

# COLDWATER TASK GROUP EXECUTIVE SUMMARY REPORT MARCH 2025

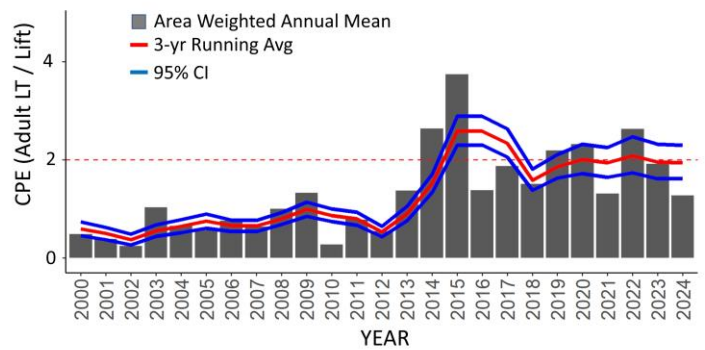


## Introduction

This year's Lake Erie Committee (LEC) Coldwater Task Group (CWTG) has produced an Executive Summary Report encapsulating information from the CWTG annual report. Three charges were addressed by the CWTG during 2024: (1) Report on the status of the cold-water fish community, (2) Participation in the Integrated Management of Sea Lamprey Process on Lake Erie, outline and prescribe the needs of the Lake Erie Sea Lamprey management program, and (3) Maintenance of an electronic database of Lake Erie salmonid stocking information. The complete report is available from the Great Lakes Fishery Commission's Lake Erie Committee Coldwater Task Group website at <http://www.glfsc.org/lake-erie-committee.php> or upon request from an LEC or CWTG representative.

## Lake Trout

A total of 250 lake trout were collected in the Coldwater Assessment Survey in 2024. Adult (age 5+) relative abundance decreased to 1.29 fish per lift, below the target of 2.0 described in the 2021 Lake Trout Management Plan. The 3-yr running average remained at target therefore no management actions related to adult abundance are being recommended for 2025. There were 21 age classes and four strains captured in 2024. Lake trout ages 4, and 14 were the dominant cohorts. Ages 5,9,12,15,16, and 17 also contributed notably. Lake trout older than age-10 continue to increase in abundance and comprised 50% of the total catch. Finger Lakes and Lake Champlain strains comprised the majority of the population. The Partnership Survey changed design in 2024 targeting waters less than 30m in depth and no longer fished the Pennsylvania Ridge.



## Lake Whitefish

Lake whitefish harvest in 2024 was 81,222 pounds, distributed between Ontario (83%), Ohio (15%), and Pennsylvania (2%). Harvest decreased 60% from 2023 and remains low compared to previous decades. Gillnet fishery age composition ranged from ages 3 to 9 with ages 5, 4, and 3 representing the majority of the harvest. Relative to recent decades, lake whitefish survey and fishery status indicators in 2024 were moderate or better. Assessment surveys caught lake whitefish from ages 1 to 22, with age compositions that partially overlapped the 2024 gill net fishery. Bottom trawl and gillnet survey indices forecast modest recruitment of age 3 lake whitefish in 2025 and 2026.

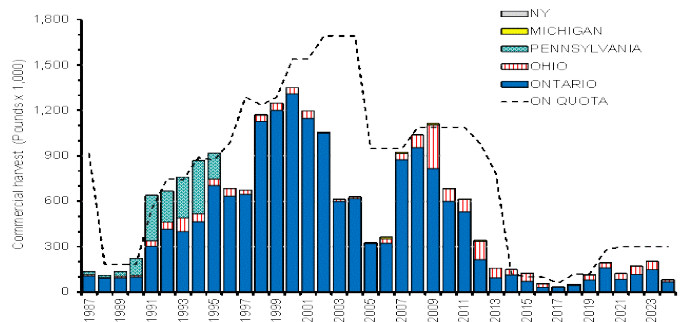
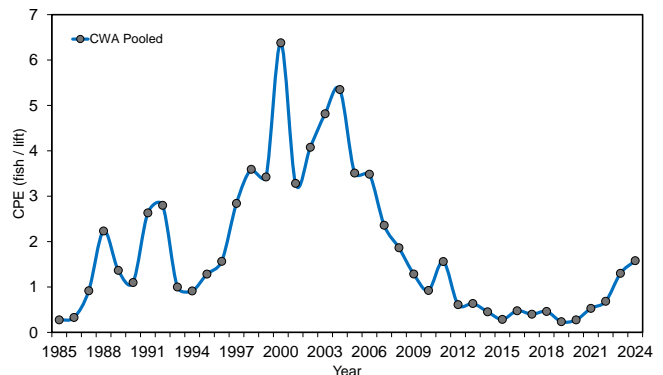


FIGURE 1.1.1. Lake whitefish total harvest from 1987-2024 by jurisdiction in Lake Erie. Pennsylvania ceased gill netting in 1996. Ontario quota is presented as a dashed line.

