

**Possibly a Joint UPCAC Resolution if EUPCAC Approves 4/27/22**

**Western UP Citizens' Advisory Council  
Fisheries Subcommittee Resolution for Consideration  
March 22, 2022**

The WUPCAC Fisheries Subcommittee has become aware Governor Whitmer's budget is calling for \$30 million of federal relief money to be appropriated to the DNR fisheries hatchery system (see next page). We agree with Fisheries Chief James Dexter that this will be a "Once in a lifetime opportunity to improve the DNR's fisheries infrastructure." If approved by the legislature, monies will be available to upgrade long antiquated hatchery facilities.

We have reviewed the list of items that the Fisheries Division has proposed for the spending of this money. We are glad to see the Governor's support for fisheries in the State of Michigan. We also are glad the Fisheries Division will be able to upgrade the hatcheries. Without trying to take away from the need for hatcheries improvements, we feel additional infrastructure for walleye rearing is being overlooked and needs to be part of the infrastructure upgrade.

Of the approximate \$10 million allotted annually for rearing fish, it is our understanding that approximately 3% of that money is going towards rearing walleyes (\$300,000). Over the last 15 or so years, the number of U.P. inland waters stocked was slashed until just a handful of stocked lakes remained. The reason given at the time was for a study for the Bays de Noc requiring all or almost all of the spring walleye fingerlings from the management unit. Later we were told those tribal negotiations required the DNR to stock the Bays de Noc very heavily.

The end results of those actions have resulted in lost fishing opportunities for anglers in the U.P. Locals and vacationers alike are very disappointed that the DNR has failed to stock fingerlings at adequate levels. The newly released DNR Inland Walleye Management Plan states the DNR can't afford to stock walleyes as had been done in the past. What really is bothersome is the DNR is only spending approximately \$26,000 **on spring fingerlings for (added at 3/22/22 WUPCAC Meeting by Floyd Dropps)** the inland waters of the U.P.

It is our understanding that a pond to raise minnows downstate to feed walleye fingerlings for fall stocking is one line item dealing with walleyes. We feel there is room for much improvement. The DNR Fisheries has told us for years, if they had the money, they would make corrections. We think this is the time to re-invest in walleye management.

The WUPCAC Fisheries Subcommittee recommends the full Council support the following resolution: ***The WUPCAC respectfully requests the Fisheries Division modify their \$30 million hatchery windfall budget to include monies to enhance walleye fisheries, especially those in the Upper Peninsula. (Note: Changes below marked in red; items removed were made by the Council with agreement from the Fisheries Committee members at the 3/22/22 WUPCAC Meeting.)***

1. ***Changed to Item 5:*** Invest monies in the Western UP for a stand-alone walleye rearing facility. The new facility should be separate from existing hatcheries, as not to be put on a lower priority for production of other fish as has happened in the past.
2. ***Changed to Item 1:*** Newly lined drainable ponds should be added. These ponds should provide better fish survival while reducing manhours needed to harvest spring fingerlings.
3. ~~***Changed to Item 2:*** Hire seasonal workers to help in managing rearing ponds. REMOVED~~
4. ~~***Changed to Item 3:*** Appoint a dedicated fisheries person in each management area, who's main responsibility will be production of the walleye rearing ponds. REMOVED~~
5. ***Changed to Item 4:*** Add ponds to rear minnows to allow for rearing of fall fingerlings.

***Approved Items in Order of Priority (approved at 3/22/22 WUPCAC Meeting by majority vote)***

1. ***Item 1 (formerly Item 2):*** Newly lined drainable ponds should be added. These ponds should provide better fish survival while reducing manhours needed to harvest spring fingerlings.
2. ***Item 2 (formerly Item 4):*** Add ponds to rear minnows to allow for rearing of fall fingerlings.
3. ***Item 3 (formerly Item 1 then 5):*** Invest monies in the Western UP for a stand-alone walleye rearing facility. The new facility should be separate from existing hatcheries, as not to be put on a lower priority for production of other fish as has happened in the past.

Thank you for the opportunity to express our concerns.

A once in a lifetime opportunity to improve Michigan Fisheries

## **Governor's Proposed DNR Budget Highlights**

Jim Dexter, MDNR Fisheries Chief, stressed that the Governor's proposed budget is an extraordinarily good budget proposal, which will allow most of Fisheries Division's aging infrastructure to finally be upgraded.

### **Fishery survey equipment and related items**

Since much of the survey and monitoring equipment in Fisheries Division is old and worn-out, efforts will be made to upgrade or replace boats, motors, trailers, electronics, shop tools, monitoring equipment, nets, and other items needed for field and lab work. Normally, each year Fisheries Division only is provided about \$100,000 annually for such infrastructure upgrades but the proposal is designating \$1.5 million for these upgrades.

### **Replacement of the Lake Michigan Research Vessel, the Steelhead**

The proposal would allocate \$4 million from the general fund with no matching funds required for the replacement of the DNR Lake Michigan Research Vessel. The aging *R/V Steelhead* needs much work and because of its age, replacement parts are very difficult to obtain. This will be the last major upgrade to the DNR's Great Lakes research vessel fleet which will be completely modernized with a lifespan of over 50 years.

### **Hatchery infrastructure upgrades**

The proposal designates \$30 million for infrastructure upgrades of the six DNR fish hatcheries. This would modernize the aging systems resulting in more reliable fish production at less energy costs. Some of the items that will be improved include:

- The cold-water facilities at the Wolf State Fish Hatchery will be separated from the cool-water operations. Each section will have separate water supplies that will reduce the chances of disease transmission between the two sections of the hatchery. The ponds will be upgraded and there will be more room to raise minnows to feed fall fingerling walleyes. These upgrades will enhance walleye and muskellunge rearing production.
- Well upgrades and maintenance
- New electrical systems
- Resurfacing the concrete raceways with epoxy to seal them to prevent growth of disease organisms
- Upgrade heaters and heating systems. This is in addition to a separate ongoing \$3 million project to install solar panels at several hatcheries to save energy costs that can be substantial at the hatcheries.
- Replace the old pumps with new pumps that can be throttled to deal with changing demands.
- Effluent system upgrades
- Pond maintenance and sediment removal
- Roof upgrades
- Parking lot improvements
- Other needed work.

### **Tribal Coordination Unit**

Since the Tribal management activities are in the interest of all the public, efforts have been made to obtain general fund money. The work has been increasing and two years ago \$150,000 of general funding was obtained to help support hiring Steve Lenart, fishery biologist. The current \$650,000 request is for up to 4 staff including, 2 biologists and 2 technicians.