2013 Winnebago System Yellow Perch Fyke Net Survey

Post-Season Synopsis

Ryan Koenigs, Winnebago Sturgeon Biologist, 15 October 2013

The spring of 2013 was quite different than that of 2012. That year, due to unseasonably warm 70-80° weather, the ice on the Fox River in Oshkosh went out around mid-March, whereas a more gradual warm up in 2013 led to ice out occurring during the first week in April. Our crew was out sampling shortly after that and was able to get a good look at the size structure from the capture of 474 yellow perch on April 8, 2013.

The weather was not the only difference between these two years. The survey results were also quite different. The adult population in 2012 was dominated by 6-8" fish (93% of males and 79% of females) that were mostly 2-3 years old (99.5% of the males and 98.3% of the females). In 2013, the adult male population was still dominated by 6-8" fish (67.4%), but overall the size structure contained a higher percentage of larger fish. In fact, 76.9% of the adult female population and 26.7% of the adult male population was comprised of fish larger than 8" (Figure 1). Even though there was a higher percentage of larger fish observed in 2013, the population was still predominantly made up of 2-3 year old fish (96% of the females and 93% of the males).



Data collected during the springs of 2012 and 2013 are beginning to show some general trends within the yellow perch population. First of all, yellow perch in the Winnebago System exhibit above average growth rates compared to the state average (Figure 2). Females are able to reach 8" between the ages of 2-3 and 10" by age 4. Males grow slightly slower and reach 8" at age 3 and 10" at ages 5-6. These growth rates are quite high compared to most lake in WI and allow fish to reach harvestable sizes in a



relatively short period of time. Another trend is that the population is dominated by young fish (4 years old and younger). The lack of older fish suggests a high mortality rate and data we have collected verify this. For example, mean mortality estimates from these two years indicate that roughly 65-70% of the adult female population and 75% of the adult male population succumb to mortality each year. Mortality in this case consists of both natural mortality and harvest.

The high degree in angling effort targeting yellow perch is what led our crew to

begin focused assessments on this species. Over the first two years we have started to see some trends develop, but those two years only provide a snapshot of what is happening within the population and fishery. It will take more years of sampling to fully understand what factors are driving the dynamics of the population. So stay tuned for more reports as we continue to collect more data. In the meantime, get out there and take advantage of the tremendous fishing opportunities that the Winnebago System has to offer!



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