

The Lake and the Ledger

*Lake Michigan's fishery in 2026 — the science, the money,
the decree, and the decisions being made this fall*

Michigan Steelhead and Salmon Fishermen's Association • September 2026, revised September 9 • Eight parts, three appendices

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How to use this document

This is a working briefing on the state of the Lake Michigan fishery and the decisions being made about it right now. It is written for chapter conversations — the questions members actually ask, and the answers that hold up.

It is organized in eight parts. Parts I and II are the resource itself: what the science says and what is coming at us. Part III is money, which this year is the single biggest determinant of what the fishery looks like in 2030. Part IV is the 2023 Consent Decree and treaty fishing, handled factually and with both sides on the record, because chapter members will ask and the answer needs to be accurate rather than comfortable. Part V is rivers and dams, including the fight that is closest to a decision. Part VI covers the remaining issues. Part VII is where I think we can actually move the needle. Part VIII is the talking-point section — the sixty-second version of each issue, plus the hard questions and straight answers.

Four notes.

Some of this is unsettled and I have said so. Where a decision has not been made, or where sources disagree, the text says that rather than picking a number. Chapter credibility depends on us being right, not on us being certain.

Two different Chinook cuts are in play and they are frequently confused. One is a fishery-management decision driven by the predator-prey ratio. The other is a budget-driven cut to egg production at the hatcheries. They come from different places, they are decided by different people, and they could compound. Part I and Part III separate them.

The tribal fishing section is written to be defensible in a public meeting. Treaty rights are settled federal law and the decree is a negotiated allocation among sovereigns. Our concerns about specific provisions are legitimate and specific, and I have laid them out. So are the responses from the tribal side. Members are better served by understanding the actual structure than by a version that makes us feel better and falls apart under a follow-up question.

This edition corrects the record on Brandon Road. The version of this briefing prepared earlier in September did not yet reflect the September 2–3 reversal of the Army Corps stop-work order. That update changes both the facts in Part II and the advocacy ask in Part VII, and it is reflected throughout this copy. If any chapter received an earlier draft, please use this one.

Part I — Where the Fishery Stands

1. The headline

Lake Michigan is producing very good fishing on a food web that is getting thinner underneath it. Both things are true at once, and holding both is the hard part of every conversation we are going to have this year.

Anglers are catching fish. Catch rates have been strong. And the biological indicators that predict the next five years have moved in the wrong direction, far enough that the management agencies are preparing to cut Chinook stocking in 2027.

The reason to take this seriously rather than dismiss it as agency caution is that we have seen the alternative. Lake Huron's Chinook fishery collapsed in the mid-2000s when the alewife base gave out, and it has never come back in the form it had. Everyone who was fishing then remembers what that looked

like. The whole purpose of the predator-prey management framework is to avoid repeating it on Lake Michigan.

2. Alewife and the predator-prey ratio

Chinook salmon in Lake Michigan eat alewife. Not mostly — essentially exclusively. Diet studies put alewife at roughly 99% of the Chinook diet, which makes the Chinook fishery a direct function of one prey species.

That prey species is under pressure from below. Quagga mussels have restructured the bottom of the food web (Part II), reducing the plankton production that alewife depend on. The alewife population is showing three signals at once, and all three point the same way: fewer fish, younger age structure, and lower individual weights.

On the predator side, salmon biomass has been rising — partly from stocking, and substantially from natural reproduction in Michigan tributaries, which now accounts for a large share of the Chinook in the lake. That is the part anglers often miss. We do not control Chinook abundance through stocking alone anymore. Wild fish are a big fraction of the population, and they are not adjustable.

The two numbers to know:

- **The predator-prey ratio crossed its critical threshold in 2025.** That is the trigger the Lake Michigan Committee built into its salmonine stocking strategy specifically so that decisions would be made on evidence rather than on argument.
- **Average weight of 3-year-old female Chinook fell below 15 pounds in 2025.** Fifteen pounds is the benchmark managers watch. Below it means the fish are not finding enough to eat.

Ben Turschak of the Michigan DNR put the situation plainly: “there is going to be fewer prey relative to the number of predators.”

3. The 2027 Chinook stocking reduction

Michigan DNR is planning an approximately 25% reduction in Chinook stocking beginning in 2027, held for three years. At Ludington that translates to roughly 75,000 fish instead of the recent 100,000, with comparable reductions across Michigan’s Lake Michigan ports.

Three things chapter members should understand about this.

It is a lake-wide decision in principle and a state-by-state decision in practice. The Lake Michigan Committee — Michigan, Wisconsin, Indiana, Illinois, and the tribal authorities, coordinated through the Great Lakes Fishery Commission — sets the shared framework. Each jurisdiction then makes its own stocking decisions. Wisconsin’s participation in a proportional cut is not guaranteed, and the political dynamics there run differently. If Michigan cuts and Wisconsin does not, Michigan anglers absorb a reduction that does not deliver the full biological benefit. That is a legitimate concern and it is worth raising through the Lake Michigan Committee process rather than in the press.

Reducing stocking has worked before. The 2013 cut — a lake-wide reduction from roughly 3.3 million to 1.7 million Chinook — is generally credited with extending the fishery. Michigan absorbed the largest share of that cut, in part because of the volume of natural reproduction in our streams. Members who were around then will remember the argument, and they will also remember that we still have a Chinook fishery.

A cut is not the same as a collapse, and it is not the same as giving up on Chinook. The framework is adaptive. If alewife recover, stocking goes back up. What we should resist is not the cut itself but any move to make it permanent by default or to extend it without the data supporting it.

