



# cannonball

## G A Z E T T E



OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE MICHIGAN CHARTER BOAT ASSOCIATION • FALL 2017

## 2017 ANNUAL CONFERENCE & BUSINESS MEETING

### MCBA Annual Membership Meeting

**October 20, 21 & 22, 2017**

*Working With You For A Better Charter Industry*

Holland, MI — The 2017 Annual Michigan Charter Boat Association Business Conference will be held over the weekend of October 20, 21 and 22, 2017 at The Double Tree Hotel by Hilton.

The Association has made arrangements with the hotel for a special room rate for those who wish to stay overnight for one or two nights. Call them at (616) 394-0111, and ask for the MCBA special rate (\$94 per night, Code: MCB) the address is 650 E. 24th Street St. Holland, MI 49423

The fall conference is a great way to catch up on what's going on and to enjoy a day or two away from the regular home routine. Bring your spouse or significant other, too. There are lots of things (shopping for the upcoming holidays) to do in the area.

The Annual Conference will begin on Friday evening with a social gathering in the hospitality room (6: PM - till?). This informal gathering will provide an evening long opportunity to mix with MCBA officers and board members; maybe some DNR personnel or Sea Grant staff, and of course, other captains from all over the state. There will be FREE snacks, pizza, pop and adult drinks.

Of course, attendance at this event is strictly optional, but it is a great way to start your weekend at the MCBA conference. And you



The Double Tree Hotel by Hilton

*Call 616-394-0111 to secure your room reservation code: MCB*

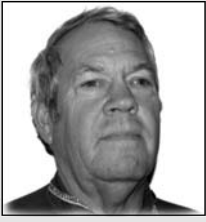
might get a chance to talk to someone in the DNR who needs to hear your issue. However, you don't need to attend the Friday evening session to enjoy the conference main event.

The main event will begin early Saturday morning, with coffee and Complete Deluxe Buffet Breakfast during registration. The program begins at 9:00 AM. Various Speakers and panels will present information about issues of interest to our captains. There are question and answer sessions at the end of each presentation. The program for this fall's conference agenda is located on page five.

On Saturday evening we will have a dinner at the hotel, followed by a short program including the Annual MCBA Awards and our honored din-

*(Continued on page 2)*

## From the Helm . . .



As I write this column for this September issue of the Cannonball it's looking like a much better summer for MCBA Captains on Lake Michigan in 2017. King Salmon numbers seem to be up from over the last several years... King Salmon were big and that seems to be holding true with Coho Salmon as well. From personal observation in my area, the Betsie River is having one of the best runs of King Salmon since 2012 with many vehicles parked along roads near the Betsie. I am looking forward to this year's MDNR creel data this coming winter.

On August 30, I attended the Lake Huron Citizens Advisory Meeting at Jay's in Clare. A few of the highlights from this meeting for our Lake Huron captains: In MH-1 (Northern Lake Huron), the lake trout harvest by sport anglers is over the total allowable catch (TAC) by roughly 30,000 lbs. This is in regards to the tribal consent decree for Lake Huron waters. It is worrisome as the MDNR was talking about a three-bag limit per angler down to two fish per angler. Our captains need to know this who fish Lake Huron waters. Atlantic salmon are being dropped next year from approximately 175,000 to 100,000 plants due to

overcrowding and sickness at the Platte River Hatchery. Plans are to release the young Atlantics at Lexington and St. Mary's River for the best survival of the smolts. The walleye by-catch issue between commercial netters and sport anglers is still ongoing in the Saginaw Bay area at this time. The proposed new Commercial Fishing Statue is on hold as of this time. MCBA will report to our membership when we have any news on this item.

In July, Captain Jim Bennett and I attended the NRC meeting in Lansing at the Lansing Center. We both presented our reasons to remove the chumming ban on Michigan rivers. From what we see it will take our captains writing letters to state congressional representatives to make a difference regarding this new law.

