

DATE: GUESS 1985

Page 1

W.C.A FISHERIES UP-DATE by Bill Davis

This edition of my regular report on the status of our fisheries will be characterized more by doom and gloom, than by cheery optimism. I guess this pessimism is part of the conviction I share with my fellow resort operators that our style of tourism will not survive this generation. Tourism in this area has been dependant on the area's wild beauty, clean waters, good fishing, and uncrowded character. All of this is threatened by relatively uncontrolled development. I am surprised that the vast majority of Carling's shoreline residents seem inclined to passively accept the loss of these values.

LAKE TROUT

Since 1984 I have been convinced that exploitation rates experienced by our lake trout and splake fishery are too high, and that the genetic quality of the original lake trout was not being maintained. Much of the biological explanation associated with these problems is too complex for this newsletter. Over the last year there have been two developments that have changed this situation from urgent to critical.

1) A new viral disease, lethal to lake trout, has invaded the U.S. waters of the Great Lakes. To avoid any risk that this disease, although it is not yet known to occur in Canadian waters, might infect their hatcheries MNR has banned the collection of eggs, for lake trout propagation, from the Great Lakes. This means that there will be no stocking of lake trout in the Big Sound for the foreseeable future. This has been compounded by the loss of at least half the lake trout that were to be stocked last spring while they were being trucked up here from the hatchery. In addition, all of the lake trout that were to be planted next spring were lost when they escaped from the cages they were being reared in.

2) The splake program is under review, and it is widely expected that it will be cancelled.

The cumulative effect of these developments is that the future of this fishery now depends on natural reproduction. Given local attitudes

towards restraint and conservation, I don't believe it has a chance! Unless our District Biologist, Lloyd Thurston, makes some good moves, quickly, our excellent lake trout fishery will be but a memory in 5 or 6 years. The lake trout at Davy Island were spawning successfully until 1981. Since then there is no evidence of any significant natural reproduction anywhere in the Sound.

Evidence of natural reproduction by the lake trout would show up as numerous young, unclipped fish. If the fishery is to hold its own, there would have to be at least as many small natural fish entering the fishery each year as are being harvested. In other words your catches of trout should comprize as many small fish as all other sizes combined. At present less than 1 trout in 100 is a small natural trout, so it is apparent that we are harvesting the lake trout more than 100 times faster than they are being replaced by natural means.

Lloyd Thurston is asking trout anglers to voluntarily release any lake trout larger than 5 lbs. in an attempt to protect spawning size fish. He is further asking that anglers release natural (unclipped) lake trout of any size to protect the genetic diversity of the trout stocks.

Lloyd has asked my help in catching some lake trout in the closed area this summer, so that sonic tags can be placed on them. He wishes to track their movements to evaluate, among other things, the value of the closed area. I believe this is much needed research, and I am happy to be able to help.

WALLEYE

The project to rehabilitate the walleye population of the Shebeshekong River made more progress in 1988. The project, led by Robert Merkel, and a handful of dedicated volunteers, raised another 12,000 walleye fingerlings. The group also doubled the size of the three ponds that the walleyes are now being reared in, and re-established a 3,000 square foot spawning area in the Miner Rapids (at the Dillon bridge). A few members of the group repaired the excellent walleye spawning areas much further up the river. These areas had been destroyed by a group of thoughtless individuals who wanted

easier boating access up the river.

Although our group's work received copious praise from the MNR, the same cannot be said for Carling township council. A first request for a donation from the Township by a delegation from the project was turned down, although Carling had promptly honoured such a request from the walleye project at Pointe au Baril. A later request, made just before the election, did result in a useful contribution.

Approval for work necessary to re-establish the walleye spawning area at the Miner rapids, during October, was sought from Carling council, and was given. Unfortunately, the group of individuals, myself among them, doing the work altered a small section of the shoreline without separate, specific permission. We were concerned that a small, uneven section of rock retaining wall, built to contain a septic tile field that once existed at the edge of the river, would be hazardous for individuals coming to view the spawning walleyes that we hope will soon crowd the new spawning area. Walleyes spawn at night, and we were concerned that the vertical drop at the edge of the swift river current would be dangerous, especially to those not familiar with the area. No members of Carling Council had come by to show interest, or offer encouragement, during the four days when most of the work was done. However, our Reeve happened by as Ron Ramsay was tidying up the area, which had become somewhat dishevelled by this major construction. Mr. Reekie took exception to some of the work done, and ordered a halt. He then mobilized Council to demand that the Ministry of Natural Resources order us to replace the rock wall and to clean the area up. Council made no effort to discuss any of this with the walleye project volunteers. We volunteers had little choice but to view these tactics as harassment, in as much as we had fully intended to landscape the area upon completion of the project, until interrupted by Mr. Reekie, and also we felt that we had used our best judgement in altering the rock wall while the equipment to do the job was on site. Later we heard that Carling council, upon hearing of our safety reasons for doing the work, retaliated by asking MNR to post the area as now being unsafe for canoeing. We have not yet been able to learn of any incidents where

anyone has ever attempted to canoe through these rapids, and consequently view this as continued harassment. It is "nice" to know that our efforts, as unpaid volunteers to improve our community, are so well appreciated by our elected council.

SMALLMOUTH BASS

Dropping water levels in Georgian Bay have probably resulted in many of the smallmouth bass nest sites I established over the last few years to be left high and dry. I intend to put in a bunch more this spring, to accomodate the present water levels. I would like to remind you that there are still stockpiles of gravel at several locations on the shoreline should any of you wish to do some also.

CONSERVATION

The single biggest problem that the rehabilitation of our fisheries now face is excessive exploitation. Unfortunately there are still far too many anglers in this area who appear to believe that our fisheries are inexhaustible. Despite the fact that over the last century the number of anglers plying these waters has increased several hundred fold, some individuals seem to retain the attitudes about fishing that their great grandfathers did. Not only are there vastly increased numbers of anglers, but they are equipped with electronic fish finders, snowmachines, fast seaworthy boats, and a plethora of lures, lines, rods and reels. Magazine articles describe, in detail effective techniques that at one time were only known by a few, if any, anglers. At the same time habitat losses because of rampant shoreline development have decreased our fisheries ability to renew themselves.

There will always be fishermen who feel compelled to take home every fish they catch. It may be the only way they can show off. Where large numbers of fish are involved, these people are no longer heroes, they are hogs. The only defence against them is peer pressure. If you condone this greed you have no right to expect decent fishing, and you won't get any. Fishery resources can no longer support a frontier ethic. If our fisheries are to have a bright future, many more of you are going to have to become involved in their maintenance and rehabilitation.