

## House Ways & Means Committee

### Testimony

#### HB 4567, HB 4568, HB 4569

**Dennis H. Eade, Executive Director  
Michigan Steelhead and Salmon Fishermen's Association**

Chairman Iden and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bills 4567, 4568 and 4569 sponsored by Representatives O'Malley, Wendzel, and Lilly. These bills protect game fish, codify those fish species available for commercial harvest, regulate gear used to take fish and establish meaningful penalties to protect the sport fishery. The legislation is being introduced at a time when sport fish (or game fish) are under stress from a shrinking forage base caused by invasive species like zebra and quagga mussels. Mussels are changing the Great Lakes ecosystem by filtering the food source of small marine animals that make up the diet of larger prey fish which comprise our sport and commercial fisheries. The fisheries division is having to make tough management decisions and cutting fish plants of salmon, steelhead, brown trout and lake trout to prevent a system wide collapse in Lake Michigan, as occurred in Lake Huron in 2004. In order to ensure we continue to provide sport anglers with the opportunity to catch salmon, steelhead, brown trout, and perch, we need to protect these species from further deprivation.

Today, sport fishing in Michigan represents a \$4.2 billion dollar industry that can ill afford a major **drop off** of out-of-state fishing tourism or in-state anglers. Over 300,000 anglers visit Michigan to experience our World Class fisheries annually. Michigan is second only to the state of Florida for out-of-state fishing tourism. That is why the Tourism Industry Coalition of Michigan, which is comprised of over 50 organizations including Convention and Visitor Bureaus, Lodging Associations and Attractions, is supporting this legislation. The American Sport Fishing Association (ASA) which includes tackle manufacturers, boat manufacturers, retailers, wholesalers, and media, forwarded a letter of support from over thirty manufacturers as signatories for the passage of these bills. Local units of government like the City of St. Joseph, South Haven, Holland, Ferrysburg, Bay City, Lake St. Clair and Macomb County Commissioners, have passed resolutions of support for these bills.

Protecting game fish means more than just allocation; it means having substantive regulations as well. In fact, and as just one example of why this statute needs to be updated, what happens if an angler goes over their legal limit? I am a recreational angler, and if I were to go one fish over my bag limit, such as a walleye, or a steelhead, I would be facing a misdemeanor fine of up to \$500 for that one fish. Conversely, for the commercial fishers, the existing statute language for fines limits a fine to no more than \$100 dollars. That commercial fisher could take tens of thousands of pounds of whitefish over a licensed allocation, make a killing on the sale of those fish, and only be liable for a \$100 dollar fine. These are public trust resources that deserve recognition of their value to society. A \$100 dollar fine is not a disincentive to break the law. In order to have proper resource management we must have reasonable rules that allow for enforcement that is meaningful. Without strong regulations and enforcement, how can our DNR

properly manage Great Lakes fisheries for generations to come? It is appropriate for this legislature to consider proper fines and penalties for an industry that utilizes our public trust resources.

Saginaw Bay, for example, represents over 70% of all angling activity on Lake Huron. Walleye and yellow perch are the major recreational attraction and yellow perch are currently at historic lows. Lose those fisheries to commercial exploitation and not only will billions of dollars be lost to the State economy in the loss of jobs and revenue from sport fishing but we will suffer the loss of countless hours of recreational enjoyment that sport fishing provides.

Dr. Tanner writes in his memoir titled "*Something Spectacular*" that, and I quote, "once sport fishing was recognized as the best allocation of resources, it was necessary to restrict commercial methods of fishing so that they would have little or no impact on sport fishing. In conservation circles, this practice is known as managing for the 'key value.' Recreational fishing would be the key value, and commercial fishing efforts could exist only where there was no or little negative impact on recreational fishing and the development of the largest and most valuable freshwater recreational fishery in the world."

Why would we want to invest so much as sportsmen and women with license fees and excise tax dollars to build up these fisheries merely to hand over a third of the sport fish to private companies to sell? The Fisheries Division is a \$40 million dollar operation funded by sport fishermen and women. Are commercial fishers willing to pay 30% of that cost to fund the division from with their license fees and profits? These companies have invested nothing in our state's game fish but are demanding they get a share.

The Michigan Steelhead and Salmon Fishermen's Association recommends you support the proposed commercial fishing statute bills before you, consider the effects it will have in the future instead of now in the present where we find a negligible number of commercial fishing operations. These bills represent valid distinctions, rules and necessary regulations for properly managing the public trust waters of the Great Lakes.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bills 4567, 4568 and 4569.

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