In closing, I hope to see you at our annual workshop and banquet at the Double Tree Hotel, Holland MI. in October. Dates are from the 20th through the 22nd. We have a good line up of MDNR fisheries people who will provide the latest in Michigan's fishery news.

Kind regards,

Captain Eric Andersen

MCBA President 

**Friday Oct. 20, 2017 Hospitality room opens (6:00 PM - till?). See You There!**

*(Continued from page 1).* . . . **Annual Meeting**

ner speaker Dr. Harvey Bootsma, School of Freshwater Sciences, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. After the short program, there is a spirited tackle raffle, usually raffling off some of the best current tackle from the best companies.

For those who stay over and we encourage you to do so, Sunday morning brings the official annual business meeting after coffee, juice, and BREAKFAST BUFFET (Free to all members & spouse). The meeting will cover all the cur-

rent business of the Association and will end following the election of officers. Normally, the meeting is over by 10:30 AM or so, and folks begin to check out to travel home or take in local events.

We offer our annual business meeting as a benefit to our members for the sake of working together. We hope you will attend to learn more from your Association and what we have to offer your charter business. Why not take a little time off from your normal schedule and take in an

*(Continued on page 3)*

interesting, informative and relaxing weekend for fun and camaraderie with fellow captains. 🐟



**Maritime Licensing Specialist**  
Lt. Commander USCG (retired)  
Charles "Chuck" Kakuska

### SEA K'S LICENSING LORE

I would like to start by thanking MCBA for the wonderful flower arrangement sent to my wife Connie during her hospital stay. It brought a smile to her face during a very dark time. It was a real morale booster knowing people care.

As Connie continues to improve, I wish I could say the same about the Coast Guard National Maritime Center. Though medical cards are being issued relatively quickly, once the application package is received in the Professional Qualifications Evaluations Branch (PQEB) it can take anywhere from 6-8 weeks for your actual credential to be issued. If they are this far behind in the traditionally slower summer season, what is the winter going to bring? I am encouraging everyone to take full advantage of starting the renewal process up to 8 months early to avoid not having a valid license when your season is scheduled to start. I do not think you will see the Coast Guard grant another extension like they did last year. Regarding that extension, everyone should be aware it is no longer available after September 30, 2017.

Several reminders as you are completing your application packages. On the small boat sea service forms remember to only list days

after your current license was issued. I've run across quite a few files lately where service was listed prior to the current credential being issued and when the Coast Guard subtracts those days from your total, individuals are coming up short of the required sea time for renewal. Also, if your boat ownership is listed in a corporate name please remember to include a copy of your business license or articles of incorporation to verify you own the boat. Also, please remember a chiropractor cannot complete your physical. It must be a licensed physician or nurse practitioner.

We can go into more detail about some of the common pitfalls at the winter meeting. Hope to see you there. 🐟



**N. Lake Michigan**  
By Captain Bill Winowiecki  
MCBA Director



Labor Day weekend is already here. Wrapping up the 2017 charter season is on the horizon.

It has been a good fishing season. Very large king salmon. I have heard of quite a few fish 30 lbs. or over. Last year we had very few salmon and no alewives in northwestern Lake Michigan. This year the salmon fishing has been good. There seems to be good schools of alewives. I have been catching a few kings all summer. The last three weeks of August have brought back memories of the good old days.

