

NRB.iskey # 42234

A Evaluation of the . . .

FISHERY RESOURCES OF ISLE ROYALE NATIONAL PARK

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PROPERTY
of
National Park Service
Isle Royale National Park

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Washington 25, D. C.

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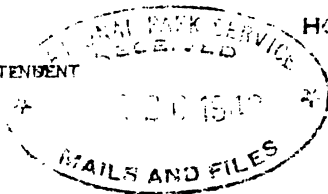
ISLE ROYALE NATIONAL PARK

VIA

HOUGHTON, MICHIGAN

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THE SUPERINTENDENT



March 23, 1942.

MEMORANDUM for the Director.

From time to time we have assembled various data and general information concerning sport and commercial fishing activities at Isle Royale National Park. These data have been compiled and we submit herewith a map showing the species present in the inland lakes and principle streams of the park, also fishing grounds used by the commercial fishermen in Lake Superior waters adjacent to the park. The color legend used for indicating species in the lakes and streams is in accordance with your memorandum of December 5, 1940. The statistical data concerning the catch of fish which we are attaching is taken from annual reports made to the Michigan State Conservation Department.

Although the Isle Royale streams and lakes have been noted for fine sport fishing for many years, the records indicate only one plant of non-commercial species prior to 1941. In 1932, 3,200 seven month old brook trout were planted in Siskiwit River, Rook Harbor, and Tobins Harbor. Undoubtedly, however, there have been several unrecorded plants prior to 1932 by local residents and others interested in fishing in and near the park.

Sport fishing is the principle activity of many park visitors, however, sixty percent of it is in Lake Superior on the same grounds as that used by commercial fishermen. The balance is in the inland lakes with only a small number of people fishing the short streams of the park. Lake trout and pike constitute ninety percent of the catch by sport fishermen. Sport fishing has increased considerably the last three years. The increase is principally in fishing in the inland lakes. From present indications, the lakes can easily support an increase of several times the present volume of fishing before artificial propagation to maintain the fish would be necessary. Food seems to be abundant and fish plentiful in all of the major lakes. Sport fishing is certain to increase considerably as travel to the park increases and as guides and boats are available at various points in the park and on the inland lakes. Sport fishing in and near the park, while important, is not at present a problem. A Michigan license is required, of course, and for the present at least, the existing federal and state regulations give ample protection so far as the take of sport fish is concerned. It may later become necessary to impose purely local regulations but this does not seem to be required now.

Commercial fishing is of more immediate importance so far as the administration of the park is concerned. It involves local residents, federal and state regulations, cooperation with the State Conservation Department, Federal Fish and Wildlife Service, as well as the International Committee on Great Lakes Fisheries.

There are no definite records available to indicate when commercial fishing operations first began at Isle Royale, but most of the older residents say it dates back to about 1850. As a matter of fact, there are four residents of Isle Royale who have themselves fished there for more than fifty years, continuously. Early fishing operations were based on use of sail boats and, for a time, small trawlers were used with pond and trap nets before general regulations were made to control the type of equipment and the take of fish. Two or three large companies were interested in commercial fishing at Isle Royale, among these the Booth Company, which is still in existence, the H. Christiansen & Sons Company of Duluth, present operators of the mail boat to the park. In fact, the commercial fishing there just about supports the operation of this company's boat from Duluth.

For many years the state of Michigan has prescribed control measures and regulations for commercial fishing at Isle Royale. A variety of species are taken for commercial purposes. The take at Isle Royale is, while small, of considerable importance to the group of fishermen living in the park. The average take for the twelve year period, 1931 to 1941, inclusive, is 635,605 pounds annually. This includes lake trout, herring, whitefish, and menominee.

The commercial fishing operation at Isle Royale is conducted by about thirty families, constituting eighteen separate operations. Thirty-seven Michigan state commercial fishing licenses in all are issued to the owners and employees at Isle Royale. About sixty-five persons obtain their livelihood from the commercial fishing in the park. Excepting three families, all of these people move to the Minnesota and Michigan mainland during the winter period from November 15 to April 15. Three families have remained in the park over winter for the past several years. Two of these, however, have children of school age and they must shortly move to the mainland or arrange for home instruction for their children.

Fishing is conducted by the use of gill nets and what is locally known as top hooks or set lines. A survey made over the past three years shows that 786,000 feet of trout gill nets, 74,510 feet of herring gill nets, and 13,510 top hooks, 31 row boats or dories, and 30 gasoline motor launches are in use in the operation in the park. Based on reports required to be made to the Michigan Conservation Department, the take during the past twelve years has averaged 635,605 pounds, the smallest year being 1932 when 444,630 pounds were caught, while 1936

seems to be the largest year with 1,047,090 pounds. This take is divided about fifty-four percent of lake trout, forty percent herring, five percent whitefish, while the balance is represented in a catch of Menominees. The catch of whitefish has steadily declined from six percent in 1931 to eight-tenths of one percent in 1939. The attached table shows catches for the twelve year period 1931 to 1941 inclusive.

