

Mille Lacs Fisheries Advisory Committee Meeting Summary: 4/28/16

The most recent meeting of the Mille Lacs Fisheries Advisory Committee (MLFAC) took place on Thursday, April 28th, at the Garrison City Hall. The meeting focused on discussions about what topics and activities the committee would like to prioritize in the coming months.

Introduction:

Brad Parsons, Central Region Fisheries Manager, summarized the committee's work thus far and noted steps that DNR has taken on Mille Lacs Lake in response to committee input and feedback. These include hiring an additional winter creel clerk in 2016; adding questions about fishing methods to the 2016 summer creel survey questionnaires; conducting additional research on hooking mortality in 2016, including mortality rates for walleye caught with live bait and artificial lures; modifying 2016 summer fishing regulations to allow the use of live bait; and exploring methods for incorporating individual angler data into DNR research and management.

Small group discussions:

Committee members and staff participated in two rounds of small-group brainstorming discussions, focused first on clarifying the key functions of the committee and then determining future topics and activities. After each round of brainstorming, small groups presented key ideas back to the larger committee for further discussion and prioritization.

The key functions of the committee, as outlined in the MLFAC Charter, are:

1. Represent the breadth of interests around the Mille Lacs fishery;
2. Learn about and contribute to the broader understanding of biological, social, and economic aspects of the Mille Lacs fishery;
3. Identify and communicate significant fisheries management or related issues to DNR staff;
4. Facilitate dialog between the public and the DNR regarding potential solutions to identified issues;
5. Develop recommendations to advise DNR on potential approaches to solve identified issues; and
6. Provide advice on the most effective and publicly acceptable regulations for the Mille Lacs fisheries.

Committee members and staff noted that the MLFAC has successfully touched on all key functions outlined in their charter. In particular, committee members have acted as a two-way conduit for information between DNR and the broader public, and have been able to provide an outside perspective on fisheries management issues based on the diverse collective experience of all members. When asked what was needed to better achieve these functions, committee members asked for increased and earlier communication from DNR about relevant issues and decisions (e.g. regulations); a better ability to document the full range of opinions among committee members; and increased communication with Tribal representatives.

DNR asked committee members to identify future meeting topics/activities based on the desired outcomes outlined in the MLFAC Charter, which are:

1. Effective and well-supported recommended actions to address identified fisheries management issues
2. Shared understanding among committee members, the DNR, and the broader public of issues and potential solutions

Out of approximately fifteen potential future topics/activities identified by the committee, those ranked as highest priority at this time included:

- Improving accuracy of the model used to estimate hooking mortality, and exploring methods to reduce hooking mortality rates on walleye in Mille Lacs Lake;
- Expanding and improving the accuracy of creel surveys;
- Understanding the lower portions of the food web in Mille Lacs Lake, including impacts of aquatic invasive species (AIS);
- Revisiting treaty fisheries management to identify lessons learned thus far, and any potential desired changes; and
- Increasing involvement of Tribal representatives in the committee's work, and providing committee education on Tribal culture and fisheries management.

Some of the additional topics of interest for the future included:

- Incorporating angler-supplied data into DNR research and management;
- Exploring functions of the proposed new fishery station and fishing museum;
- Continuing to seek MLFAC representation at Fisheries Technical Committee meetings; and
- Examining the DNR budget and expenditures for Mille Lacs management.

2016 Hooking Mortality Study Outline:

Tom Jones, Regional Fisheries Treaty Coordinator, also provided an update on DNR's plans for a new hooking mortality study on Mille Lacs Lake this summer:

Study goals:

1. To increase sample sizes of fish caught on natural baits to improve hooking mortality model.
2. To collect a large sample of fish caught on artificial lures to improve our estimate of the different mortality rates between artificial and natural baits.

Field methods:

1. Walleye will be caught by angling with different methods.
2. Artificial and natural bait methods will be adjusted to roughly reflect methods used by angling public.
3. We will record data on fishing method and bait, and data on bleeding and hook-swallowing.
4. Fish will be marked so that mortality can be traced back to methods and injuries.
5. Angled walleye will be transferred to holding pens.

6. Pens will be inspected for mortalities 5 or 6 days later.
7. Temperature data will be recorded at several locations.
8. Desired catch includes 750 fish on artificials and 750 on natural bait.

Modeling:

1. Mortality data will be fit to several models that include fishing methods, fish size, and temperature.
2. AIC scores will be used to evaluate differences in models.

Application:

1. At the very least, we expect to have a refined mortality rate model.
2. If sample sizes are sufficient, we may be able to match the mortality rate to the combination of fishing methods used in a specific time period.
3. New data may not be available to apply to this year's fishing. We will try, but the final model cannot be fitted until the entire temperature range has been sampled. We may be able to get an approximate model mid-season, and apply that as a tentative measure for the early season.

Next steps:

Meetings of the MLFAC will be scheduled monthly throughout the summer. Scheduled dates will be announced via this email list once available. The May meeting (Thursday, May 26, 5:30-8:30pm at Appeldoorn's Resort) will provide an open discussion among committee members on the five topics identified as key priorities: hooking mortality, creel surveys, lower portions of the food web, treaty fisheries management, and greater involvement of Tribal representatives in the work of the MLFAC.