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<p><b>"CANNONBALL GAZETTE"</b> Editor: Larry Lienczewski · published by the <b>MICHIGAN CHARTER BOAT ASSOCIATION</b> P.O. Box 80162 · Lansing, MI 48908-0323 800-622-2971</p> <p><b>OFFICERS</b></p> <p><b>President: Eric Andersen</b> · (231) 362-3242 13568 9 Mile · Kaleva, MI 49645</p> <p><b>Vice President: Rich Haslett</b> · (248) 542-1563 292 S. Zimmerman Rd · Beulah, MI 49617</p> <p><b>Secretary: John Giszczak</b> · (734) 787-0030 9760 Judd Road · Willis, MI 48191</p>	<p><b>Treasurer: Larry Lienczewski</b> (989) 684-7943 3396 Anna Drive · Bay City, MI 48706</p> <p><b>Directors</b></p> <p><b>Northern Lake Michigan</b> <b>Bill Winowiecki</b> · (231) 228-7417 3700 Schomberg Rd · Cedar, MI 49621</p> <p><b>Central Lake Michigan</b> <b>George Freeman</b> · (231) 845-1779 6888 Illinois Rd · Ludington, MI 49431</p> <p><b>Southern Lake Michigan</b> <b>Mike Nelson</b> (616) 990-4421 15801 Stanton St · West Olive, MI 49460</p>	<p><b>Upper Peninsula</b> <b>Brian Helminen</b> · (906) 482-2424 22950 Airpark Blvd · Calumet, MI 49913</p> <p><b>Southern Lake Huron</b> <b>Ken Deaton</b> (989) 428-3130 2905 Parkview Drive · Port Hope, MI 48486</p> <p><b>Northern Lake Huron</b> <b>Rick Konecke</b> (989) 255-4524 916 Ford Ave · Alpens, MI 48707</p> <p><b>Lakes St. Clair and Erie</b> <b>Henry Walters</b> · (586) 725-3678 7103 St. Clair Ave · Fair Haven, MI 48023</p>
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## SECRETARY'S REPORT

By Captain John Giszczak



If you have fishing reports you'd like to share with potential charter guests, please send them to me: MCBA Secretary John Giszczak; fishstraycat@gmail.com. Reports are posted on the MCBA website and the name of your business will be posted with your fishing report. Please include a picture. It makes the post more interesting and will make it much more likely that potential guests will contact you about a fishing trip. Pictures of fish must be clean (no blood showing) preferably taken on your boat, on the water. It's a great opportunity to showcase your business with little effort and "zero" cost.

The 2018 Membership Applications will be mailed in late September. Please do not let

them sit on your desk until 2018. A number of captains neglected to mail in their applications until after the December 31st deadline last year, and got burned; having to pay to be re-drug tested. Also, make sure your mates turn in their applications as early as possible, to avoid potentially slower processing after the fishing season starts. I know it's a pain but please fill out the application completely; if something is missing I have to assume you don't want it in your listing. I occasionally make mistakes entering your data, so please don't wait until the 2018 season is in full swing to check your listing and wonder why you're not getting any calls. It pays to check your listing at the beginning of every new membership year to be sure it is accurate, and then occasionally throughout the season, to be sure it is on-line and working for your business. 🐟



Visit MCBA Industry News & Events: [MCBAmembers.com](http://MCBAmembers.com)

*(Continued from page 3) . . . Directors Report*

Anglers have had very good catches of small, medium and large salmon. These fish are very healthy and powerful. Where did they all come from?

I wish I could say the same thing about lake trout. Tribal netting has shrunk the size of our fish and numbers are down in zone MM-5. We have caught many smaller fish 15 to 20 inches long. We have spent a lot of time searching for pods of lake trout to zero in on.

The MCBA finally received our raffle license and permit. We sent out tickets to our membership. I am starting to receive returns on our tickets. I want to thank all members who purchased tickets and asked for more.

There were many hours of work between our board members and my wife Sue to get this project off the ground. Sue came through in flying colors. She stuffed all the envelopes while I was fishing. She deserves a special thank

you.

The Coalition to Protect Michigan Resources attorneys, Steve Schultz and Chris Patterson, met with the DNR officials on July 24, 2017. Issues about the 2020 Tribal Decree were discussed.

Rich Haslett and I attended the Tribal Council Meeting August 24, 2017 at the Grand Traverse Resort. All notes I have received were listed as confidential. I am writing this so that our members know our positions are being heard.

It is hard for the MCBA to raise funds to support the "Coalition" when we cannot discuss what is going on. It is very frustrating.

