

History of the Mason County Walleye Association

Ludington, Michigan

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The Mason County Walleye Association was first organized in 1987, incorporated as a non-profit corporation in 1988 and began rearing walleye fry to fingerlings in 1989. The first pond that the association operated was a five acre non-drainable pond between what was at that time the K-Mart shopping plaza and the exit ramp for the US 31 highway. We had a successful first year; we raised 102,000 fingerlings from 200,000 fry for a 51% survival.

At that time we were in the process of constructing our own drainable rearing pond on property that was donated to us by The Dow Chemical Company. The property was donated for the express purpose of building a walleye rearing facility. We also had very good community support and help from large contributors such as The Consumers Power Company, the Fish American Foundation and the Michigan Wildlife Foundation. We were also the recipient of an Inland Fisheries Grant from the Michigan DNR.

1990 was our second year in operation. We operated two ponds, the one next to K-Mart and our own new drainable pond. We raised 52,000 fingerlings from 200,000 fry (26% survival) in the K-Mart pond and 146,000 from 250,000 fry (58% survival) in our new pond.

The third year was our last year to operate the K-Mart pond. The highway department had a problem with private access to the pond from the expressway. The decision was OK with us since the pond was getting clogged with algae from the heavy fertilization and its productivity was deteriorating. In 1991 we raised 41,000 fingerlings from 200,000 fry (20% survival). In our new pond we were able to do significantly better. It didn't have the same algae problem since the pond would drain like a bathtub and we could start a new rearing season with fresh water. It was also determined that the stocking number could be raised to 320,000 fry. We had 125,000 survive (39%).

We have continued to operate the drainable rearing pond to this date with one year absent (2007) when the DNR decided to not raise any walleye due to VHS concerns in the inland fish population. We have been in operation now for 24 years, have raised a total of 3,500,000 fingerlings from 7,600,000 fry (a 45.9% survival).

The fish have been distributed by the DNR to lakes in the northwest part of the state. Mason county has received 1,165,000* fingerlings (33%), Manistee County, 939,000* (27%) and other counties in Michigan, 1,200,000* (34%). The lakes in Mason county are Hamlin and Hackert Lakes, Manistee County, Bear Lake, Portage Lake, Hodenpyl & Tippy ponds, and some of the lakes outside these two counties are Silver lake (Grand Traverse Co.), Upper & Lower Hearing lake, Platte Lake (Benzie Co.), Big Star Lake (Lake Co.), Muskegon River (Muskegon CO.), Lake Mitchell & Lake Cadillac (Wexford Co.), Houghton Lake (Roscommon Co.), and Rose Lake & Missaukee Lake (Missaukee Co.)

*These numbers only include lakes stocked with Walleye raised in the Mason County Walleye Association's rearing ponds. There are additional fish that were stocked in these lakes that were raised by the DNR in their own facilities.

Raising Walleye and stocking them in lakes that are heavily fished by the public has a major impact on the local economy and also benefits the quality of life for both residents and visitors. These communities that rely on tourism as a major component of their economic well being rely on programs such as this to improve their visibility and attract visitors.

The Mason County Walleye Association plans to continue raising Walleye for as long as the DNR wants us to. We see this as a commitment in perpetuity. Walleye is a very desirable game fish species and fishing pressure is intense. It is unlikely that the DNR would discontinue their Walleye stocking programs and we plan to continue a relationship that has been very productive.