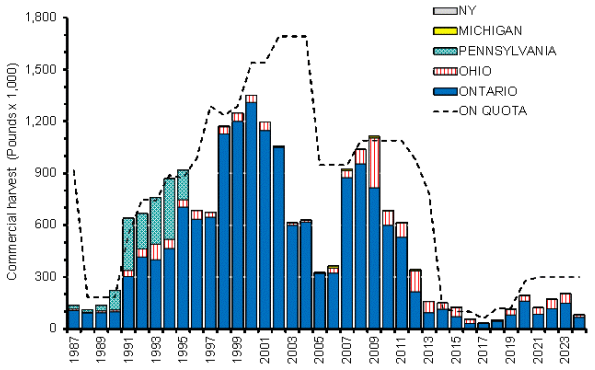
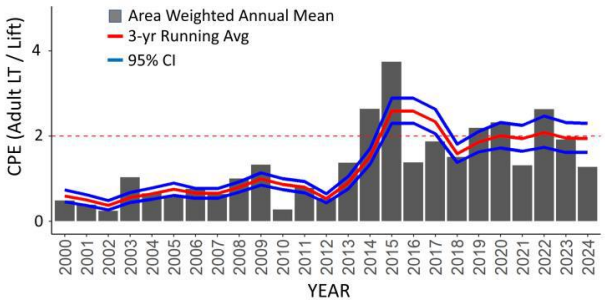


FIGURE 1.1.1. Lake whitefish total harvest from 1987-2024 by jurisdiction in Lake Erie. Pennsylvania ceased gill netting in 1996. Ontario quota is presented as a dashed line.

Ontario's commercial fishers harvested 22% of quota (300,000 pounds) in 2024. Most (88%) of Ontario's 2024 lake whitefish harvest was from gillnets with 12% from commercial trawls. The largest fraction of Ontario's lake whitefish harvest (57%) was caught in the west basin (Ontario-Erie statistical district OE-1) followed by OE-2 (22%), OE-4 (11%), with the remaining harvest distributed eastward among statistical districts OE-3 (8%), and OE-5 (2%; Fig 1.1.1). Maximum harvest in Ontario waters during 2024 was distributed northwest of Pelee Island and west of Point Pelee. Harvest in OE-1 from October to December represented 50% of Ontario's lake whitefish harvest. Peak harvests occurred in OE-1 during December (18,158 pounds) and November (13,057 pounds) with central basin harvest (OE2 and OE3) during March and April (11,584) accounting for 17% of Ontario's harvest. In eastern Lake Erie (OE4 and OE5), 8,292 pounds of lake whitefish were landed in 2024 with most (93%) of harvest from commercial trawls and the remaining 7% from gillnets. There was no reported effort targeting lake whitefish during 2024 in Ontario waters of Lake Erie. Lake-wide, Ontario's lake whitefish harvest came from fisheries targeting walleye (80%), rainbow smelt (12%), white bass (4%), white perch (4%) and yellow perch (1%). In addition, a tagged lake whitefish was surrendered to MNR from commercial fisheries in 2024.

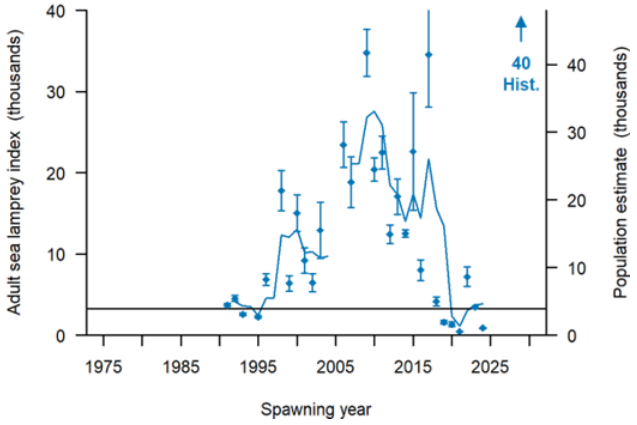
Burbot



Total commercial harvest of burbot in Lake Erie in 2024 was 1,100 pounds. All was incidental. Burbot abundance and biomass indices from annual assessment surveys remained at low levels, relative to the time series; however 2024 catch rates continued to be elevated in some surveys. The burbot catch rate in the Interagency Coldwater Assessment Survey averaged 1.59 fish/lift, a decadal high while those in the Ontario Partnership Assessment Survey averaged 0.62 fish/lift. Burbot in the Coldwater Assessment Survey and Partnership Survey ranged in age from 2 to 16 and the largest age class present were 5 year olds. Rainbow smelt was the dominant prey item in burbot diets followed closely by round goby.

