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Lake trout research underway on Lake Ontario

Binational effort aimed at survivability of popular sport fishing species

Submitted by the New York Sea Grant

Lake trout research underway on Lake Ontario is part of the U.S.-Canada Cooperative Science and Monitoring Initiative (CSMI) field year on the lake. Research collecting data on lake trout movement using acoustic telemetry tags is being led by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in collaboration with the U.S. Geologic Survey (USGS), New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Fisheries, with outreach assistance from New York Sea Grant (NYSG).

The research team is using specialized tags that communicate with acoustic receivers stationed on the lake bottom. The tags will provide information about the migration patterns and habitats used by adult lake trout. This innovative technology is particularly useful for locating spawning habitats and will help to inform future restoration efforts for potentially degraded spawning sites.

More than 350 lake trout will be tagged in 2023. The tags' battery life allows the fish to be tracked over the next 10 years.

This research has already produced a "first."

"This work in 2023 represents the first time a wild-produced lake trout has ever been tagged in Lake Ontario," said USFWS fish biologist Dmitry Gorsky, Ph.D. "Lake trout are a native species that is important to the ecosystem and to the world-class sport fishery on Lake Ontario."

Gorsky is based at the USFWS Lower Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office in Batavia, New York.

This research is funded in part through the U.S. Environmental



The external acoustic tag, below the dorsal fin, identifies this fish as tagged in 2023. It is one of the first wild lake trout to be tagged in Lake Ontario. (Photo: Jo Johnson/U/SFWS)

Protection Agency Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.

Lake Ontario Charter Industry Assisting Research

The local charter fishing industry is assisting the research from ports at Mexico Bay, in eastern Lake Ontario, and Wilson, along the western end of the lake. Capt. Casey Prisco and first mates/captains Roy Letcher and A.J. Berry of Dirty Goose Sport Fishing Charters, based in Pulaski, New York, were contracted to help the research team catch lake trout for the tagging study.

"In late April and early May, lake trout in the eastern end of Lake Ontario were found in deeper water, making them hard to collect with standard fisheries gear," said USGS fish research biologist Alex Gatch of the USGS Tunison Lake Ontario Biological Station in Cortland. "Charter captains have a wealth of knowledge about the resource, and are an efficient way for us to locate and collect the number of lake trout we need to tag."

The tagged fish are returned to the water to resume normal behavior to assure quality data.

New York Sea Grant is providing public outreach support to inform anglers, fisheries, and general public audiences about the value of this research.

NYSG Great Lakes Fisheries Specialist Stacy Furgal noted, "Tagged fish that are a part of this

study are marked with an external, orange-colored tag. If anglers catch a tagged lake trout, they can choose to return it to the water, or, if the fish is harvested, please contact Alex Gatch, agatch@usgs.gov, 607-753-9391, ext. 7540, to return the internal tracking tag."

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the only federal agency with the primary responsibility for the conservation and management of fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the American people. Learn more at <https://www.fws.gov/>.

The U.S. Geological Survey is the science arm of the U.S. Department of the Interior and provides an array of earth, water, biological and mapping data and expertise in support of decision-making on environmental, resource and public safety issues. Learn more at <https://www.usgs.gov/>.

New York Sea Grant is a cooperative program of Cornell University and the State University of New York and one of 34 university-based programs under the National Sea Grant College program of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Learn more at <http://www.nyseagrant.org>.

The Cooperative Science and Monitoring Initiative is a binational effort instituted under the science annex of the 2012 Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement to coordinate science and monitoring activities in one of the five Great Lakes each year to generate data and information for environmental management agencies. Learn more at www.epa.gov/great-lakes-monitoring-cooperative-science-and-monitoring-initiative-csmi/.



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