Please consider donating to the MCBA to support the Coalition to Protect Michigan Resources fund when renewing your membership. We have a long way to go and negotiations are starting. Your tax-deductible donation is deeply

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# MCBA Conference Agenda, Saturday, October 21, 2017

- 8:00 – 9:00 AM Registration and Breakfast (Courtesy of the MCBA)
- 9:00 – 9:15 AM Introductory Remarks & Pledge of Allegiance Eric Andersen, President, Michigan Charter Boat Association; Introduction of Program Moderator , Dan O’Keefe, SW District Educator, Sea Grant
- 9:15 – 10:00 AM Todd Grizskea, Assistant Director, MDNR - GL Basin update
- 10:00- 10:20 AM **Break**
- 10:20 – 11:00 AM Jay Wesley, Lake Michigan Basin Coordinator:  
Salmon, Lake Trout, Predator Prey Update  
11:00 – 11:40 AM Jay Wesley, Lake Michigan Management
- 11:40 – 12 Noon Charter Catch Reports Update: Donna Wesander, MDNR  
Charlevoix Fisheries Research Station, Michigan DNR
- 12 Noon–1:00 PM **Lunch** (Courtesy of Michigan Charter Boat Association).
- 1:00 – 2:00PM Dr. Harvey Bootsma, School of Freshwater Sciences, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee: Great Lakes Food Chain-What is Happening.
- 2:00 – 2:30 PM Dan O’Keefe, MSU Sea Grant: Charter Boat Economics
- 2:30 – 3:00 PM USCG License Renewal & Updates: USCG Lt. Commander (retired), “Chuck” Kakuska, Sea K’s Maritime Service
- Break**
- 6:00 – 7:00 PM Social Hour – Cash Bar
- 7:00 – 8:00 PM **Dinner**
- 8:00 – 8:30 PM Introductory Remarks MCBA President, Eric Andersen  
Dinner Speaker - Dr. Harvey Bootsma
- 8:30 - ? MCBA and Pistis Awards, Special Recognition Awards; MCBA Tackle Raffle

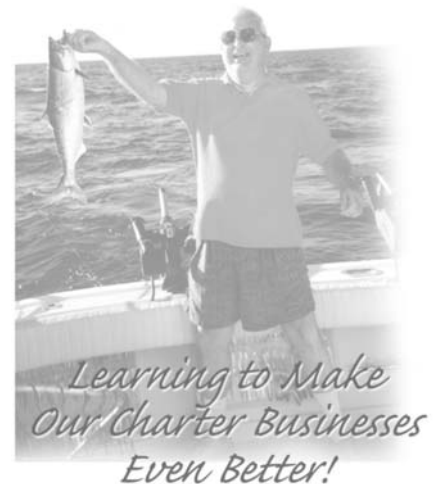
**Talk responsive websites with Maxine Appleby:**  
Is your website responsive (compatible with smartphones and tablets?) Maxine Appleby will be available to discuss these issues with you.

*The Hospitality Suite will re-open following the conclusion of the Tackle Raffle*

## MCBA Program, Sunday, October 22, 2017

- 8:00 – 9:00 AM Coffee, juice and Deluxe Breakfast Buffet (Free to All Members and Spouses).
- 9:00 – 10:30 AM Annual Membership Meeting: President’s Report, Committee Reports, New Business, Election of Officers; Raffle.

At the adjournment of the meeting, there will be a free drawing for the Hospitality Room cooler and its contents and a **GoPro 5 Session Camera**. Each registered member present will be given one ticket for the drawing. You must be present to win. 🐟



appreciated.