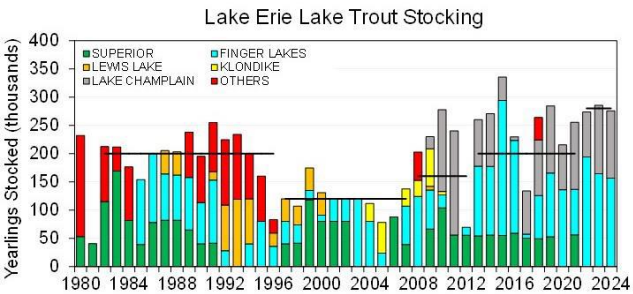
Sea Lamprey

The A1-A3 wounding rate on lake trout over 532 mm was 15.7 wounds per 100 fish in 2024. This is above the target rate of 5.0 wounds per 100 fish. Large lake trout continue to be the preferred targets for sea lamprey in Lake Erie. The Index of Adult Sea Lamprey Abundance (870) represents a significant decrease from last year however the three year average-index is slightly above the target of 3,300. Only one lampricide treatments was completed in 2024 in Conneaut Creek in PA and DFO completed 24 granular Bayluscide plots in both jurisdictions on the St. Clair River.



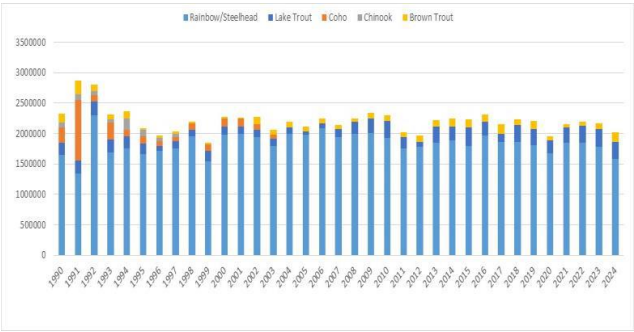
Lake Erie Salmonid Stocking

All the US fisheries resource agencies and a few non-governmental organizations (NGO's) in Pennsylvania and Ontario currently stock steelhead in the Lake Erie watershed. A total of 1,582,152 yearling steelhead were stocked in 2024, accounting for 78% of all salmonids stocked. This was a 11% decrease from 2023 and slightly below the long-term (1990-2023) average annual stocking of 1,837,578 steelhead. This year Pennsylvania clipped roughly 100,000 Shasta strain rainbow trout to assess their contribution and to the fishery but looking at their return rates. Roughly half of all steelhead stocking occurred in Pennsylvania waters 51.6%, followed by 29.5% in Ohio waters, 13.6% in New York waters, 3.1% in Michigan waters, and 2% in Ontario waters. The NYSDEC stocked 165,104 yearling steelhead and 50,000 domestic rainbow trout in 2024, which in combination was above their stocking target of 192,500 yearlings. Steelhead stocking in Ohio was 16% above a target objective of 400,000 yearling steelhead while Pennsylvania steelhead stocking was down from a stocking objective of 1 million yearlings due to changes in hatchery rearing and facilities available to steelhead production. Stocking of rainbow trout in Ontario occurs in the central basin of the lake and is conducted by a local conservation club utilizing fertilized eggs provided by the OMNR fish culture section. The Ontario stocking in 2024 (32,992) was a significant decrease from the previous year (60,533). Details of stocking locations and numbers of fish per stream can be found in agency reports.

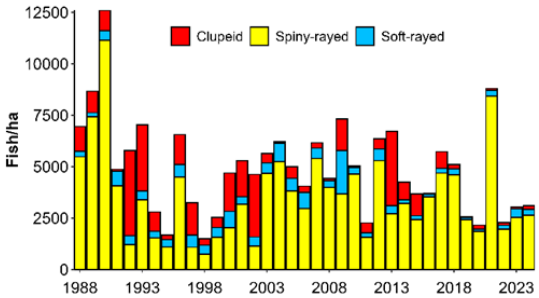


Brown trout stocking in Lake Erie totaled 163,394 yearling and adults in 2024, all in Pennsylvania waters to provide catchable trout for the opening of the 2024 Pennsylvania trout season as well as put, grow, and take fish for later stream returns which began in 2009. This was a significant increase from 2023 and a large increase in the long-term (1990-2021) average annual stocking of 87,519 brown trout. Brown trout stocking levels for catchable trout are expected to continue at the current rates in Pennsylvania.

