

THE INSIDE LINE

LAKE ERIE ANNUAL STATE OF THE LAKE MEETING

I recently attended a State of Lake Erie meeting at Woodlawn State Park. This meeting was hosted by the NYSDEC Lake Erie fisheries unit located in Dunkirk New York. There were approximately 100 people in attendance including DEC officials from the Buffalo and Olean offices. This was a great turnout even though I don't believe that the meeting was well advertised. The meeting results by species are as follows:

WALLEYE

The eastern end of Lake Erie has experienced 8 consecutive years of superb walleye recruitment and we now have an estimated 150 million walleyes in the lake! Their diet has changed from primarily rainbow smelt to gobies due to a diminished smelt supply. The growth rate has slowed a little due to reduce forage but still is good by all standards. The average walleye caught was 20" and the catch rate per boat was 6 which exceeded the norm of 3. The bottom line is. We should have excellent walleye fishing in Eastern Lake Erie for the foreseeable future...The good old days is actually right now!!

PERCH

The eastern basin had excellent hatches in 2016 and 2019 so we should have continued good fishing with the average perch being in excess of 11 inches" Once again permitting the catching of perch full of spawn was questioned but the DEC felt that the prolific nature of the spawning perch with thousands of eggs negated the effect of catching a few 'spawners". In fact one DEC official felt that there are so many perch in the eastern basin that many of them die of old age. Bottom line again, we should have excellent perch fishing for the immediate future.

SMALLMOUTH BASS

This fishery is very stable and again ranks as one of the top 5 smallmouth fisheries in United States. 95% of the bass caught are released back into the fishery which is typical for bass fishing. Spring and fall seem to be the best times to fish and the catch rate per hour is above normal. The shore fishermen especially in the Buffalo and Niagara River area also catch a lot of bass so having a boat is not required to enjoy this fishery. The DEC noted a slight downturn in size caught but felt it was not significant.

I will have more information on this State of the Lake seminar in the next column along with upcoming events.

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