Hope to see you at MCBA Annual Business Conference October 20, 21 & 22, 2017 🐟



**Central Lake Michigan**

By Captain George Freeman - MCBA Director

All and all for most captains in Central Lake Michigan, this season has been a better one than last year but has still had its ups and downs. Many captains have said their bookings are up from last season. June and July's offshore fishery didn't materialize again this year so lake trout were the primary target for many captains. King fishing was better mid July through mid August this season. Lots of 20-plus pound fish were caught, including a 37 pound King caught in Ludington and a 41 pounder caught in Muskegon. From mid August through September 1, king fishing has been tough. A couple bright spots this year have been reports of large amounts of bait showing up on sonar and fish are filled with both big and small alewives. Also the Coho fishery has really helped augment our catches. They have stuck around longer than usual this year in Central Lake Michigan. Without them our boxes in August would have been much lighter.

The annual MCBA membership meeting will be held October 20, 21, & 22, 2017 at The Double Tree Inn at Holland this year. Special room rates are being offered for MCBA members. Hope to see you there. If you are interested in providing news from your area of our region, please give me a call. (877 456-3474) 🐟



**Lake Erie & Lake St. Clair**

by Captain Henry Walters - MCBA Director

Hello everyone.

The season is in full swing and we all are putting many hours on our boats – cleaning, repairing and general mainte-

nance to keep everything running smoothly.

As we were fishing this spring and early summer for walleyes in the river, I and a lot of other anglers had seen many salmon following our jigs and spinners to the boat. It seemed to be in the entire St. Clair River System.

While fishing for walleye, I had caught two **Atlantic salmon**. The following day we took my smaller boat out with salmon gear. We were five for eleven in two hours and they were all Atlantic salmon that weighed from 2 ½ to 8 ½ lbs.

What a surprise! Since then we fished eight more times and caught salmon every time with a few steelhead mixed in. The last time we went out was on the morning of July 4.



We caught five Atlantic salmon like the one pictured in the St. Clair River System. The last one I had seen was by Buoy 30 in the South Channel on July 22 while we were perch fishing.

They seemed to like the river until the water temperature reached the upper 60's and after that, they started to disappear. I am sure they went back to Lake Huron.

I had almost lost all hope for salmon fishing in Lower Lake Huron and the St. Clair River.

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This had gotten me all fired up for spring salmon fishing next year. I plan to put my salmon gear back on for the spring. I hope they show up again.

Hope to see everyone at the conference in October. We can talk.

Good luck fishing 



### Upper Peninsula

By Captain Brian Helminen - MCBA Director

It is not too early to start preparing for the 2018 chartering season; after all, it is only about seven months away. The earlier you start and the better you plan, the busier your season will be.

Here are several ideas to consider that will help fill your 2018 schedule and put more money in your pocket.

1. Make sure your MCBA listing (<http://www.michigancharterboats.com>) on the website is accurate and has a working link to your website.
2. Update your website with photos and information to make it attractive to your ideal clients. I like to show families, women and kids because they have been my bread and butter clients. If you are consistent at pulling in the trophy kings, then post those pictures. If you like to help fill your customer's freezer with loads of perch, post coolers full of perch.
3. Print and distribute brochures to area restaurants, hotels, motels and places tourists are likely to visit and to our Pure Michigan distri-

bution center. Michigan tourism-related businesses may distribute (upon receiving approval) brochures at all 14 Welcome Centers around the state or at specific Welcome Centers. For more information, contact the Michigan Department of Transportation at 517-322-5559. A professionally done website and brochure is worth the extra money spent on it. After approval, you will receive a unique MI number you can print on your brochures so they can call you when they run low.

