

# Possible Walleye & Perch Quota/Limit Reductions Raise Questions

by  
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For the next two years the lights may dim over Lake Erie's marquee highlighting it as the "Walleye Capital of the World." Beginning in 2004, major reductions in Lake Erie's total allowable catch of both walleye and yellow perch are anticipated. Reductions are likely to extend into 2005 as well.

Reporting that Lake Erie has experienced poor young-of-year hatches of walleye in 2000 and again last year, the Great Lakes Fisheries Commission's Lake Erie

Committee is strongly hinting that reduced daily catch limits will come about for all stake holders.

These cuts could be between 40 and 60 percent of this year's total allowable catch. Lake Erie's 2003 allowable walleye catch is 3.4 million fish and 9.9 million pounds of yellow perch.

"Last year's walleye hatch was probably the worst we've seen in 25 years, and the yellow perch

hatch was not much better," said Kevin Kayle, manager of the Ohio Division of Wildlife's Fairport Harbor Fisheries Research Station.



Such talk could hurt an already ailing sport fishing charter industry. Coupled with a sluggish economy, reductions in daily bag limits would not help in either recruiting new business or retaining existing customers. "This certainly isn't good news," said Ron Johnson of Painesville Township.

"Johnson says that Ohio's lake Erie sport fishermen aren't even taking their quota limit of walleye now.

Consequently, Johnson says, any further restrictions "don't make sense." "And I can't understand why they increased the yellow perch quota for Ontario's commercial fishermen. We're talking thousands of pounds of fish," Johnson said.

Each Lake Erie bordering state and province is allocated a certain share of the allowable catch. Each cut of the pie is determined by a formula based on the surface area of the lake under the jurisdiction of the respective state

or province. Ohio receives 51 percent of the catch limit for all of Lake Erie. Meanwhile, Ontario's share is 43 percent. New York, Michigan and Pennsylvania split the remaining 6 percent. But the problem is not just with walleye. The commission is deeply concerned about Lake Erie's yellow perch stocks. Here, poor recruitment of hatched fish was noted in 2002 as well.

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boat the boat drifts perpendicular to the contour or breakline. Occasionally the bow mount trolling motor will correct the drift or in some circumstances the kicker motor will have to be nudged into gear to compensate for gusty winds.

All in all the walleyes and bass can be easily caught on Lake Erie. By using some simple techniques of trolling and boat control it won't be long before you will be saying, "Oh Those Erie 'Eyes." Hope to see you on the water soon!

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"The sport fishing catch for yellow perch was tremendous last year and we anticipate it continuing," said Isbell. "Last year we saw a lot of 30-fish limit catches, and better angler success than in previous years. We should see a repeat of that success again this year."

Ontario will receive about five million pounds and Michigan, Pennsylvania and New York will share the remainder.

Ohio's daily bag limit for sport anglers remains at 30 perch per angler. Existing commercial fishery regulations also remain in effect

The Lake Erie Committee remains concerned about changes in the Lake Erie environment caused by aquatic nuisance species and climate driven impacts on lake levels. Spring weather patterns adversely affected walleye and yellow perch hatches in 2000 and 2002 and the committee anticipates major cuts in walleye and perch TAC in 2004 and 2005 to help offset these poor hatches. Work by the member agencies will continue through the summer to determine strategies for reducing harvest where necessary and for protecting Lake Erie's valuable resources.

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Consequently the commission is forecasting that agencies and anglers should prepare themselves for reduced catch limits in 2004, for both walleye and yellow perch.

"With our regulation cycle we're going to put forth our proposals for the 2004-2005 fishing season later this summer," Kayle said. "Right now, we're expecting changes, but we will be pouring over the data as well as the social and economic impact of any law changes before we decide what to do."

Pennsylvania's possible solution to its anticipated requirement to reduce the harvest next year may include an increase in the minimum size limit. That state's Fish and Boat Commission is exploring the possibility of increasing the size limit from the present 15 inches to 20 inches. Kayle also said he expects to see a series of public forums that will address the issue, allowing the fishing public to hear the division's arguments.

"The thing in our favor is that we haven't even come close to meeting our quota so we should still have some buffer that we can live off before we would have to make some serious cuts," Kayle said.

For this year Ohio's Lake Erie anglers will continue to live under a daily bag limit of 6 walleye if taken between May 1 and February 28, 4 fish if caught between March 1 and April 30. Ohio's yellow perch anglers can currently keep 30 fish per day.