The reaction at the DNR's public workshops has been cautiously supportive, which matches what I hear from our chapters. One attendee's line captures the mood well: "We don't want a collapse."

4. The case for a diversified fishery

The strategic answer to a thin alewife base is not to fight over Chinook numbers. It is to reduce the fishery's dependence on a single predator-prey relationship.

Steelhead, brown trout, coho, and lake trout all have broader diets than Chinook and are far less exposed to an alewife downturn. Steelhead in particular are the species our organization was founded around, they use the rivers we already work to protect, and they hold up in years when Chinook do not.

This is where MSSFA has something specific to offer. If the Chinook conversation is going to be constrained by biology for the next several years, the productive advocacy is for stocking allocations and river habitat work that give anglers something to fish for through the constraint. That is a message chapters can get behind without pretending the alewife problem does not exist.

5. Whitefish: the rescue attempt

Lake whitefish are in worse shape than salmon and the story is worth knowing, both because it matters and because it is the clearest illustration of what quagga mussels are doing.

Commercial harvest has fallen from 6.9 million pounds in 2009 to under 2 million pounds recently. In some areas of the lake, essentially no hatched whitefish have survived to adulthood in twenty years. The mechanism is the mussels: they strip the plankton that whitefish larvae need in their first weeks of life.

This fall, state and tribal scientists are attempting a genetic rescue — collecting spawning whitefish from multiple distinct Lake Michigan bloodlines, incubating eggs at Wolf Lake State Fish Hatchery, and distributing survivors to hatcheries around the state. The goal is to hold the genetic diversity in captivity until conditions in the lake allow reintroduction.

Funding is \$350,000 from the state budget and \$900,000 from the Great Lakes Fishery Trust. That covers a couple of years for some of the populations. There are eighteen genetically distinct whitefish populations across Lakes Michigan and Huron.

Doug Craven of the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians framed the urgency: "If we don't do it this year, there may not be enough wild fish" to preserve the genetic diversity. DNR Fisheries Chief Randy Claramunt was blunter about southern Lake Michigan: "I hope we're not too late."

Why this matters to us even though we do not target whitefish. First, it is the same food-web failure that is squeezing alewife — whitefish are the early warning. Second, it is a genuine point of shared interest with the tribes and the commercial fishery, and those are worth having. Third, it is a live demonstration that Michigan's hatchery system is doing work nothing else can do, which is directly relevant to the funding fight in Part III.

6. Sea lamprey: the good news, and why it is fragile

Lake Michigan is currently the best-performing lake in the system on sea lamprey. Adult abundance is meeting target and holding steady, and the marking rate on lake trout is above target but decreasing. Lake trout populations are stable.

That is a real success and it is entirely the product of sustained control work by the Great Lakes Fishery Commission and its agents — lampricide treatments, barriers, traps, and assessment, year after year without interruption.

The fragility is structural. Sea lamprey rebound fast when control lapses. The Commission's own framing is that success requires ongoing effort because "sea lampreys are resilient." The control program depends on annual federal appropriations flowing through a funding channel that has been the subject of interagency friction, and on field seasons that cannot be skipped and made up later. A single missed treatment cycle on a productive tributary produces a cohort of lamprey that shows up as wounded fish four to six years later.

Compare our position to Lake Huron and Lake Erie, where both abundance and marking rates exceed targets. That is what the trajectory looks like when control is not keeping pace.

The message for chapters: lamprey control is the least visible and most cost-effective thing being done for our fishery, and it is the easiest thing to quietly underfund because it works.

7. Water levels and a changing lake

Lake Michigan-Huron has come well off the record highs of 2020. For 2026 the levels have been running roughly 11 to 12 inches below the long-term average, and 4 to 7 inches below 2025, driven by three consecutive dry autumns and elevated evaporation.

The forecast community's framing is the useful part: the record lows of 2012–13 and the record highs of 2020 were eight years apart. The trend is not simply "down." It is increasing variability.

For anglers that means launch ramp depths, harbor dredging, and river mouth conditions that change more than they used to. For fish it means nearshore spawning habitat that is inundated one year and dry the next. It is a slow-moving issue but it belongs in any conversation about port infrastructure and access funding.

Part II — The Invasive Front

8. Invasive carp: what changed in August — and again in September

This is the most significant development of 2026 and it needs to lead any chapter briefing.

In mid-August, sampling crews removed hundreds of juvenile silver carp, four to six inches long, from the Marseilles Pool of the Illinois River — roughly 80 miles from Lake Michigan. This is the furthest north juvenile invasive carp have been documented on the Illinois River.

The word that matters is *juvenile*. Adult fish wander. Juveniles at that size mean a spawning event occurred nearby, possibly further upriver. Biologists treat a population as established when multiple life stages are present in an area. Since 2010, established populations had been documented only in the lower stretch of the Illinois River, down around Peoria. This is a meaningful step change in where the front line sits.

At almost exactly the same time, the Army Corps of Engineers issued a stop-work order on the Brandon Road Interbasin Project.

Brandon Road is the billion-dollar chokepoint defense at Joliet — an engineered gauntlet of electric barriers, acoustic deterrents, and a bubble curtain designed to stop carp moving upriver toward Lake Michigan. Total project cost runs around \$1.15 billion, with \$274 million federal and \$114 million state committed to the first phase. Construction is seasonal, and the 2026 season had just begun in July when the order came.

The stated reason was “federal administrative review.” No further explanation was given at the time to the states, the contractors, or the partner organizations. Andrea Densham of the Alliance for the Great Lakes summarized the position of nearly everyone involved: “We have no clarity for why this happened.” Michigan DNR’s public position throughout the halt was that “Michigan continues to remain committed to supporting the completion of the project.”