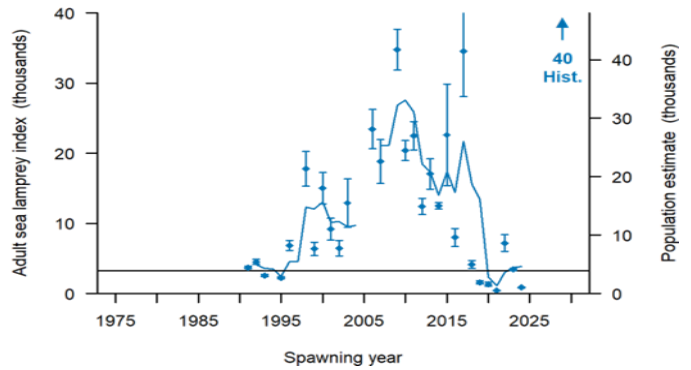
## Burbot

Total commercial harvest of burbot in Lake Erie in 2024 was 1,100 pounds. All was incidental. Burbot abundance and biomass indices from annual assessment surveys remained at low levels, relative to the time series; however 2024 catch rates continued to be elevated in some surveys. The burbot catch rate in the Interagency Coldwater Assessment Survey averaged 1.59 fish/lift, a decadal high while those in the Ontario Partnership Assessment Survey averaged 0.62 fish/lift. Burbot in the Coldwater Assessment Survey and Partnership Survey ranged in age from 2 to 16 and the largest age class present were 5 year olds. Rainbow smelt was the dominant prey item in burbot diets followed closely by round goby.



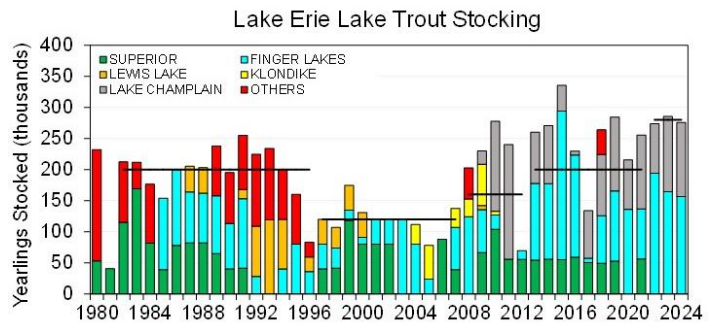
### Sea Lamprey

The A1-A3 wounding rate on lake trout over 532 mm was 15.7 wounds per 100 fish in 2024. This is above the target rate of 5.0 wounds per 100 fish. Large lake trout continue to be the preferred targets for sea lamprey in Lake Erie. The Index of Adult Sea Lamprey Abundance (870) represents a significant decrease from last year however the three year average-index is slightly above the target of 3,300. Only one lampricide treatments was completed in 2024 in Conneaut Creek in PA and DFO completed 24 granular Bayluscide plots in both jurisdictions on the St. Clair River.



### Lake Erie Salmonid Stocking

A total of 2,020,737 yearling salmonids were stocked in Lake Erie in 2024, which was below the long-term average (1990-2023). Lake trout stocking fell slightly below the 280,000 goal, and two different strains were stocked in 2024. By species, there were 275,191 yearling lake trout stocked in the east basin of Lake Erie, 163,394 brown trout stocked in Pennsylvania waters, and 1,582,152 rainbow/steelhead trout stocked across all five State and Provincial jurisdictional waters.



### Steelhead

The summary of steelhead stocking in Lake Erie by jurisdictional waters for 2024 is: Pennsylvania (817,488; 51.6%), Ohio (466,520; 29.5%), New York (215,104; 13.6%), Michigan (50,048; 3.1%), and Ontario (32,992; 2%). Total steelhead stocking in 2024 (1.58 million) was below the long-term average. Annual stocking numbers have been consistently in the 1.5-2.0 million fish range since 1993. The summer open lake steelhead harvest was estimated at 26,637 steelhead across New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Ontario, and Michigan and above the long-term average harvest of 22,019. Tributary angler surveys, represented the majority (>90%) of the targeted fishery effort for steelhead. Catch rates remain high and there are planned creel surveys in the future in most jurisdictions.

