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West Carling Association

SINCE 1921

• GEORGIAN BAY SHORELINE CONCERNS •



The State of the Sport Fishery on the Georgian Bay

An Appeal for Your Support

If you have done much fishing along the coast of the eastern Georgian Bay over the last few years, you have doubtless been frustrated by your declining luck. It's not, however, your skills that are slipping. The sport fish simply are not there in the numbers they were ten years, let alone a generation ago. A 1981 survey in our area of the Bay indicated that it took an angler on average 20 hours to catch a walleye, nine hours to catch a pike and 1.5 hours for a smallmouth bass. The 1982 figures would doubtless be still worse. Perch fishing as well is down as anglers shift their attention to this fish in the face of the depletion of other stocks. The decline in the success rate of anglers has also meant that they have lowered their standards and are now keeping smaller fish and intensively fishing nursery areas. As a result, studies indicate that 90 per cent of the sport fish caught are too small to have yet had an opportunity for a single spawning, a factor that is obviously contributing further to the deterioration of the sport fishery.

The principal cause of the current problem has been identified by scientists as the commercial fishery. First, in this respect, it must be pointed out that walleye, the most sought-after of all game fish, is also classified as a commercial fish by the Ministry of Natural Resources. Years of setting too high a quota for walleyes has meant that this marvellous sport fish has virtually vanished from our area. Second, pike, too, are viewed as an acceptable catch by commercial fishermen when taken outside the present, far-too-limited sport fishing line. Since pike, like other sport fish, move in the summer to the cooler, deeper waters outside the protected zone, they have over the years been taken by the commercial fishermen in such large numbers that their current population is estimated at less than a tenth what it was ten to fifteen years ago. Third, permits have been issued to the commercial fishermen to fish within the current restricted zone for commercially accepted species. Such fishing, as well as that outside the restricted area, is conducted with gill nets, and over the years large numbers of sport fish have been caught and killed by this form of commercial fishing both within and outside the current zone. Fourth, since the population of the principal commercial fish, white fish and chub, has been down (at least until very

recently) due to over-fishing, the commercial fishermen have had to set thousands of yards of net to obtain catches that are economically viable (as of the late 1970's, 300 miles of gill nets had been licensed for commercial fishing in the area from Parry Sound to, and including, the French River; not all licences, however, are fully active). As a result, the probability of large numbers of sport fish being caught and killed by netting has increased. Finally, the decline in walleye and pike, both of which are major predators, has led to an increase in such undesirable species as suckers, carp, alewives and smelt. An improvement in the stocks of these large sport fish is thus important to the future maintenance of a balanced fish population.

While the commercial fishery is thus primarily responsible for the current problem, it must be emphasized that there is no reason why that industry cannot be maintained over the long-term as a viable economic enterprise in harmony with a refurbished sport fishery, provided proper resource management is practiced in the future.

In 1977 a campaign was launched by the newly-created Georgian Bay Sport Fisheries Federation to improve the quality of the sport fishery along the eastern shore, with Bill Davis of the West Carling Association playing a very active role in this federation. The time has now come, however, when this effort cannot be left in the hands of just a few people, but when they need the support of all of us in Carling Township. The state of the sport fishery should not be a matter of concern to our anglers alone, but to all of us anxious to preserve this section of the Georgian Bay as a recreational area. A restored fishery is essential to a rejuvenation of the resort industry, and that in turn is important to the economy of Carling Township. Without improved direct and indirect employment opportunities in the tourist sector, efforts will continue to mount within this township to attract industry and that is incompatible with the preservation of the area's natural beauty, its ecology and its wilderness and recreational character.

With these considerations in mind, the West Carling Association at its General Meeting in August decided to organize a lobbying effort in connection with the sport fishery and to enlist the support of the other four associations of shoreline and island property owners in Carling Township for this activity. Accordingly, the West Carling Association is asking all of its members, as well as shoreline and island property owners in West Carling who have not yet become members of the Association, to take a few minutes to write a letter or letters to the Minister of Natural Resources, to your local MPP if you know him or think he is interested in MNR matters, and to any provincial bureaucrats you may know concerned with natural resource issues.