Steelhead



The summary of steelhead stocking in Lake Erie by jurisdictional waters for 2024 is: Pennsylvania (817,488; 51.6%), Ohio (466,520; 29.5%), New York (215,104; 13.6%), Michigan (50,048; 3.1%), and Ontario (32,992; 2%). Total steelhead stocking in 2024 (1.58 million) was below the long term average. Annual stocking numbers have been consistently in the 1.5-2.0 million fish range since 1993. The summer open lake steelhead harvest was estimated at 26,637 steelhead across New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Ontario, and Michigan and above the long-term average harvest of 22,019. Tributary angler surveys, represented the majority (>90%) of the targeted fishery effort for steelhead. Catch rates remain high and there are planned creel surveys in the future in most jurisdictions. ✧



Forage Task Group Report March 2025

The Lake Erie Committee Forage Task Group (FTG) report addresses progress made on four charges:

1. Report on the results of the interagency lower trophic level monitoring program and status of trophic conditions as they relate to the Lake Erie Environmental Priorities.
2. Describe the status and trends of forage fish in each basin of Lake Erie and evaluate alternate data sources and methods to enhance description of forage fish abundance.
   2.1. Describe forage fish abundance and status using trawl data.
   2.2. Report on the diets of important Lake Erie predator fish where available.
   2.3. Describe growth and condition of Walleye, Lake Trout, and Black Bass.
3. Continue hydro acoustic assessment of the pelagic forage fish community in Lake Erie, while incorporating new methods in survey design and analysis following the GLFC's Great Lakes Hydro Acoustic Standard Operating Procedures where possible/feasible.
4. Act as a point of contact for any new/novel invasive aquatic species and incorporate into the USGS Nonindigenous Aquatic Species database.

Interagency Lower Trophic Level Monitoring

The Lower Trophic Level Assessment monitoring program has measured nine environmental variables at 18 stations around Lake Erie since 1999 to characterize trends in lake productivity. In 2024, lake productivity was down compared to 2023. The Trophic State Index, which is a combination of phosphorus levels, water transparency, and chlorophyll *a*, indicated that the Central Basin was within the targeted mesotrophic status.

The West Basin remained in the above-target eutrophic classification. The East Basin offshore and nearshore areas were oligotrophic in 2024. Low hypolimnetic dissolved oxygen continues to be an issue in the Central Basin during the summer months.

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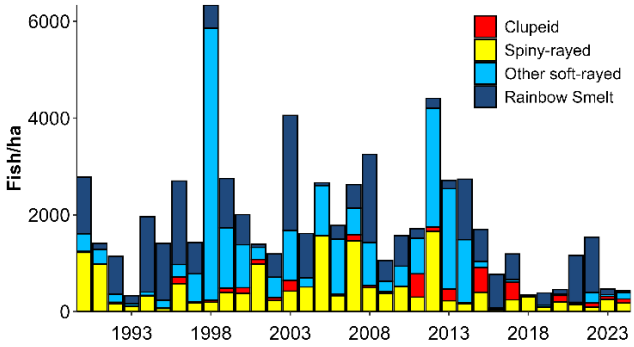
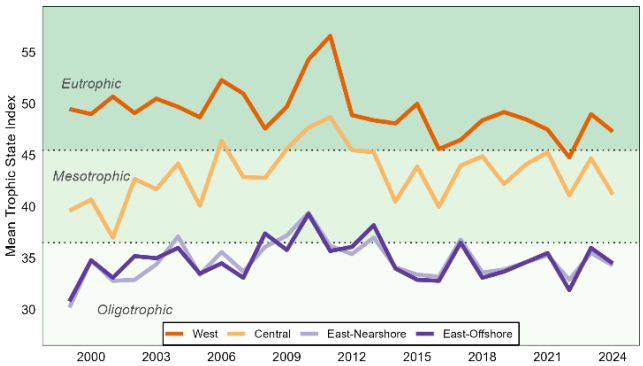
Central Basin Status of Forage

In 2024, 47 trawl tows were completed in the Ohio waters of the Central Basin. Total forage density averaged 515 fish per hectare across the Central Basin, which was similar to 2023. Total forage biomass was 5.524 kg/ha, well below the long-term mean. Age-0 Rainbow Smelt density decreased from 2023 and was well below the long-term average. Age-1+ Rainbow Smelt density decreased from 2023 and was well below the long-term mean. Round Goby indices increased compared to 2023 but were still below the long-term mean. Spiny-rayed forage density (177/ha) decreased slightly from 2023. Age-0 Yellow Perch density increased from 2023; however, these continue to be some of the lowest densities in the time series. Walleye densities were above the long-term mean.