UPDATE — SEPTEMBER 2-3, 2026

The stop-work order has been lifted, and construction is clear to resume. On September 2, Governor Whitmer called President Trump directly to press for the order to be reversed; Illinois Governor JB Pritzker made the same request. The White House and the Army Corps confirmed that night, into September 3, that the order was lifted — ending a halt of roughly five to six weeks. Alliance for the Great Lakes CEO Joel Brammeier: “For the sake of the ecosystem and economy that our region depends on, we simply cannot afford any further disruption.”

This is genuinely good news and it resolves the most urgent version of the problem — the barrier is moving again. It does not resolve the underlying one. Neither the Corps nor the administration has ever explained why the order was issued in July, or why it was lifted in September. Governor Pritzker’s office said plainly it had “not received a meaningful explanation” for the halt. A stop-work order that can be imposed and reversed with no stated criteria, apparently resolved by a direct call from a sitting governor to the President, is not a stable footing for a billion-dollar, multi-season construction project. That is now the actual risk to track: not that Brandon Road is stalled today, but that it can be stalled again on the same undocumented basis — and the next reversal may not come as fast, or as visibly.

Why this is the top-priority advocacy item. Every other threat in this document is a management problem — something we argue about how to handle. An established silver and bighead carp population in Lake Michigan would be a different lake. Carp are filter feeders that compete directly for the plankton base that alewife, whitefish, and every larval fish depend on. There is no lampricide equivalent and no realistic removal strategy once they are established at scale.

The asymmetry is what makes this worth every letter and every phone call: the cost of finishing Brandon Road is a rounding error against the value of the Great Lakes fishery, and the timeline is measured in construction seasons that cannot be recovered.

What chapters should be asking for now. Start with thanks — to Governor Whitmer and the Michigan delegation for the intervention that got construction moving again. Then two follow-up asks: written confirmation from the Army Corps of why the July stop-work order was issued in the first place, for the record rather than curiosity, and confirmation that the committed funding (\$274 million federal, \$114 million state on the first phase) remains fully obligated and that the lost weeks do not push any in-water work outside this season’s permitted window. The ask has shifted from “get this restarted” to “make sure this cannot happen again without warning.”

9. Quagga mussels: the cause underneath everything else

Quagga mussels are the reason the alewife are thin, the reason whitefish recruitment failed, and the reason the lake supports less fish biomass than it did.

They filter plankton out of the water column at enormous scale and shift the energy from the open water — where salmon, alewife, and larval fish live — down to the bottom. The lake is clearer and less productive. It looks better and feeds less.

Trout and salmon in every Great Lake except Superior are now operating in a food web reorganized by mussels.

There is no control method at lake scale. Research continues on selective molluscicides and other approaches, but nothing exists today that would meaningfully reduce quagga biomass across Lake Michigan.

What that means practically. Every management decision we argue about — stocking numbers, allocation, harvest limits — is being made inside a carrying capacity the mussels set. That is an uncomfortable thing to say at a chapter meeting and it is also the honest frame. The productive response is to focus on the things that are actually in reach: keeping new invaders out, protecting river habitat and natural reproduction, keeping the hatchery system funded, and managing predator numbers to what the lake can support.

10. What else is on the list

- **New introductions via ballast water and live trade.** Regulations have reduced the ballast pathway but not eliminated it, and the aquarium and bait trade remain live vectors.
- **VHS and fish health.** Viral hemorrhagic septicemia has been quiet but has not gone away, and hatchery biosecurity is one of the things that suffers first when budgets are cut.
- **Round goby and other established invaders.** Now permanent parts of the food web, with mixed effects — goby are prey for smallmouth and lake trout, and predators on native fish eggs.

Part III — Funding

If you take one section to your chapters, take this one. The single biggest determinant of what the Lake Michigan fishery looks like in 2030 is not biology or litigation. It is whether Michigan fixes how it pays for fisheries management in the next twelve months.

11. The structural shortfall at DNR Fisheries

Michigan fishing license fees have not increased since 2014. Twelve years of inflation have run through fish food, wages, fuel, and hatchery maintenance while the revenue line stayed flat.

On top of flat revenue, two structural problems:

The senior discount is not reimbursed. The state provides discounted licenses to seniors and other eligible residents, and the Legislature has not backfilled the lost revenue. That is roughly \$3 million a year, and over a decade it has compounded into a \$30 million hole.

The share of license revenue reaching fisheries programs has fallen. Roughly 63% of fishing license revenue now goes to fisheries programs, down from 78%. The rest is absorbed elsewhere. Anglers are paying for fisheries and getting less than two-thirds of it delivered to fisheries.

The 2026 state budget provided \$900,000 in one-time money from the game and fish fund for critical infrastructure. It is welcome and it is restricted — it cannot be spent on wages or on operating costs like fish food. It does not touch the structural problem.

What the DNR says happens without a fix. The planned reductions are specific:

- A 50% reduction in Chinook salmon egg production
- Reduced walleye stocking in Saginaw Bay
- Staffing reductions

Jay Wesley, the DNR’s Assistant Chief, has described the 2027 scenario without structural change as “no stocking, no summer hires, no inland creel surveys.”

This is the point I most want chapters to grasp. The 50% egg production cut is a budget cut. The 25% stocking reduction in Part I is a biological decision. They come from different places. If both land, the actual number of Chinook going into Lake Michigan falls much further than the 25% figure anyone is currently discussing — and the second cut would have nothing to do with alewife and everything to do with the Legislature.