While many Canadians are cynical about the utility of such lobbying efforts, research by political scientists indicates that independent letter-writing by individuals does carry substantial political influence. It is for this reason that we are not providing you with a form letter or asking you to sign a petition; such undertakings are not accorded the weight of independently composed letters, since the latter reflect more effort and, hence, are perceived as reflecting greater concern by those who take the trouble to write. You should also be assured that this is not the only action that is being taken. Letters are being sent on behalf of the West Carling and other associations

and the Georgian Bay Sport Fisheries Federation continues to function as the principal interest group concerned with this matter. However, your input is urgently required to reinforce the efforts of such organizations--to make it evident to the Government that individual citizens do care about the restoration of the sport fishery and its role in the preservation of the recreational character of the Georgian Bay.

It needs also to be emphasized that this action is being recommended not to create, but to eliminate conflict between sport and commercial fishermen. There is room for both with careful management of the fisheries resource, and we will all stand to benefit if the Ministry can thus be induced to take the necessary regulatory action.

Below we have indicated the address of the Minister of Natural Resources and listed a number of points from which you might want to draw in composing your letter, although the important thing is to say what you personally feel as succinctly as possible. It would be useful in your letter if you could also raise questions or make statements that will require the recipient to respond (e.g., "Please advise me as to what action the Ministry is considering to protect the sport fishery of the Georgian Bay.") Finally, the Association would be most grateful if you would be good enough to complete and mail the enclosed tear sheet indicating that you have written so that we will have some idea of the effectiveness of this appeal, and will be able to report the results to you in a later Association newsletter. (Copies of letters sent and replies received would also be helpful as we can pass such information on to those engaged in more continuous lobbying on this matter.)

Please act now for the sake of us all.

Possible Talking Points

1. Indicate the personal nature of your experience with the decline of sport fishing in this area.
2. Request that the present sport fishing zone be expanded by moving the demarcation line along the eastern shore of the Georgian Bay outwards beyond most of the island chain and to a depth of approximately 30 feet, so that it will include most of the waters inhabited by the major sport fish, like walleyes, pike, smallmouth bass and muskies.
3. Request the elimination of permits for commercial fishing within this new zone until the sport fishery has recovered and thereafter restrictions that will ensure no renewed harm to the sport fishery.
4. Request the banning of gillnetting in areas inhabited by sport fish (especially for any fishing permitted within the proposed new restricted zone) and the replacement of this method by the use of entrapment gear so that sport fish can be safely released.
5. Request that individual commercial fishermen be assigned exclusive fishing zones so that they will have an incentive to practice conservation and wise fisheries management within their zones.
6. Point out that the opportunity to catch fish yourself is more important to you than being able to purchase them from commercial fishermen.

- 7. Request that the Ministry publicize new size limits for sport fish that would ensure at least one spawning opportunity before fish are kept (e.g., 28 inches for pike, 17 for walleye and 12 for bass).
- 8. Request that splake be planted in the open Georgian Bay to take the pressure off other game fish and speed up the recovery of the fishery. A limit would need to be set on the size of the commercial catch of splake to make this a viable proposition for the Ministry of Natural Resources, given the limit on hatchery production of splake fingerlings. (Splake are now being planted in the Big Sound with anticipated great benefits for the sport fishery there.)
- 9. Request that more assertive action be taken to protect sport fish spawning areas throughout the coast of the Georgian Bay.
- 10. Request that more effective action be taken to stop out-of-season sport fishing and to ensure that catch limitations are adhered to in season.
- 11. Refer to the benefits to the commercial fishery as well as to the sport fishery that would result from more careful management of fish stocks.
- 12. Refer to the economic benefits to be derived from a restoration of the sport fishery in terms of a strengthened resort industry, thus facilitating the maintenance of the recreational character of the Georgian Bay.

WRITE TO: Hon. Alan Pope,
 Minister of Natural Resources,
 Whitney Block,
 99 Wellesley St. W.,
 Toronto M7A 1W3

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This is to indicate that I have sent a letter(s) about the state of the sport fishery to the following

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Signature _____

Please mail this form to:

West Carling Association,
 c/o 135 Ridgewood Road,
 West Hill, Ontario M1C 2X3.