4. Join the local chamber of commerce and tourism bureau and display brochures at their centers. Cost is usually minimal (one charter booked will pay for the cost) and they will display and pass out your brochures and business cards.
5. Book your space at the fishing shows and start planning your display for your booth.
6. Offer free charters to your school's Sports Booster Club, Economic Development Association, or Lion's Club for their raffles. I do this every year with restrictions: Valid during my slow season, Monday through Thursday. (This is spelled out on a certificate that I provide.)
7. MCBA members could donate a fishing charter for the Detroit, Novi or Grand Rapids shows. (Contact Rich Haslett for details.)
8. Create and/or maintain a client mailing list and send two or three promotional postcards to past clients. The first one before the Christmas shopping season, one before Father's day and before the busy summer season begins. Use this same list to send a Thank You postcard with your boat pictured on the front.
9. Maintain and use your client email list to send updates and offers to past clients. I have used Vertical Response, a web-based email service to send out mass emails to past clients. I will send a blurb about a fish-



# 2017 MCBA ANNUAL CONFERENCE REGISTRATION FORM

The Double Tree Hotel by Hilton • 650 E. 24th Street • Holland, MI 49423  
616-394-0111

October 20, 21 & 22, 2017

Oct. 20 Evening (social @ 6:pm) Oct. 21 (seminars, dinner, & raffle) Oct. 22 Morning (business meeting)  
Please note Friday evening social and Sunday morning business meeting are **FREE to ALL members.**  
(Free food, snacks, drinks. Social bar to any member of legal age Fri & Sat. evenings.)

**Pre-registration is encouraged for Saturday's events** (walk-ins welcomed) so we know how to set up the rooms and can order the correct number of meals. Please return the form below with your check (Walk-ins register at the door) by **10/10/17** and save \$5.00

As mentioned in the last newsletter, a limited number of rooms are available to MCBA members for the special, low rate of \$94 per night. Call the hotel directly at (616) 394-0111 and mention that you will be there for the MCBA meeting (code: MCB).

**Questions?** Call MCBA at 800-622-2971. The MCBA board has worked hard to respond To MCBA membership and provide attendees with information that will help you make the most of your charter business, so please plan to be there and make this **The best MCBA Annual Meeting ever!**

**MCBA Member:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Guest Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Saturday Main Events

MCBA Annual Meeting Registration  
(Spouse free incl.)

**Pre-Registration** \$15. x \_\_\_\_\_ people = \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (Spouse free)

**Registration at the door:** \$20. (Spouse free)

- Traditional Breakfast Buffet 8:00 to 8:45 am (included with registration)
- Saturday Lunch: Courtesy of MCBA

Optional Saturday Dinner: \$25. Ea. For Captain's Deluxe Buffet Dinner x \_\_\_\_\_ people = \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
(open bar optional at dinner)

**Sunday AM Business Meeting** and Sunday BREAKFAST BUFFET (**Free** to all members & spouse)

Number people to attend Sunday Breakfast Buffet 8 - 9 am \_\_\_\_\_

**Total ENCLOSED \$** \_\_\_\_\_

Please make check payable to MCBA,

and return to:

**MCBA Annual Meeting**

**9760 Judd Road**

**Willis, MI 48191** 

*Captain Frank English has  
**PROMISED** another great  
raffle at Saturday's dinner*





(Continued from page 7) ...**DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

ing show coming up, a great day we had on the water, or something relevant along with a link to my Facebook page and Website. (Not to be used for sending to new or potential clients, but only ones you have dealt with in the past.)

10. Buy a placemat ad. Find out who prints them in your area and get on their list. These are then distributed free to your local restaurants where potential clients will see your ad and discuss fishing over coffee.

11. Post blogs on your website regularly (ideally once per week.)

In your advertising, offer charters for: birthdays, Christmas and employee appreciation gifts, corporate outings, etc.

I hope you had a great 2017 season and will prepare for an even better 2018! 🐟

## SHOW TIME



### Show Chairman

By Captain Rich Haslett—Vice President  
(Admiral) Linda Haslett  
248-542-1563  
taloncharters@gmail.com

### Sport Shows 2018

The dates and places for the 2018 shows are:

- \* Ultimate Fishing Show January 11-14 at Suburban Collection Show Place, Novi MI.
- \* Outdoorama March 1-4, Suburban Collection Show Place, Novi MI.
- \* Ultimate Sport Show March 15-18, Devos Place, Grand Rapids, MI.