Losing creel surveys deserves its own mention. Creel data is how we know what the fishery is doing. Without it, every future argument about stocking, allocation, and harvest gets made on anecdote, and the party with the data wins. Cutting creel surveys to save money is cutting the instrument panel to save weight.

Wisconsin is the cautionary example: two hatcheries closed and muskellunge stocking cut by 70% under budget pressure.

12. House Bill 5093 — the fisheries funding bill

This is the bill to know.

HB 5093 is the fisheries-focused successor to Senate Bills 276 and 277, which stalled in part because they bundled hunting fee increases onto fishing licenses and anglers objected. HB 5093 is narrower and better targeted.

What it does:

Provision	Detail
Base resident fishing license	Restored to \$28
Senior license	Stays at \$11 if the Legislature backfills the lost revenue; rises to \$20.80 if it does not
New hatchery stamp	\$5, with all revenue directed to state hatcheries
Revenue share to fisheries	Raised from 63% to 85%
Deposit mechanism	Direct deposit of fishing license fees into fisheries accounts

Provision	Detail
Accountability	Three-year mandatory review with a Fisheries Oversight Committee including angler representatives
Trolling privilege	Hatchery stamp holders get expanded Great Lakes trolling — up to 30 rods per boat, versus the current three-rods-per-angler structure

Why the structure matters more than the fee. Anglers have been asked for money before and watched it go somewhere else. The three provisions that make this bill different are the 85% share, the direct deposit, and the oversight committee with anglers on it. Those are accountability mechanisms, and they are what makes a fee increase defensible to our membership.

The 30-rod provision is a genuine benefit and should be talked about as one. It is a meaningful change for Great Lakes trolling and it is tied directly to the stamp.

The Michigan Anglers Consortium is leading the advocacy on HB 5093, and it is the natural coalition vehicle for our chapters to plug into.

Status and the political problem. The Senate has shown willingness to move fee legislation — it passed the earlier SB 276/277 package — but House Republicans rejected that approach. HB 5093 is a different and more targeted bill, and its path still runs through a chamber that has been resistant to fee increases generally. This is a live legislative fight, not a formality.

13. What chapters should actually do about HB 5093

Concrete, and it fits on a card:

1. **Know your state representative's name and position on HB 5093.** The Michigan Anglers Consortium has a lookup tool.
2. **Make the accountability argument first, not the fee argument.** “We are willing to pay more if 85% of it reaches fisheries and anglers sit on the oversight committee” is a much better opening than “raise our fees.”
3. **Use the specifics.** Twelve years without an increase. A \$30 million unreimbursed discount hole. A 50% Chinook egg production cut on the table. Those numbers do work that general concern does not.
4. **Lead with the 30-rod provision when talking to Great Lakes anglers.** It is a real benefit and it makes the stamp an easier sell.

14. Federal funding: GLRI and the reauthorization

The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative expires September 30, 2026. That is now.

GLRI has distributed over \$5 billion since 2010 across nearly 9,000 restoration projects, with economic analyses putting the return at more than \$3 in benefit per dollar invested. It funds a substantial share of the habitat, invasive species, and monitoring work that our fishery depends on.

The reauthorization vehicle is H.R. 6422, the American Water Stewardship Act, which passed the House in March 2026 and carries GLRI reauthorization along with other clean water program funding through 2031. Advocates are pushing for \$500 million annually — the highest level in the program's history. Related standalone GLRI legislation has moved through the House in this Congress as well.

The ask is Senate action before the authorization lapses. That is a straightforward, non-partisan message to both Michigan senators, and it is the highest-leverage federal item after Brandon Road.

Related federal pressures worth knowing: the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law's water infrastructure funding also expires September 30, and NOAA staffing reductions have already disrupted Great Lakes monitoring capacity — including algal bloom forecasting on Lake Erie. Monitoring is the same category as creel surveys: cheap, invisible, and the thing you cannot argue without.

15. Sea lamprey and the Great Lakes Fishery Commission

The lamprey control program is binational and is funded through annual appropriations. It has been the subject of recurring interagency friction over which federal channel the money flows through, and that friction has periodically threatened field seasons.

The advocacy point is simple and does not require getting into the weeds: lamprey control cannot absorb a gap year. Treatment schedules are built around larval development cycles. A skipped season produces a cohort that shows up as wounds on lake trout and salmon four to six years later, long after the budget decision has been forgotten.

Lake Michigan is currently at target. That is the argument for sustaining the program, not for trimming it.

16. Non-appropriated funding

The Great Lakes Fishery Trust is putting \$900,000 into the whitefish genetic rescue — nearly three times the state contribution. The Trust exists as a result of settlement funds tied to Ludington Pumped Storage fishery losses, and it remains one of the more flexible sources of money for Michigan fishery work.

Sport Fish Restoration (Dingell-Johnson) funds flow from federal excise taxes on fishing tackle and motorboat fuel and are apportioned to states partly on the basis of license sales. This creates a direct link between how many licenses Michigan sells and how much federal money Michigan receives — which means the recruitment and retention issue in Part VI is a funding issue, not just a cultural one.

Part IV — Tribal Fishing and the 2023 Consent Decree

This section is written to be usable in a public meeting where someone disagrees with us. It lays out the structure, our objections, and the responses on the record.

17. What the decree is

The 1836 Treaty of Washington reserved fishing rights to the signatory tribes in what are now large portions of Lakes Michigan, Huron, and Superior. Those rights are federally protected law. The courts have repeatedly affirmed them, and no negotiation or litigation on the horizon changes that.

Because the state and the tribes both manage a shared fishery in those waters, the practical arrangements — who fishes where, with what gear, in what season, for how much — have been governed since 1985 by negotiated consent decrees entered in federal court. The 2000 decree expired in 2020, and after extended negotiation a new decree was approved by the federal district court in August 2023.

