**Great Lakes Salmon Initiative Optional Trolling License Proposal**

The GLSI is moving forward with a proposal to offer an optional trolling license to run up to three additional rods when trolling the Great Lakes for salmon, trout, and walleye. We brought this proposal up at the Lake Huron and Lake Michigan Citizens advisory meetings a few months ago to gauge the level of support from all the various fishing and conservation organizations in our state. We needed to see broad support to move forward with this and we are seeing that.

The GLSI is promoting this to help all anglers be more successful trolling our Great Lakes. It is not unusual to have 1 or 2 rods out of your spread catch the majority of fish in your box. Having a few extra rods that might hold that hot lure could be difference of a catch versus a skunk or a big box versus a small box. Some good action really makes your time on the water more enjoyable. Here are the details and frequently asked questions that we have been getting on this.

This proposal entails selling an optional great lakes license for boats that are trolling for $26.00. The license would grant the holder the ability to use up to 3 additional rods when fishing from a boat on the Great Lakes and connecting waters. All other rules and creel limits would remain in effect. All revenue generated from this license would be directed toward the DNR’s budget for use in enhancing our great lakes fisheries. We will be pushing for the funds to be used for cormorant control which is really needed now. The license would not be in effect for anglers fishing from piers or shore, so it does not create overcrowding in these locations and reduce angler participation. It could not be used for targeting other species like perch, bass, or pike in protected bays like the Les Cheneaux islands area. It also could not be used in US Army Corps of Engineers designated connecting inland waters like the inland waterway that flows through Burt, Mullet, Crooked and Pickeral Lakes or the lower Au Sable from the mouth to Foote dam. It is meant for open water trolling from boats on the Great Lakes only.

**Frequently asked questions:**

**Will this hurt our salmon and trout fishery?** – No, these fisheries are protected by creel limits. The MDNR has agreed to let Tribal fishers use more efficient gill nets under the premise that it will not hurt the resource due to quotas on the total allowable catch for the fish they are targeting. The quotas will protect the resource. While we disagree on gill nets because of their indiscriminate killing, we see this no differently for sport anglers and see no harm in allowing more efficient trolling spreads because we have creel limits to protect the fishery from overharvest. In addition, our silver fishery is a put and take fishery. Anglers pay to stock these fish and should be able to catch as many as possible.

**Will this hurt our walleye fishery?** – No, our Great Lakes walleye fisheries are thriving and are under-utilized right now. In Saginaw Bay, many feel the large walleye population is depressing perch populations and the MDNR has been liberalizing creel limits, size limits and spawning closures to harvest more walleyes. The Lake St Clair and Detroit River walleye fisheries are at all-time highs. On Lake Erie, Michigan anglers have consistently year after year fallen short of our total allowable walleye catch from agreements with the surrounding states and Canada. Because of this, legislators have proposed opening commercial fisheries for walleye that could devastate the walleye population. The history of commercial fishing in Michigan has proven this. Sport anglers need to harvest more walleyes to combat pressure to open commercial fisheries and this proposal will help that.

**Why should I be forced to pay more to troll the Great Lakes?** – This is an optional license so if you do not want to run extra rods, you do not need to buy this license.

**Will this create unfair advantages for tournament anglers with big crews?** – No, each tournament sets their own rules and can maintain any rod limit they want for a tournament. Most have nine rods limits today that can continue under tournament rules. We think this will help increase tournament participation because with this license, a two person crew could enter a tournament and run the nine rods allowed to fairly compete with other boats. We think it would be great to bring out more anglers for club tournaments.

**Why should I send more money to the DNR for this, I’m not happy with their performance and don’t want to?** – As noted above, it is an optional license but here is more to consider. At the Citizens Advisory Meeting, Fisheries Chief Randy Claramunt shared that budget requests for more funding to control cormorants along other needs of the department were turned down. As you know, inflation is driving the costs up for everything we use. This affects the MDNR too and without increased revenue, they will be forced to make cuts to programs that benefit anglers. The MDNR obtained Federal permits to reduce cormorant populations but were unable to execute the majority of control allowed due to lack of funding. Cormorants are proven to reduce fish populations and can devastate newly planted smolts. We feel the trolling license could fix this and will be pushing to use the funds generated from it to control cormorants. It will provide benefits to both Great Lakes and inland anglers. If this license generates more funds than needed to control cormorants, we would love to see increases in hatchery capacity to stock more fish. We have also got suggestions to use the funding for enforcement of the consent decree.

**Will this have a negative impact on Conservation Officers enforcing fish and game rules?** – No, we have had discussions with representatives of the DNR law enforcement division and they did not express concerns with this. When they engage anglers, the first thing they usually do is to check licenses and if a person did not have the proper license to cover the rods they are running, they could be cited for a violation.

**What are the next steps to implement this?** – The GLSI is continuing to work with other angling groups to gain their formal support for this proposal. A significant number have given their formal support and many groups will be discussing it at winter board meetings. The initial feedback has been very positive. Only one group in our state has told us they cannot support it at this time. We have discussed this proposal with the MDNR, and they are open to this concept. They are being impacted by inflation like we all are and do not want to cut services. Over the next month, the GLSI will be working to gain formal approval from more fishing groups. The next steps after that will be to work with the DNR and the State Legislature to make this license a reality. There may be changes to the proposal as more and more stakeholders weight in. We are very open to adjusting this idea to make it work. We will need input and help from anglers and angling organizations across the state to do this.

**I like this idea; how can I help?** - If you are a member of an angling organization, please ask your group to formerly support this proposal and contact the GLSI to acknowledge that. You will need to engage your board of directors. You can also share and promote this with your friends and on social media. The more support we have from anglers the better. Follow our Facebook page or join the GLSI for further developments. We will keep you posted on further developments on how you can help make this proposal a reality.

We are wishing you tight lines and full boxes in 2024! We are asking for your formal support of this proposal and welcome your questions so send us all that you have. If you can support this, let me know or for any questions, please contact me at:

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