We give away two free trips per show and are looking for captains willing to donate their time and services. Captains who donate will have their brochures displayed at all shows we participate in and will be reimbursed \$200.00 for fuel once the trip has been run. If you are interested

in donating, please e-mail me at:

taloncharters@gmail.com so that we can add you to our list to be used at the 2018 shows or the 2019 season. 🐟

## MCBA Cookbooks

The cookbook sales have been pretty good since having them published. We still have some that need to be sold. If every captain would consider buying five or more to sell to family, friends and customers we could get the rest of our books into kitchens where they belong. I will have cookbooks at our fall banquet if you would like to purchase them. I want to thank everyone who has helped and will help to sell the remaining books.



Capt. Rich Haslett V.P. 🐟



### A View from over the Transom

By Captain Jim Fenner

Last year at this time I wrote an article including the paragraph below regarding the pending decision to cut the plants for Lake Michigan in 2017:

"By the time this appears in print, a decision on the cutting or not cutting of Chinook plants in LM in '17 may have been or soon will be made. A complicated and emotional discussion with huge ramifications has been generated by the Lake Committee's proposals."

Ultimately a modified cutting and planting program was finally chosen. Over the winter, some cursed the DNR, even calling for the firing of the Fisheries Chief. Now the 2017 season is winding down. What a difference a year makes! While not rivaling the best of the glory years,

(Continued on page 10)

(Continued from page 9) ....**Over the Transom**

2017 has been largely a year of pretty good fishing. It was a pretty good lake trout season, especially in the spring. Also, area captains tell me they are seeing bait they haven't seen for years. It will be interesting to see what the scientists find when they do the bait survey. The salmon fishing has been good too, and we are seeing more bigger, stronger, fatter, Kings than we've seen for many years. Many fish over 30 pounds, even a 40+ pound fish from Muskegon. Amazing! I can't recall a 40 pounder being caught by a sport fisherman in Michigan since before I started charter fishing in the 1980's!

As it turns out, two mild winters and the DNR's planting decisions have staved off the collapse that seemed to be looming. Calls for the firing of the fish chief have mostly fallen away. Perhaps we are seeing the return to trust in the DNR and science for the management of the fishery. That's a good thing. I've heard reports of some pretty good catches in Lake Huron too. Maybe we've turned a corner there too. Let's all hope that we continue to have a quality mixed bag fishery long into the future.

If you are planning to join me and become a retiree soon, and if you, like me, want keep up with the constantly changing status of fishing in Michigan, I hope you will choose to continue your MCBA membership in the retired category. It is easy to do. The option is on the renewal page. It is not expensive, and it will keep you 'in the loop'. I look forward to seeing many of my CB friends, active and retired, past and present, at the annual MCBA fall conference and business meeting over the weekend of October 20, 21 and 22, 2017 at The Double Tree Inn in Holland. The Michigan MCBA has reserved a block of rooms, at a special rate \$94. for those

**Friday evening social and Sunday morning business meeting are FREE to ALL members. (Free food, snacks, drinks)**  
**Social bar to any member of legal age Fri & Sat. evenings.**

who wish to spend a night or two. Call -616-394-0111 and mention the MCBA (code: MCB). It will be an interesting and informative meeting. It's a great location for spouses too. My wife says Holland is her favorite CB conference city. Hope to see you there. 🐟

**Note:** Lt. Commander, USCG (retired) Charles "Chuck" Kakuska will be available to answer USCG license renewal questions throughout the day at MCBA Annual Meeting Saturday Oct. 21, 2017

## **MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY** | **Extension**

### **Lake Michigan kings are back — but why?**

After the gloom-and-doom of 2016, anglers are gearing up for a much better run of salmon in 2017. Recent trends in the fishery suggest that ups and downs may be the new norm if prey populations do not stabilize.