It binds seven sovereign governments: the United States, the State of Michigan, and five tribes — though the fifth, the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, did not sign and has litigated against it. The four

signatory tribes are the Bay Mills Indian Community, the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians, and the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians.

The term is 24 years. That is the number every chapter member should know. This decree governs the 1836 treaty waters until roughly 2047. As the Sault Tribe's own attorney put it, "This decree is a 24-year decree... We've kind of tied the hands of our legislators."

18. What changed, and what our coalition objected to

The Coalition to Protect Michigan's Resources — the sport fishing and conservation coalition that carried our side's objections — raised three specific concerns, and they are worth stating precisely rather than generally.

Expanded gill net areas. The decree permits gill net use in waters where it was previously restricted, including Grand Traverse Bay and the waters off Leland. These are heavily used recreational areas and the change is real.

Longer gill net seasons in certain zones.

Incidental catch treatment. This is the most technical objection and the most substantive. Charter captain Tony Radjenovich, who led CPMR, described the prior arrangement: "once you reach a quota in your area [for either lake trout or whitefish], you stop fishing that area." Under the new decree, fishing may continue after a quota is reached in some circumstances, with incidental catch of the quota species not counting against the limit in the same way. The coalition's position is that this weakens the practical effect of the quotas.

The coalition also pointed to the state of the whitefish stocks — down to roughly 10–15% of 2000 levels — as the reason the margin for error is thin.

19. The responses on the record

Bill Rastetter, attorney for the Grand Traverse Band, made three counterarguments that our members will encounter:

- **Quotas are unchanged.** The harvest limits are the same regardless of gear type or zone expansion, so expanded gill net areas do not by themselves increase total harvest.
- **Sport fishing gained in places.** He cites a 60-40 allocation advantage for lake trout in the Leland waters favoring the recreational fishery.
- **Tribal self-regulation is real and federally reviewed.** Tribal fishery management includes federally approved conservation measures, and tribes have their own strong interest in the resource's sustainability.

There is also a point that came out of the litigation worth repeating: an attorney for one of the signatory tribes noted that the ruling confirmed tribes "have the ability to withhold our permission if necessary to protect the natural resources." Tribal governments are co-managers with conservation authority, not simply harvesters.

How I would handle this in a room. Our objections are about specific provisions — zones, seasons, and incidental catch accounting. They are not about whether treaty rights exist. Any chapter conversation that drifts toward the second question is one we lose, deservedly, and it damages relationships we need for whitefish, lamprey, and habitat work where our interests genuinely align. Keep it on the provisions.

20. Where the litigation landed

Both challenges to the decree have now failed, from opposite directions.

Our side. CPMR appealed to the Sixth Circuit, arguing procedural grounds — essentially that the coalition had expected an opportunity to have its objections tested in court. Michigan’s counsel contested CPMR’s standing, arguing that recreational anglers are “Michigan citizens, non-tribal citizens, who participate in the fisheries at the permission of the state” and are represented by the state in negotiations rather than as independent parties. Oral argument was held in December 2024, and the Sixth Circuit resolved the recreational coalition’s appeal against it in March 2025, without a merits ruling on the substance of the objections.

The Sault Tribe’s side. The Sault Tribe argued the decree violated its own 1836 treaty rights by prohibiting traditional gear, closing historically used areas, and restricting species access, and that it was excluded from the negotiation. The Sixth Circuit upheld the decree on March 13, 2025. The U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear the appeal on January 12, 2026.

The practical bottom line: the 2023 decree is final and it governs until roughly 2047. Chapter members should hear that clearly. Continuing to litigate it is not a strategy.

21. Where influence actually remains

The decree being final does not mean we have no role. It means our role shifts from opposition to participation. Four places where it is real:

Implementation and the technical committees. Quotas, assessments, and lake trout rehabilitation zones are worked through joint technical processes over the life of the decree. That is where the numbers actually get set. Sustained, informed, non-adversarial participation over twenty years is worth more than a lawsuit that has already been lost.

Data. Whoever brings the best data to a co-management table has disproportionate influence. This is the single strongest argument for protecting creel surveys (Part III) and for MSSFA’s own volunteer data collection (Part VII).

The standing question itself. The state’s position — that recreational anglers are represented by the state and have no independent standing — should shape how we invest. If the state speaks for us in these negotiations, then our leverage runs through the state: the Natural Resources Commission, the DNR, and the Legislature. That is a strategy, and it is one we can execute.

Shared interests. Whitefish restoration, sea lamprey control, invasive carp, and habitat work are areas where tribal and sport fishing interests point the same direction. The whitefish genetic rescue is a joint state-tribal effort right now. Those partnerships are assets and it costs us nothing to treat them as such.

Part V — Rivers, Dams, and Access

22. The Consumers Energy dam sale

This is the fight closest to a decision, and it is the one where our organization has taken the most visible position.

The deal. Consumers Energy proposes to sell 13 hydroelectric dams to Confluence Hydro, a subsidiary of Maryland-based Hull Street Energy, for \$1 each — then buy the power back under a long-term contract.

The rivers involved: the Kalamazoo, Grand, Muskegon, Manistee, and Au Sable. For a steelhead and salmon organization, that list is the point. Those are among the most important cold-water and migratory fisheries in the state, and several are the rivers our chapters were built around.

The economics. The power purchase contract prices at \$160 per megawatt hour — roughly double market rate — with 2.5% annual escalation over 30 years. Total cost to ratepayers is estimated at \$3.4 billion over 30 years, roughly \$1,800 per person across 1.9 million ratepayers. Consumers seeks an 8.75% return on the purchased power, generating an estimated \$270–278 million in additional profit on assets it is selling for thirteen dollars.

