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Catch Limits Recommended for Lake Erie Walleye and Yellow Perch for 2008

NIAGARA FALLS, ON – Lake Erie fishery managers from Michigan, New York, Ohio, Ontario and Pennsylvania today recommended a 2008 total allowable catch (TAC) of 3.594 million walleye and 10.160 million pounds of yellow perch¹. Both the walleye and yellow perch TACs represent a decrease in allowable harvest from 2007. The managers, meeting as the Lake Erie Committee, noted that poor walleye and yellow perch year classes in 2002, 2004, and 2006, and a below average year class in 2007, necessitated the lower harvest in 2008.

WALLEYE

The Lake Erie Committee recommended a binational TAC for walleye in 2008 of 3.594 million fish. This compares to a TAC of 5.36 million fish in 2007. The Committee's Walleye Task Group—comprising scientists and field biologists—reported that walleye hatches have been poor in 2002, 2004, and 2006 and below average in 2007. Because of the continued low level of new fish to the harvestable population, the Lake Erie Committee recommended the TAC reduction to maintain and protect the remaining stocks. This reduction reflects the consensus of the committee that the fishery is becoming ever-reliant on the dwindling 2003 year class. Actual walleye harvest in 2007 was 4.486 million fish.

Lake Erie agencies together monitor the status of walleye spawning and recommend walleye TACs to ensure the future of the fishery. Based on the data collected and interpreted together by the Canadian and U.S. jurisdictions on Lake Erie, the reduced 2008 TAC will allow the agencies to adhere to their objectives of allowing harvest while protecting future spawning.

Under a 2008 TAC of 3.594 million fish, Ohio will be entitled to 1.847 million fish, Ontario 1.556 million fish, and Michigan 0.191 million fish. The TAC is recommended by the Lake Erie Committee and is allocated to Ohio, Michigan and Ontario by an area-based sharing formula of walleye habitat within each jurisdiction in the western and central basins of the lake. The walleye fisheries of eastern Lake Erie remain outside the allowable catch management area.

YELLOW PERCH

Like walleye, yellow perch spawning was poor in previous years such that the committee recommended a reduction in allocation to 10.160 million pounds in 2008 from 11.39 million pounds in 2007. An area-based sharing formula determines the allocation of these fish among the five jurisdictions on the lake. For 2008, Ontario's allocation is 4.861 million pounds, Ohio's allocation is 4.389 million pounds, and Michigan's allocation is 0.128 million pounds. New York and Pennsylvania will receive 0.098 million pounds and 0.684 million pounds respectively. In 2007, actual yellow perch harvest was 9.685 million pounds. The committee will complete its yellow perch management plan in 2008.

¹ Walleye are allocated by number of fish; yellow perch are allocated in pounds.

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BASIS FOR TAC DECISIONS

“Walleye and yellow perch fisheries in Lake Erie fluctuate based on annual spawning and survival,” said Lake Erie Committee chair Mike Morencie of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. “This means that the Lake Erie Committee must assess the state of the lake continually and recommend annual total allowable catch limits, based on the science that all jurisdictions collect and discuss together. Our top priority is to provide sport and commercial fishers—on both sides of the border—access to the resource while at the same time taking the necessary steps to ensure that the fishery is managed properly for the future.”

“Members of the Lake Erie Committee work very closely with their constituents to take into account their needs and concerns and to advise them of long-term trends in the Lake Erie fishery. The committee notes, for instance, that spawning and recruitment of walleye and yellow perch in Lake Erie have not been strong in previous years, with the exception of the massive 2003 year class. As the committee did last year, we advise constituents that the outlook for higher catch limits is unlikely for the foreseeable future. We appreciate that lower harvest levels are hard on both commercial and recreational fishers and on local communities. We remain committed to working together to minimize those hardships while taking into account the management actions that must occur to ensure the continued health of the fishery.”

Committee vice-chair Bill Culligan of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation added: “All of the jurisdictions on Lake Erie enjoy a long-standing, cooperative relationship in managing the lake for the benefit of the fish and our constituents. We appreciate the chance to work with those affected by the decreased harvest levels and we remain committed to incorporating human needs into the decision-making process.”

LAKE ERIE COMMITTEE

The Lake Erie Committee comprises fishery managers from Michigan, New York, Ohio, Ontario and Pennsylvania. The committee’s work is facilitated by the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, a Canadian and U.S. agency on the Great Lakes. Each year the committee recommends a total allowable catch for walleye and yellow perch. Total allowable catch represents the number of fish that can be caught by sport and commercial fishers without putting the stocks at risk. The individual agencies implement the recommended total allowable catch. For more information, visit the Lake Erie Committee online at www.glfcc.org/lec.