The money value of the fish caught in the vicinity of Isle Royale varies, of course, from year to year. 1940 and 1941 show a total of nearly \$80,000 annually. It seems safe to assume that this annual catch would run pretty close to \$80,000 per year over the twelve year period. Divided among the commercial fishermen at the park and their employees, this constitutes the principle source, if not the only income, although a few of them have minor winter employment in Minnesota and Michigan which helps to some extent in their maintenance. Several of them own homes in Minnesota and most all of the children attend school there.

There does not seem to be any evidence that early commercial fishing has been detrimental to the establishment and use of the area as a national park. Actually, I believe that the presence of the commercial fishermen at Isle Royale has to some extent helped to preserve and protect the area during the years preceding its establishment as a park. When the area was authorized for national park purposes, a survey of the families engaged in commercial fishing was made and their land and properties appraised along with other properties in the park. When land purchase was actually started in 1935, and later in 1936 and 1937, it was necessary to determine a basic policy with reference to commercial fishing if the park was to be established. Although there was no organized opposition to the park from the commercial fishermen, their united effort could easily have blocked or delayed the project for many years. On this basis it was believed in general that most of the fishermen could be allowed to continue their operations for a few years or until a long range program could be worked out. From present indications, this plan has been satisfactory and helpful to the park with only one or two exceptions. In actual practice this policy will result in a gradual decline in the number of fishermen as the older people pass on and a few of the younger men move to other fields. Through control of the land and building the service can prevent any increases in resident fishermen. In 1937, there were about thirty-seven families engaged in commercial fishing. Due to one or two deaths, and two or three who have moved away, this number is now reduced to thirty. Only four or five of the total number of fishermen actually own property. A few had established squatters' rights but most of them had merely rented cabin sites. All of these equities have now been acquired and special use permits issued to all individuals who occupy government owned buildings or use docks or other facilities. We have adopted the policy of a uniform charge of \$25.00 per year for all of the fishing families.

Under these permits the fishermen repair the buildings and docks at their own expense. The fishermen indicated a willingness to dispose of cats and dogs and to conform to park regulations insofar as maintaining slightly premises are concerned, and with few exceptions, the fishermen themselves can be considered a pretty desirable class of people in the park.

Commercial fishing near Isle Royale has been subject to the same abuse and claims and counter-claims as have commercial fishing grounds in other parts of the Great Lakes. A few of the fishermen believe that fishing will be ruined within a few years unless large hatcheries are established and extensive plantings carried on. Others believe changes in the regulations will accomplish the necessary corrections while still others have other ideas. For a number of years the Fish and Wildlife Service hatchery at Duluth has collected lake trout and whitefish eggs with the cooperation of the fishermen. The superintendent of the hatchery there was asked for a record of eggs taken and fish planted back, but the only information he could give is quoted herewith:

"The only figure I can get together in which the Isle Royale take of eggs seems to be segregated from the rest of the lake, begins with the year 1916. Between 1916 and 1940, both inclusive, this station received 34,900,000 lake trout eggs and 42,000,000 whitefish eggs from that locality. Between the spring of 1915 and June, 1940, this station planted back around Isle Royale 81,000,000 lake trout fry and fingerlings, mostly fry, and 31,822,000 whitefish fry."

I believe that most of the field officials of the Fish and Wildlife Service would like to see a more comprehensive plan for the taking of eggs and hatching and replanting of fish worked out so far as the whole of Lake Superior is concerned, as well as the vicinity of Isle Royale. I believe they have made some studies toward this end although I know of no definite plans to establish hatcheries or rearing ponds for commercial fisheries.

So far as the administration of the park is concerned, the commercial fishing problem will be with us constantly. Even though a change in policy later on might eliminate the resident fishermen, people from outside the area might come in with boats and fish waters adjacent to the park notwithstanding any local regulations to the contrary. I am inclined to believe, therefore, that the best policy for the future is to continue the present arrangement but allow no

Service is obligated to cooperated with the state in their fish and
and any well prepared program of egg taking or planting which the Fish
and Wildlife Service might promulgate or work out for commercial fish-
eries in the vicinity of the park.

Burke F. Haggley
Superintendent.

Cy to the Regional Director, Region Two.

STATISTICAL REPORT COMMERCIAL FISHERIES
ISLE ROYALE CATCH IN POUNDS AND VALUE

	<u>1940</u>	
<u>SPECIES</u>	<u>POUNDS</u>	<u>VALUE</u>
Lake trout	346,213	\$51,931.95
Lake Whitefish	10,020	1,903.30
Menominee Whitefish	4,775	382.00
Herring	131,399	3,941.97
Chubs	280	42.00
TOTAL	492,687	\$58,201.72

	<u>1941</u>	
Lake Trout	226,879	\$50,469.43
Lake Whitefish	8,778	1,843.38
Menominee Whitefish	7,755	620.40
Herring	237,245	8,896.69
TOTAL	550,657	\$61,829.90

Twelve Year Average
1930 to 1941 inc.

<u>SPECIES</u>	<u>TOTAL POUNDS</u>	<u>YEARLY AVERAGE</u>
Lake Trout	4,256,453	355,536 lbs.
Lake Whitefish	128,625	10,719 "
Menominee Whitefish	121,730	10,144 "
Herring	3,109,129	259,094 "
Chubs	11,324	944 "
TOTAL - 12 yrs.	7,627,261	635,605 "