The fishery concerns, as raised by the Michigan Hydro Relicensing Coalition and allied groups:

- **Six of the 13 dams already fail summer water temperature standards**, degrading downstream cold-water habitat.
- **Private equity ownership and long-term stewardship.** The coalition’s concern is that ownership structures oriented to financial returns may not carry aging infrastructure through expensive relicensing and remediation. Hull Street’s record includes acquiring and divesting hydro assets since 2017.
- **No decommissioning plan** for aging structures.
- **Risk of habitat loss through land sales** — the shoreline and riparian holdings attached to these projects.
- **Edenville and Sanford are the cautionary precedent**, and every Michigan angler knows what happened there.

Where it stands. The case is Michigan Public Service Commission Case U-21985. An administrative law judge recommended in June 2026 that the Commission reject the sale. The Commission’s final decision has been expected around September 2026, with FERC approval also required. Opposition has come from an unusually broad coalition: industrial power users, residential ratepayer advocates, the Michigan Attorney General, and MPSC staff, alongside the conservation organizations.

What chapters should do. Public comment on Case U-21985, and contact with commissioners through the proper channel. This is one of the rare issues where the fishery argument, the ratepayer argument, and the dam safety argument all point the same direction — which is why the coalition is as broad as it is. Our value-add is the fishery voice: the temperature standards, the cold-water habitat, and the relicensing obligations that a new owner may or may not carry.

The strategic question beyond this deal. Whoever owns these dams, several are approaching relicensing, and relicensing is the moment when fish passage, minimum flows, and temperature requirements get set for decades. That is a generational opportunity for river fisheries and it is worth building capacity for now, regardless of how the sale is decided.

23. Line 5

The Army Corps of Engineers issued a federal permit for the Line 5 tunnel under the Straits of Mackinac in August 2026, finding it “not contrary to the public interest,” after conducting the review under an expedited status. State-level permitting hurdles remain.

MSSFA does not need a position on pipeline policy to have a position on the fishery. The relevant facts are that the Straits are the connection between Lakes Michigan and Huron, that a release there would move in both directions, and that the fishery consequences of a significant incident would be severe and long-lasting. Members will ask; that is a defensible answer that does not require us to litigate energy policy.

Part VI — Other Issues

24. Cormorants

Double-crested cormorant management has moved through several regulatory cycles. Following a federal rule change, Michigan resumed lethal control under depredation permits, and the state has authority under Michigan law to manage cormorants in specific circumstances.

The honest science position is that cormorant predation is a locally significant, lake-wide secondary issue. At specific sites — river mouths, stocking sites, and some island colonies — cormorants can consume a meaningful share of stocked smolts. Across Lake Michigan as a whole, they are not the driver of salmon abundance; alewife and quagga mussels are.

The advocacy that works is targeted. Control at documented problem sites, particularly around stocking events, is defensible and effective. Broad claims that cormorants are collapsing the fishery are not supported and cost us credibility with the agencies whose stocking decisions we are trying to influence.

25. PFAS and the Eat Safe Fish guidelines

Michigan issued updated Eat Safe Fish guidance in June 2026, including expanded “do not eat” advisories for certain waters and species.

This is a real public health matter and it is also a fishery participation issue. Consumption advisories affect how families think about a day on the water, and they affect the value proposition of a fishing license for people who fish to eat.

The useful posture for chapters: know the current guidance for your local waters, share it accurately, and do not either minimize it or amplify it. The credibility we build by being the group that gives people straight information about what is safe to eat is worth more than the discomfort of the topic.

26. License sales, recruitment, and why it is a funding issue

Angler numbers matter twice over. They determine license revenue directly, and they influence Michigan’s share of federal Sport Fish Restoration apportionment, which is based partly on license sales.

Every angler we recruit and retain is money into the fisheries budget, in two separate streams. That reframes the youth clinics, veterans events, and accessible fishing programs our chapters already run: they are not just good works, they are part of the funding strategy. Chapters should be counting and reporting participation, because those numbers are advocacy currency.

Part VII — Where We Can Actually Move the Needle

Seven items, ranked by leverage against effort.

1. Brandon Road. Highest stakes, and the most urgent version of the ask has just been resolved — Governor Whitmer’s September 2 call to President Trump got the stop-work order lifted after a five-to-six-week halt. What remains: press for a written explanation of why the order was issued in the first place (still never given), and for confirmation that the committed funding and this season’s construction window are intact. An established carp population changes the lake permanently; nothing else in this document does.

2. HB 5093. The state fisheries funding fix. Lead with accountability — 85% share, direct deposit, angler oversight committee — and with the 30-rod trolling provision. This is the difference between a fishery that is managed and one that is merely observed.

3. GLRI reauthorization. Authorization lapses September 30, 2026. The House has moved; the Senate is the ask. Non-partisan and straightforward.

4. The dam sale and river relicensing. Case U-21985 in the near term. Beyond it, building our capacity to participate in FERC relicensing on the Muskegon, Manistee, Grand, Kalamazoo, and Au Sable, where fish passage and flow requirements are set for decades.

5. Protect creel surveys and monitoring. Unglamorous and foundational. Every argument we will make for the next twenty years — on stocking, on allocation, on the decree's implementation — depends on data. Losing creel surveys costs us more than losing a stocking increment.

6. Volunteer data collection. This is our comparative advantage. Angler-collected catch and length data, systematically gathered across the chapter network, is real scientific value that no agency budget can replicate and that gives us a seat at technical tables. It is also the kind of program that gives chapters something concrete to do.

