



GRETCHEN WHITMER
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
LANSING



M. SCOTT BOWEN
DIRECTOR

DATE: February 13, 2024
TO: Onekama Township Invasive Species Committee
FROM: Scott Heintzelman, Supervisor, Central Lake Michigan Management Unit
SUBJECT: Portage Lake memo, Onekama Township Hall, February 7, 2024

Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) Fisheries Division Unit Manager, Scott Heintzelman, met with the Onekama Township Invasive Species Committee to discuss the findings of the Advanced Ecological Management (AEM) fisheries survey conducted on Portage Lake, summer 2023.

- Survey conducted by AEM staff followed MDNR protocol (net types/gear) to sample fish communities.
- Survey design used by AEM was determined in consultation with MDNR to produce best possible results.
- Over a thousand fish representing 28 different species were collected during the survey by AEM.
- MDNR Fisheries Managers have reviewed the survey results and analysis and generally agree with the summary. The AEM survey is comparable to past MDNR surveys of Portage Lake.
- Concerns related to panfish populations (bluegill/pumpkinseed) raised in the AEM survey summary are warranted, however other recent MDNR survey information was not included and might buffer these conclusions:
 - MDNR creel survey results from 2009 – 2019 consistently show yellow perch and bluegill as being the most caught species in Portage Lake. Although catch rates for both species fluctuates from year to year they remain the most popular fisheries, followed by bass fisheries.
 - MDNR walleye survey conducted in March 2021 caught 100 bluegill as bycatch. Length of bluegill and count was recorded. Bluegill ranged from 3 inches to 11 inches, indicated good size and age distribution.
- Although catch numbers were very low for bluegill and pumpkinseed sunfish during the AEM survey, fish ranged in size from 2 inches to 8 inches indicating several age classes exist in Portage Lake and reproduction is occurring.

Other discussion items: The AEM survey along with all past MDNR surveys of Portage Lake have specified aquatic habitat, and nearshore habitat preservation as being critical to ecology and overall health of the Portage Lake watershed. Potential items the Invasive Species Committee could pursue would be:

- Aquatic habitat education, best management practices for private property owners, recommendations for boat operators to reduce erosion and resuspension of fine materials, educational signage posted at key access points.
- Habitat restoration, including nearshore habitat projects on public property, habitat restoration projects with willing property owners, explore various grant opportunities. Consult with local MDNR Fisheries Biologist.
- Invasive species management, review treatment plans, examine all options, understand risk vs consequences.

If need further information or assistance, please contact me at 231-433-9782, or by email at heintzelmans@michigan.gov.

cc: Mark Tonello