

Walleye News and Fact File

2002 Walleye and Perch Quotas Set

Annual catch quotas for Lake Erie have been increased for 2002 for yellow perch but will remain the same for walleye, the Great Lakes Fishery Commission has announced.

The quotas represent what biologists from lakewide agencies consider the total allowable catch that can be shared while conserving fish stocks.

The walleye catch is set at 3.4 million fish, the same as 2001. Last year the lake states and Ontario, through the GLFC's Lake Erie Committee, agreed to hold the line on walleye catches for at least three years.

That was done to give walleye stocks a chance to recover from several years of poor-to-fair reproduction. The 2001 walleye catch lakewide, including sport and Canadian commercial fishing, was 2.9 million fish, well within the committee recommendation.

Each state and Ontario are allowed shares of the catch, based on surface area within each jurisdiction. Ohio, with 51 percent of the lake, is allowed 1.7 million walleye. Ohio anglers landed 1.2 million walleye in 2001. Ontario's share, 43 percent, comes to 1.4 million walleye, almost all taken commercially. The rest of the catch is shared among Michigan, Pennsylvania and New York.

Walleye sport-angling regulations for Ohio waters remain the same as in 2001 for Lake Erie and tributaries at four fish each day per angler in March and April, and six each day the rest of the year.

"Last year was great and we expect it to be equally good this year," said Gary Isbell about the fishing prospects. Isbell is administrator of fish management and research for the Ohio Division of Wildlife.

The lakewide quota for yellow perch has been boosted to 9.3 million pounds, from 7.1 million pounds in 2001.

"We've been monitoring the yellow perch situation closely, and we believe perch now are showing signs of good recovery," Isbell said.

Perch stocks were depressed for much of the 1990s because of poor year-classes, which led to much more conservative quotas.

Ohio sport anglers will be allowed roughly 2.5 million perch, about 500,000 more than caught in 2001.

Ontario will be allotted 4.8 million pounds of perch, and the other states will share the rest. Perch shares are set on a different formula from walleye, based on surface area and past performance.

The Ohio sport limit for yellow perch remains 30 each day, and commercial netting rules remain in effect.

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LAKE ERIE WATER LEVELS EXPECTED TO BE SLIGHTLY HIGHER THIS YEAR THAN LAST

Overall water levels to remain below average for spring and summer

Hydrologists with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) are cautiously optimistic that Lake Erie water levels will be slightly higher this spring and summer than during the same period in 2001.

As of March 8, Lake Erie water levels are 1 inch below average, but about 4 inches higher than this time last year. Based on this information and other atmospheric indicators, hydrologists say that although the lake will be about 4 inches below its mid-summer average in July, it will be 7 inches above last July's level.

This is good news for boaters who are increasingly dependent on charts and buoys when navigating Lake Erie's relatively shallow reef and harbor areas. It is also good news for nature enthusiasts who are finding resurgent bird and plant life in the lake's shoreline mud flats.

Lake Erie waters began dropping in 1998, falling to below average in 1999 and remaining there ever since. However, the ups and downs of water levels are a normal part of Lake Erie's life cycle, ODNR experts say.

"Lake Erie is a constantly changing body of water," said Dave Cashell, state hydrologist at ODNR. "In mid-1930s, the lake was 31 inches lower than it is today. In the mid-1950s and again in 1986, it was 35 inches higher than today."

Officials first began measuring water levels in the Great Lakes in the mid-1800s. The present system of gauges began operating in 1918. Hydrologists have learned that lake levels fluctuate with the seasons and can vary dramatically over longer periods of time.

Long-term averages have varied more than 6 feet over the period of time records have been kept. Water levels were slightly above long-term averages during the mid-to-late 1800s and generally

below the long-term averages from about 1890 through 1967. From 1968 to 1999, levels were again generally above long-term averages.

The lake also rises and falls about 15 inches with the seasons - losing water in the fall and winter through evaporation and gaining water back during spring snowmelt and summer rains.

About 80 percent of Lake Erie's water flows in from the Upper Great Lakes through the Detroit River. Another 10 percent comes from tributary streams, with the remaining 10 percent coming from precipitation falling directly on the lake's surface. The Detroit River inflow is directly dependent on rain and snow-fall around Lakes Superior, Huron and Michigan. Unusually warm winters and dry summers in the late 1990s brought little precipitation and virtually no ice cover to the Upper Lakes, causing water levels to drop in those bodies of water, and subsequently, in Lake Erie. Last winter's sparse precipitation was insufficient to relieve those conditions.

According to the ODNR Division of Watercraft, most Lake Erie boat launches will be fully operable this spring and summer. Boaters should check for the best launch areas when planning a lake outing. ODNR always advises boaters to use charts when navigating unfamiliar waters. Boaters should be especially cautious around the islands in the western basin and when nearing shore. Navigation charts for Lake Erie are available at marinas, bait shops and other outlets on the north coast.

For more information about Lake Erie water levels, check the ODNR web site at www.ohiodnr.com or call the ODNR Coastal Services Center at 419-626-4296 or toll free at 888-644-6267.

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