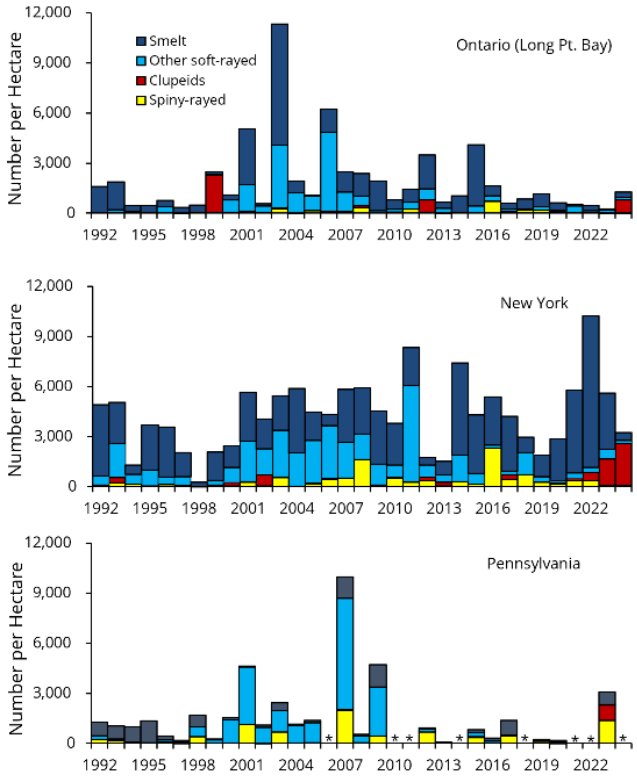


Walleye

Walleye total length at age-2 through age-4 again declined in 2024, returning to a declining trend since ~2019. Length at age-2 (377 mm) and age-3 (428 mm) remain below the ten-year means (410 mm and 467 mm, respectively), while length at age-4 (477 mm) was closer to the ten-year mean (494 mm). Length-at-age data come from the ODNR fall gill-net survey (September–October of each year in West and Central basins). Methods can be found in the Appendix of the ODNR Lake Erie Data Report (Ohio Division of Wildlife 2024).



East Basin Status of Forage



In 2024, overall forage fish densities were below time series averages in New York and offshore Ontario waters, although densities in Ontario increased from 2023. Total forage biomass was 26.1 kg/ha in New York waters and was the fourth highest level in the time series. Catches of age-0 and age-1+ Rainbow Smelt were low in both Ontario and New York.

Emerald Shiner catches of age-0 and age-1+ decreased far below the time series average in New York waters. Catches of Emerald Shiner in Ontario remain low in 2024. Round Goby densities were below average in New York but above average in Ontario. Abundance of Alewife (mainly age-0) was the highest in the time series in New York and the second highest in the Ontario time series.

Average numbers of age-0 Walleye were caught in New York and below-average catches of age-1 Yellow Perch. Catch of Age-0 Lake Whitefish was at the fourth highest level in the time series in New York waters. Catches of most other species were low, although Trout-perch abundance increased in Ontario waters. Pennsylvania intended to trawl in 2024, but boat mechanical issues and scheduling conflicts prevented sampling.

Walleye and Yellow Perch

Walleye length at age-1 and age-2 from netting surveys targeting juveniles in New York has declined for the past eight years. Growth for both age-1 and age-2 Walleye decreased in 2024 and remained 15 and 32 mm below the long-term average length, respectively. Age-1 and age-2 length in 2024 ranked ninth and third lowest, respectively, in the 44-year time series (Ludwig 2025). Age-0 and age-1 Yellow Perch sampled in fall trawl surveys in New York have exhibited stable growth rates since 2006. In 2024, age-0 Yellow Perch mean length equaled the time series average of 81 mm while age-1 Yellow Perch mean length (132 mm) was slightly below the time series average (140 mm; Wilkins and Ludwig 2025).