### **Spread the word! Lake Michigan kings are back — for now.**

After a couple of disappointing years of fishing for Chinook salmon along the Michigan



Chinook salmon from the 2014 year-class are now Age 3 and they seem to be providing very good fishing in Lake Michigan.

shoreline of Lake Michigan, anglers are once again excited about the late-summer bonanza

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*(Continued from page 10) . . . Kings are back*

that these “king” salmon provide. While the final estimates of angler harvest and catch rates will not be available from Michigan DNR and other agencies until spring, the long lines of heavy coolers at fish cleaning stations and full boards of fish are a very good sign.

The size of fish is even more impressive. Ever since bacterial kidney disease (BKD) ran through the Chinook salmon population in the late 1980s, king salmon over 30 pounds have been rare to nonexistent in most years. This year has already produced numerous 30 pounders and even one giant that tipped the scales at 41.48 pounds (see details).

### **Why the rebound?**

While fisheries scientists do not have a definitive answer to this question, there are several factors that are at work. Many relate to the poor year-class of Chinook salmon in 2013. Many anglers will remember the public process that led up to the 46 percent reduction in Chinook salmon stocking for 2013. On top of this stocking cut, natural reproduction fell by an estimated 84 percent in 2013. All told, the number of Chinook salmon entering Lake Michigan dropped from 10.68 million in 2012 to 3.5 million in 2013.

This weak 2013 year-class was a big factor in the poor fishing experienced last year because age three fish from the 2013 year-class were returning to spawn in 2016. The good news is that wild reproduction increased slightly in 2014 and the total number of Chinook salmon increased to 6.47 million (stocking remained steady from 2013 to 2014).

Chinook salmon from the 2014 year-class are now age three and they seem to be providing very good fishing. Fisheries managers have been trying to balance the number of predators and available prey for decades, and judging by early reports it seems that the current balance is providing a nice mix of good catch rates and large, healthy salmon. However, this does not

mean that the future of the Lake Michigan fishery is secure.

### **Ups and downs may be the new norm**

Growth of salmon has been bouncing up and down like a ping-pong ball over the past decade. The growth rate of fish is a good indicator of their overall well-being and ability to find enough food, so this means that conditions are changing a lot from one year to the next.

Fisheries managers look at the weight of mature age three female Chinook salmon returning to weirs and harbors as a standardized measure of salmon growth in Lake Michigan. In 2015, the average weight of an age three female was 13.1 pounds. This increased to 19.0 pounds in 2016.

### **That is a huge difference!**

Such radical and rapid shifts in growth rate indicate instability in the ecosystem. In other words, food availability is changing a lot from one year to the next. Some of this is related to changes in the number of predators (especially the big fluctuations in wild Chinook salmon production) but fluctuations in the availability of alewife (the salmon’s food source) are a bigger problem.

In short, small alewife are relatively abundant in some years and provide a lot of food for salmon. In other years, alewife do not produce as many young and salmon have trouble finding food. A big problem in recent years is that alewife do not often survive to spawn several times. Instead, nearly all alewife are eaten before they reach age five.

Not coincidentally, the last good alewife year class we had was in 2012. The alewife from that 2012 year-class are now age five. If some of them are able to avoid all of the hungry mouths out in the big lake until next year then we may finally have some Age six alewife in Lake Michigan once again.

This would be a good sign for overall stability

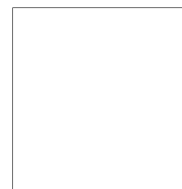
*(Continued on page 12)*



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(Continued from page 11) . . . **Kings are back**

of predator-prey balance in the lake, but it is by no means guaranteed. Prior to 2000, alewife of age six, seven, and eight were common and in some years age nine alewife were found. We are still a long way from that level of stability in older alewife.

Judging by recent history, the boom times will not last long. Get out there and enjoy it while it lasts, and remember the good times next time we have a tough season. 

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**Newsletter Deadline**

The next issue of the Cannonball Gazette will be published in December. Submissions **must** be in by **November 20, 2017**

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