7. Diversified stocking advocacy. If Chinook are constrained by biology for several years, push for steelhead, brown trout, and coho allocations that keep anglers on the water through the constraint — and for the river habitat work that supports natural reproduction.

What I would not spend our capital on: relitigating the consent decree, or making cormorants the centerpiece of our message. Both are dead ends that cost credibility we need elsewhere.

Part VIII — Chapter Talking Points

27. The sixty-second version of each issue

On the fishery generally. “Fishing has been good and the food web underneath it is thinner than it was. Both are true. The managers are planning a Chinook stocking cut in 2027 because the predator-prey ratio crossed its threshold and three-year-old females dropped below fifteen pounds. We have been here before — the 2013 cut worked. What we are watching for is that the cut stays temporary and that Wisconsin cuts proportionally.”

On invasive carp. “In August they found hundreds of juvenile silver carp eighty miles from Lake Michigan, further north than ever recorded. Juveniles mean spawning. At the same time the Army Corps stopped work on the Brandon Road barrier for five weeks and never said why. Governor Whitmer got President Trump to reverse it on September 2, which is genuinely good news — but nobody has explained why it happened or what stops it from happening again. That is still the single biggest threat to this lake, and it is still the one thing where a phone call to your congressman matters.”

On funding. “Fishing license fees have not gone up since 2014. Only 63 cents of every license dollar reaches fisheries, down from 78. The state owes fisheries about three million a year in unreimbursed senior discounts and it has added up to thirty million. HB 5093 fixes the structure — 85% share, direct deposit, an oversight committee with anglers on it, and a five-dollar hatchery stamp that gets you thirty rods on the Great Lakes. Without it the DNR is looking at cutting Chinook egg production in half.”

On the consent decree. “The decree was approved in 2023, it runs twenty-four years, and the litigation is over — our coalition's appeal failed in March 2025 and the Supreme Court turned down the Sault Tribe in

January 2026. Our concerns were specific: gill nets in Grand Traverse Bay and off Leland, longer seasons, and how incidental catch counts against quota. Those concerns stand. But the decree is final, and the place to have influence now is in the technical committees where the quotas actually get set — which is an argument for protecting our data collection.”

On the dam sale. “Consumers wants to sell thirteen dams for a dollar each on the Kalamazoo, Grand, Muskegon, Manistee, and Au Sable, then buy the power back at double market rate for thirty years. Six of those dams already fail summer temperature standards. An administrative law judge recommended the Commission reject it in June. The Commission decides this fall. Comment on Case U-21985.”

On whitefish. “Whitefish are close to collapse — commercial harvest went from nearly seven million pounds in 2009 to under two million. The mussels starve the larvae. The state and the tribes are doing a genetic rescue this fall to bank the bloodlines in hatcheries. It matters to us because it is the same food-web failure that is squeezing our alewife, and because it shows what the hatchery system can do when it is funded.”

28. Hard questions and straight answers

“Why are they cutting salmon when the fishing is great?” Because the indicators that predict the next five years turned before the catch rates did. Lake Huron’s fishery collapsed in the mid-2000s and never came back the same. Three-year-old females fell under fifteen pounds last year. The cut is about not repeating Huron.

“Isn’t this really about the tribes taking our fish?” No. The alewife problem and the quagga mussel problem have nothing to do with treaty fishing. Our objections to the decree are real and they are about specific provisions — gill net zones, season length, and incidental catch accounting. But the biology driving the stocking cut is separate and would be happening either way.

“Can we still fight the consent decree?” No, and we should stop spending on it. Our appeal failed in March 2025 and the Supreme Court closed the last door in January 2026. The decree runs to roughly 2047. Our influence now is in implementation and in the technical committees.

“Why should I pay more for a license when the fishing might get worse?” Because the alternative is measurably worse. Without the structural fix the DNR has said it is looking at cutting Chinook egg production in half, cutting walleye stocking, and dropping creel surveys. And the bill directs 85% of the money to fisheries with anglers on the oversight committee, which is not how it has worked before.

“Aren’t the cormorants the real problem?” They are a real problem in specific places — around stocking sites and some river mouths — and targeted control there is worth doing. Across the whole lake they are not what is driving salmon numbers. Alewife and mussels are. If we make cormorants our headline we lose credibility on the things that matter more.

“Is the carp barrier actually going to get built?” The money is committed — \$274 million federal, \$114 million state on the first phase — and construction started in July. The Army Corps then stopped work in late July for “administrative review” and gave no explanation to anyone, including the states. Governor Whitmer’s direct appeal to President Trump got the order lifted on September 2, and construction is clear to resume. The barrier is moving again — but the episode showed it can be halted with no stated reason and restarted the same way, which is exactly why continued attention from the delegation still matters.