Adult Walleye condition in the New York waters of Lake Erie had generally been trending down over the last decade. In 2024, the relative weight of the average 18–24 inch Walleye was 81, slightly below the time series average of 84. Decreasing weight at length may indicate a lack of suitable forage in recent years, especially Rainbow Smelt, and increasing predator demand.

Aquatic Invasive Species

Since 2016, the Forage Task Group has maintained a database to track Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) in Lake Erie. Recently, the FTG has been working with the USGS Nonindigenous Aquatic Species database team to incorporate the FTG database and other agency data into the USGS Nonindigenous Aquatic Species Database so that the Lake Erie data can be better archived and help track AIS on a greater geographic scale.

The FTG is actively monitoring for any new aquatic invasive species that enters the Lake Erie watershed. A few AIS that are not yet in Lake Erie but are of particular concern to the FTG are Black Carp, Silver Carp, Bighead Carp, and Tench. Black, Silver, and Bighead carps are present throughout the Mississippi Basin and have been found in tributaries close to Lake Michigan. Tench was first detected in a tributary of the St. Lawrence River in 1994 and has since spread into the St. Lawrence River and eastern Lake Ontario (Bay of Quinte; Avlijas et al. 2018). The rapid expansion of Tench suggests there is an elevated risk of Tench entering Lake Erie should their expansion into Lake Ontario continue. No Black Carp, Silver Carp, Bighead Carp, Tench, or any other novel non-native fish species were captured in Lake Erie waters in 2024.

Two notable non-native species were captured in Lake Erie in 2024. The first was one hybrid striped bass (*Morone chrysops x M. saxatilis*) captured in a commercial gill net near Port Burwell, ON (42.62500, -80.79167) on April 4, 2024. One additional hybrid striped bass was captured in a commercial trap net near Magee Marsh, OH (41.63492, -83.19278) on April 29, 2024. Unlike most hybrids, the hybrid striped bass is fertile and may backcross with native White Bass (*M. chrysops*; Hodson 1989). The second notable species captured was a total of eight Western Mosquitofish (*Gambusia affinis*); two captured while boat electrofishing during USFWS Early Detection Program efforts in the Maumee River (41.55537, -83.65105) on September 12, 2024, and six additional Western Mosquitofish captured while boat electrofishing during USFWS Early Detection Program efforts in Sandusky Bay (41.41884, -82.95314) on September 26, 2024. The USGS

Nonindigenous Aquatic Species Database reports that this species was previously detected in Maumee Bay in 1981 and in the Sandusky River in 2023. Western Mosquitofish has an overall risk assessment of 'High' due to their history of invasiveness and likelihood of establishing (USFWS 2024). ✧

Visit an Ohio Fish Hatchery this Spring

COLUMBUS, Ohio – This spring, Ohio DNR is hosting public open houses at state fish hatcheries where visitors can learn about fish production. Hatchery open houses are free of charge and provide a great opportunity for visitors to see fish up close before they are stocked into one of Ohio's many public lakes and rivers.

The Division of Wildlife operates six state fish hatcheries, which raised and stocked 46 million fish in 2024. Sport fish species raised for stocking in public waters include cold-water fish (rainbow trout, steelhead, and brown trout), cool-water fish (saugeye, walleye, yellow perch, and muskellunge), and warm-water fish (hybrid-striped bass, channel catfish, blue catfish, and bluegill). These hatcheries enhance many of the fishing opportunities that anglers enjoy.

Hatchery open houses are scheduled from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at each location:

- **Saturday, March 29:**
  - St. Marys State Fish Hatchery, 1735 Feeder Rd, St. Marys, 45885
- **Saturday, April 5:**
  - Hebron State Fish Hatchery, 10517 Canal Rd SE, Hebron, 43025
  - Senecaville State Fish Hatchery, 57199 Senecaville Dam Rd, Senecaville, 43780
- **Saturday, April 12:**
  - Castalia State Fish Hatchery, 7018 Homegardner Rd, Castalia, 44824
  - Kincaid State Fish Hatchery, 7487 St. Rt. 124, Latham, 45646
- **Saturday, May 3:**
  - London State Fish Hatchery, 2470 Roberts Mill Rd, London, 43140

During each open house, Division of Wildlife staff will give tours and answer questions about fish production and fisheries management. Guests will have the opportunity to learn about these hatcheries, view fish eggs and fry in production buildings, and watch older fish in ponds or raceways. Family-friendly activities and displays including an archery trailer and BB gun range will be available at some locations. Discover what the hatchery nearest you will offer.

