

# Researchers: Lake Trout Rebound, Chinook Salmon Wane in Lake Huron

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collapse, and no biologist ever anticipated the natural Chinook reproduction like we've had here," said Greg Wright, a member of the Lake Huron Technical Committee which recommends management action for the lake. "Basically they've done a great job doing what they were initially supposed to do: control alewives."

Mr. Wright serves on the Lake Michigan Technical

Committee, Great Lakes Fish Health Committee, and has been the fishery enhancement coordinator for the Tribal Nunn's Creek Fishery Enhancement Facility since 1988.

He believes the only way the lakes will stabilize from their present "boom and bust" situation is to allow native fish species to recover. He is encouraged by the natural recovery of lake trout, which are surviving much better as a result of effective sea lamprey

control and management actions taken after the 2000 Consent Agreement between American Indian tribes and resource managers. They also adapt better to the food sources naturally provided by the Great Lakes, particularly those on the bottom of the lakes.

"The only way to get stability is to have native species," he said. "I think the managers need to reconsider the policy of focusing management primarily on Chinook, and pay more attention to other native species."

**Salmon Stocking is Remarkably Successful; Most Salmon are Now Wild**  
"We used to stock millions, but we can't do that anymore," said Department of Natural Resources Lake Huron Manager Dave Borgeson, speaking to the group in Cheboygan April 21. "The lake is really in control. The lake is telling us what to do."

Perhaps the biggest surprise of the salmon-stocking program is the fact that most Chinooks in Lake Huron are wild fish, and reproducing without the help of humans.

Biologists initially thought

the salmon planted in the Great Lakes would not successfully reproduce, and they have been stocking every year to replace those that die or are caught. Now they have found that more than 80 percent of Lake Huron's Chinook salmon were born in the wild rather than hatcheries.

"Chinook began to reproduce in a big way, in a way that we never expected," Mr. Johnson said. "In 1992, only 15 percent of the fish were wild, and now 87 percent of Lake Huron's salmon were reproduced in the wild."

Lake Michigan's salmon are 50.4 percent wild.

Wild salmon spawn in streams and spend most of their adult lives searching for food in open water environments like oceans or the Great Lakes. The only time they return to streams is to spawn. Many raised in hatcheries and released in the Great Lakes have now strayed into suitable streams and are finding their own spawning grounds.

"The fish we're catching aren't going back to the hatcheries, they're going to Canada," Mr. Johnson said, noting that 80 to 97 percent of the wild fish were produced in Canadian streams around Georgian Bay and the North Channel.

This baffles biologists, Mr. Johnson said, because they previously believed salmon always return to the stream of their "birth" to reproduce. At the same time, the artificially stocked salmon are not surviving as well as the naturally reproducing fish.

"Ten percent of all salmon are dropping out of the system every year, and we're not seeing stocked fish survive like they used to," Mr. Johnson said.

Perhaps the future of a salmon fishery lies in wild stock.

Mr. Wright said the recent data suggest more than 12 mil-

lion wild salmon are entering the lakes to join the three million stocked salmon every year.

"That's the magnitude of this natural reproduction," Mr. Wright said. "So now we're looking at why we're even stocking."

The Lake Huron Technical Committee has recommended periodic breaks from stocking to reduce the number of salmon competing for limited food. It also wants to take a closer look at how many salmon still need to be stocked, now that nature is taking over.

**Salmon Fishery Suffers as Alewives Disappear; Native Fish May Provide New Opportunities**

The Lake Huron glut and demise of alewives has produced smaller and leaner salmon. Fisheries biologists are finding many in an emaciated state, but most of the anglers at the April 21 meeting in Cheboygan said the fish they are finding are small, but not starving.

Norm Perkins of Les Cheneaux Islands Charter Tours said his customers caught plenty of salmon last year, though they were much smaller than in previous years. He is not as worried about lean fish as he is about predictions of utter disappearance of a fish that has kept his customers captivated. For five years, the Chinook "King" salmon has made up the majority of what his customers catch.

"People were happy last year with the charters. They don't have to catch large fish to be happy," he said. "But it scares me a little bit as a charter captain. I like to have fish for my customers to catch. I would like to see the Lake trout pick up, and I hear they're getting good catches down south of here."

He attended the meeting in Cheboygan, as well as other informational meetings on the status of Lake Huron. He

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