29. Decision calendar

Timing	Decision	Who decides
Now	GLRI authorization lapses September 30, 2026	U.S. Senate
Resolved Sept 2–3, 2026	Brandon Road stop-work order lifted; construction resuming after a ~5–6 week halt	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, following Gov. Whitmer’s direct appeal to the White House
Fall 2026	Consumers Energy dam sale, Case U-21985	Michigan Public Service Commission, then FERC
Fall 2026	Whitefish genetic rescue egg collection	MDNR and tribal fishery agencies
2026–27 session	HB 5093 fisheries funding	Michigan Legislature
FY27 budget	DNR Fisheries operating support	Michigan Legislature
2026–27	Chinook stocking reduction for 2027	MDNR, coordinated through the Lake Michigan Committee
Ongoing	Decree implementation, quotas, assessment	1836 Treaty technical committees

Appendix A — Key Numbers

Metric	Value
Chinook diet that is alewife	~99%
Predator-prey ratio threshold	Crossed in 2025
3-year-old female Chinook average weight, 2025	Below 15 lb (benchmark)
Proposed 2027 Chinook stocking cut	~25%, held 3 years
Ludington plant under the proposal	100,000 → 75,000
Prior lake-wide cut, 2013	3.3M → 1.7M
Whitefish commercial harvest, 2009	6.9 million lb
Whitefish commercial harvest, recent	Under 2 million lb
Whitefish rescue funding	\$350K state + \$900K Great Lakes Fishery Trust
Distinct whitefish populations, Michigan and Huron	18
Juvenile silver carp found, August 2026	Hundreds, 4–6”, Marseilles Pool
Distance from Lake Michigan	~80 miles
Brandon Road total project cost	~\$1.15 billion

Metric	Value
Brandon Road phase 1 committed	\$274M federal, \$114M state
Brandon Road stop-work order	Issued late July 2026; lifted Sept 2–3, 2026 (~5–6 weeks)
Michigan license fee last increase	2014
License revenue reaching fisheries	63%, down from 78%
Unreimbursed senior discount	~\$3M/year, ~\$30M accumulated
HB 5093 target revenue share	85%
HB 5093 hatchery stamp	\$5
HB 5093 trolling provision	Up to 30 rods per boat
Budget-driven Chinook egg production cut	50% if no structural fix
One-time DNR infrastructure appropriation	\$900,000, restricted
GLRI distributed since 2010	\$5+ billion, ~9,000 projects
GLRI economic return	>\$3 per \$1 invested
GLRI reauthorization sought	\$500M/year through 2031
GLRI authorization expires	September 30, 2026
2023 Consent Decree term	24 years, to ~2047
Sovereign governments bound	7
Dams in the Consumers sale	13, at \$1 each
Dams failing summer temperature standards	6 of 13
Power purchase price	\$160/MWh, ~2x market, +2.5%/yr, 30 years
Estimated ratepayer cost	\$3.4 billion over 30 years
Lake Michigan-Huron level, 2026	11–12 inches below long-term average
Michigan sport fishing economy	~\$4 billion

Appendix B — Who Decides What

Great Lakes Fishery Commission (GLFC) — binational body established by the 1954 Convention on Great Lakes Fisheries. Runs sea lamprey control and convenes the lake committees. Does not itself set state stocking numbers.

Lake Michigan Committee — the coordinating body under the GLFC: Michigan, Wisconsin, Indiana, Illinois, and tribal fishery authorities. Sets the shared salmonine stocking strategy and the predator-prey framework. Decisions are consensus-based; each jurisdiction implements its own stocking.

Michigan DNR Fisheries Division — operates the hatcheries, sets Michigan's stocking, runs creel surveys and assessment, and represents the state in decree implementation.

Michigan Natural Resources Commission — sets fishing regulations by order. The most accessible state-level venue for angler input.

Michigan Legislature — controls license fee structure, revenue distribution, and the general fund appropriation. HB 5093 lives here.

Michigan Public Service Commission — utility regulation, including the dam sale, Case U-21985.

FERC — hydroelectric licensing and relicensing. Where fish passage, minimum flows, and temperature requirements get set for decades.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers — Brandon Road; also Line 5 tunnel permitting.

1836 Treaty technical committees — joint state and tribal bodies that set quotas and conduct assessment under the decree. Where the operational numbers are actually determined.

U.S. Congress — GLRI reauthorization and appropriations; sea lamprey control funding; Brandon Road appropriations.

Appendix C — Sources

Fishery science and management — Great Lakes Fishery Commission — Lake Michigan Committee; Salmonine Stocking Strategy (April 2025); sea lamprey status reporting - Michigan DNR Fisheries Division — predator-prey ratio analysis, stocking workshops - USGS and USFWS — decision analysis for multi-species salmonine management in Lake Michigan - Michigan State University Extension / Michigan Sea Grant

Reporting — Ludington Daily News / Shoreline Media — Chinook stocking reductions; HB 5093 - Bridge Michigan — whitefish rescue; Consumers Energy dam sale; cormorant management - Michigan Public / Great Lakes Echo — DNR Fisheries funding - Circle of Blue — Great Lakes funding in Congress; Brandon Road stop-work order - WTTW Chicago — juvenile silver carp discovery; Brandon Road stop-work order and its September 2–3 reversal - Michigan Advance, Detroit News, Capitol Fax — Brandon Road stop-work order reversal following Gov. Whitmer's and Gov. Pritzker's appeals to President Trump (September 2026) - Michigan Advance, Courthouse News, Native News Online — consent decree litigation - Leelanau Ticker, MUCC — consent decree positions - Detroit News, Planet Detroit, WCMU — Line 5, water levels, license fees

Legal and legislative — 2023 Great Lakes Consent Decree (U.S. District Court, W.D. Mich., August 2023) - Sixth Circuit opinions, March 2025; U.S. Supreme Court cert denial, January 12, 2026 - Michigan HB 5093 (2025–26); Michigan SB 276 and 277 (2025–26) - H.R. 6422, American Water Stewardship Act (119th Congress) - Michigan Public Service Commission Case U-21985

Organizations — Coalition to Protect Michigan's Resources - Michigan Anglers Consortium - Michigan Hydro Relicensing Coalition - Alliance for the Great Lakes - Great Lakes Fishery Trust

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months are provisional; where sources conflicted or a decision has not been made, the text says so. Verify current status before citing publicly — several items in Parts III and V are expected to move this fall.