Most of Ohio's fish populations are sustained through natural reproduction; however, stocking expands and diversifies fishing opportunities in waters where existing habitats do not support some fish populations. Stocking is only one of many fish management tools used by the Division of Wildlife to improve angling. Learn more about Ohio's state fish hatcheries and fish stocking locations at wildohio.gov

A small fish you see in a hatchery this spring could grow into a Fish Ohio trophy someday. Sport fish such as a largemouth bass longer than 20 inches, a saugeye longer than 21 inches, a crappie longer than 13 inches, or a sunfish longer than 9 inches qualify for Fish Ohio status. Among the 10,284 Fish Ohio submissions in 2024 were 1,598 largemouth bass, 563 saugeye, 595 crappie, and 361 sunfish

A visit to a state fish hatchery might inspire your next fishing trip. Go to wildohio.gov to discover fishing locations near you and information to help you plan a productive outing. Don't forget to check the 2025-26 Ohio Fishing Regulations booklet before you go!

State fish hatchery funding is provided by the sale of Ohio fishing licenses and the Sport Fish Restoration Act. Enacted in 1950, the Sport Fish Restoration program provides funding for sport fish conservation through federal excise taxes on sport fishing equipment, import duties on fishing tackle and pleasure boats, and a portion of the gasoline fuel tax attributable to small engines and motorboats. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service annually apportions these funds that the Division of Wildlife uses to produce and stock fish, acquire habitat, conduct research and assessment surveys, provide aquatic education, and secure fishing access. ✧

ODNR offering free boat safety inspections

In order to ensure that's done safely, the Ohio DNR) is hosting free boat safety checks. "Vessel safety checks are a great opportunity for boaters to make sure their boats and trailers are ready for the season before hitting the water," said Cindy Bellar, ODNR boating law administrator, in an ODNR press release. "These inspections give boaters peace of mind, knowing they have the necessary equipment to meet legal requirements and stay safe on the water."

The voluntary inspections will check for life jackets, fire extinguishers and more as well as offer the boat owner tips.
Before the inspection, the ODNR recommends referencing the required equipment lists found here for each type of boat.

"Boaters who pass the inspection will receive a vessel safety check (VSC) decal, showing compliance with Ohio's safety requirements," the release reads. "If an issue is found, officers will provide guidance on how to correct it."

"Don't wait until you're on the water to discover you're missing something," the release reads. "Get peace of mind with a free vessel safety check."

The free safety checks are as follows:

- **Sunday, April 6**: 4 to 6 p.m. at Delaware State Park, Main Marina boat ramp
- **Friday, April 11**: 5 to 7 p.m. at Side Cut Metropark (Metroparks Toledo), Silver Lake parking lot
- **Saturday April 12**: 5 to 7 a.m. at Side Cut Metropark (Metroparks Toledo), 475 Boat access; and 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. at Delaware State Park, Main Marina boat ramp
- **Sunday, April 27**: 8 to 10 a.m. at Delaware State Park, Main Marina boat ramp; and 4 to 6 p.m. at Alum Creek State Park, New Galena boat ramp
- **Saturday, May 3**: noon to 3 p.m. at Franklin Furnace, Holiday Point Marina
- **Saturday, May 17**: 8 to 10 a.m. at Delaware State Park, Main Marina boat ramp; 8 to 10 a.m. at Indian Lake State Park, Lakeview boat ramp; noon to 2 p.m. at Dillon State Park, Dillon Marina; and noon to 3 p.m. at Buck Creek State Park, Marina boat ramp
- **Sunday, May 18**: 8 to 10 a.m. at Indian Lake State Park, Blackhawk boat ramp; noon to 2 p.m. at Salt Fork State Park, Salt Fork Marina; 1 to 3 p.m. at Grand Lake St. Marys State Park, West Bank boat ramp; 4 to 6 p.m. at Grand Lake St. Marys State Park, East Bank boat ramp; and 5 to 7 p.m. at Kiser Lake State Park, Kiser Lake Marina
- **Friday, May 23**: 1 to 2 p.m. at East Fork State Park, Tate boat ramp; and 5 to 7 p.m. at Indian Lake State Park, Moundwood boat ramp
- **Saturday, May 24**: noon to 4 p.m. at Lake White State Park, Lake White boat ramp; 1 to 2 p.m. at Lake Loramie State Park, Earls Island boat ramp; and 3 to 4 p.m. at East Fork State Park, Tate boat ramp
- **Saturday, June 21**: 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. at Rocky Fork State Park, North Shore boat ramp

