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Tribes stock Michigan waterways with more than 730,000 walleye fingerlings

Infusion to benefit fishing for generations to come

SAULT STE. MARIE, Mich. – Multiple Michigan inland lakes along with Great Lakes waters and tributaries recently received an infusion of more than 730,000 walleye fingerlings raised under a program administered and funded by Indian tribes.

The program was assisted by the state Department of Natural Resources (DNR). “We are very appreciative of this ongoing offer from the tribes to help assist the state in enhancing not only the important Great Lakes walleye fisheries in northern Michigan, but also our inland lakes that traditionally have been a magnet for walleye anglers, like Brevoort and North Manistique Lakes,” said Jim Dexter, acting chief for the DNR’s Fisheries Division.

The fingerlings were raised by the Inter-tribal Fisheries and Assessment Program (ITFAP) based in Sault Ste. Marie. The program is administered by the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians and also receives funding from the Bay Mills Indian Community, and the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians. Walleye fingerlings were stocked in:

- Grand Traverse Bay (132,000)
- Epoufette Bay (63,000) in Lake Michigan
- Brimley Bay (100,000) in Lake Superior
- St. Martin Bay (55,500) in Lake Huron
- St. Marys River (324,000)
- Brevoort Lake (22,000) in Chippewa County
- North Manistique Lake (18,000) and Millecoquins Lake (18,800) in Luce County

“We were pleased to be able to provide surplus walleye fingerlings for stocking in inland lakes again this year,” said Lana Causley, Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians vice chairwoman. “The Sault Tribe has many members who fish inland lakes, such as Brevoort Lake,

under the Inland Consent Decree. The fingerlings will help boost future fishing opportunities for tribal and non-tribal fishers alike.”

DNR Fisheries Division staff collected walleye eggs in April from Little Bay de Noc, and provided some of those eggs to ITFAP for stocking back into Lake Michigan or inland lake locations. ITFAP collected walleye eggs from the St. Marys River for stocking in Lake Huron and the St. Marys River. The ITFAP-reared fingerlings that were stocked in inland lakes were in excess of the tribes’ annual Great Lakes stocking targets and, as part an ongoing cooperative walleye stocking partnership, were offered to the state for stocking in inland waters important to both the tribes and the state.

“As we reinitiate our walleye stocking program, the assistance from the tribes couldn’t have come at a better time, since this type of cooperative effort will help us meet everyone’s goals and objectives for healthier fisheries in Michigan,” Dexter said.

Cooperative walleye rearing and stocking work between the DNR and ITFAP has been ongoing for several years. According to ITFAP, the partnership is an example of how the tribes can contribute to the walleye fishery on lakes important to tribal members, while also benefiting non-tribal anglers.

“We have built a successful history of cooperative Great Lakes walleye stocking through the mutual sharing of eggs, fry, fingerlings and technology,” said ITFAP Director Tom Gorenflo.

In the past few years, ITFAP has produced fingerlings in excess of its Great Lakes stocking targets, providing the surplus to DNR for stocking in inland waters and Bay de Noc on an ad hoc basis.

This year, ITFAP and DNR were able to develop a tentative stocking plan for surplus fingerlings in advance of this walleye rearing season. “We are excited about the opportunity to broaden our future walleye stocking efforts to include inland lakes or additional areas of the Great Lakes such as Bay de Noc, in years when we have excess fingerlings, added Gorenflo. “These waters are important fishing areas for the tribes, and the amount of surplus fingerlings we were able to provide this year should help boost those walleye populations.”

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Cutlines:

Pictured are the 2-inch walleye fingerlings being delivered to their new home in the St. Marys River this June. Inter Tribal Fisheries and Assessment Program stocked .73 million walleye fingerlings this summer. The fingerlings went to sites on Lakes Michigan, Superior and Huron and the St. Marys River with a surplus going to Brevoort Lake, North Manistique Lake and Millecoquins Lake.

ITFAP Fisheries Enhancement Manager Greg Wright scoops a few stray fingerlings as the Sault Tribe's walleye rearing ponds yield up 730,000 of the 2-inch fish.

Photos by Brenda Austin, Win Awenen Nisitotung, June 2011