If you're unable to attend one of these safety checks, set up an inspection through your closest ODNR watercraft office. ✧

Ohio Boating Education Courses Now Available

Meet Ohio's boater education requirement before boating season gets underway

COLUMBUS, Ohio – As boating season approaches, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) encourages boaters to prepare for safe and legal adventures on the water by completing the Ohio Boating Education Course (OBEC) this spring. Whether you're an experienced boater or just starting out, the OBEC provides essential knowledge to help you navigate Ohio's waterways responsibly and confidently.

"Spring is the perfect time to get prepared for a fun and safe boating season," said Andy Foos, ODNR Boating Education Coordinator. "The Ohio Boating Education Course is a great way to make sure you understand key safety measures, navigate legal requirements, and become a more confident boater. It's not just about meeting the law—it's about enjoying the water responsibly."

The OBEC is a comprehensive, typically one-day course that covers boating skills, emergency procedures, and water sports safety. It fulfills the state's legal requirement for anyone born on or after January 1, 1982, who operates a boat over 10 horsepower. The course is open to anyone looking to improve their boating skills and is approved nationwide, no matter where you plan to boat. Each session concludes with a test to ensure participants are well-prepared for their time on the water.

While these OBEC courses are free of charge, registration is required.

Upcoming OBEC Dates and Registration Links:

- April 12 (9 a.m.-5 p.m.) – Youngstown – Registration
- April 16 (9 a.m.-6 p.m.) – Loudonville – Registration
- April 19 (8 a.m.- 4 p.m.) – Franklin Furnace – Registration
- April 19 (8 a.m.-5 p.m.) – Bethel – Registration
- April 26 (8 a.m.-5 p.m.) – Cleveland - Registration
- April 26 (8 a.m.-5:30 p.m.) – Deersville – Registration
- April 26 (8:30 a.m.-5 p.m.) – Dayton – Registration
- April 26 (9 a.m.-5 p.m.) – Indian Lake – Registration
- April 26 (9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.) – Columbiana – Registration
- May 3 (8 a.m.-5 p.m.) – Cleveland – Registration
- May 3 (8 a.m.-5:30 p.m.) – Mineral City – Registration
- May 3 (9 a.m.-5 p.m.) – Madison – Registration
- May 17 (7 a.m.-5 p.m.) – Lore City – Registration
- May 17 (8 a.m.-4 p.m.) – Waverly - Registration
- May 17 (8 a.m.-5 p.m.) – Delaware – Registration
- May 17 (8 a.m.-5 p.m.) – Huron – Registration
- May 17 (8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.) – Oregon – Registration
- May 17 (9 a.m.-5 p.m.) – Indian Lake – Registration
- May 17 (9 a.m.-5 p.m.) – Waynesville – Registration
- May 17 (9 a.m.-5 p.m.) – Youngstown – Registration
- May 24 (8 a.m.-5 p.m.) – Hillsboro – Registration
- May 31 (8 a.m.-5 p.m.) – Port Clinton – Registration

These additional courses that fulfill the state's legal requirements are offered by partner organizations. They may include a course fee:

- April 19 (8:30 a.m.-4 p.m.) – Dayton – Registration
- April 26 (8 a.m.-4 p.m.) – Lewis Center – Registration
- April 26 (8:30 a.m.-4 p.m.) – Lakeview – Registration
- April 26 and May 3 and 10 (10 a.m.-2 p.m. all 3 days) – North Olmsted – Registration
- May 6 (6-8:30 p.m. for 5 straight Tuesday evenings) – Port Clinton – Registration
- May 7 (7-9 p.m. for 6 straight Wednesday evenings) – via Zoom – Registration

Get ahead this season and ensure you're ready to navigate the waters safely and legally! Before heading out on the water, take a course, inspect the legally required equipment, and, if needed, renew your vessel registration. For more details on a course and to learn more about boating safety, visit the ODNR website.

End