

GREAT LAKES COMMITTEE ADVISORY QUESTION

QUESTION 48: Restore anadromous (lake run) fish passage to the Iron River, Bayfield County (160119)

The Iron River in Bayfield County is the third largest trout stream tributary to Lake Superior. Prior to the Orienta Dam installation in 1923, anadromous (lake run) fish species ascended Orienta Falls on the Iron River. The dam failed in 1989 and was removed shortly after. A lamprey barrier was installed at that time blocking upstream migration for all species and has remained in that condition ever since.

Sporting groups including the Brule River Sportsmen's Club, Douglas County Fish & Game League, Western Lake Superior Trollers Association, Wild River's Chapter of Trout Unlimited, Wisconsin Wildlife Federation and Douglas County Conservation Congress support the restoration of fish passage on the Iron River. A 1993 DNR Study Report estimated the anadromous salmonid run on the Iron River would annually increase Wisconsin's Lake Superior anadromous fishery by nearly 29% and contribute an estimated \$300,000 to the local economy.

Four of the five goals outlined in the draft Lake Superior Fishery Management Plan directly relate to restoring fish passage for anadromous fish:

- Protect, maintain and improve the diversity and connectivity of tributary coastal and main lake habitats of Lake Superior's fish community.
- Work with stakeholders to identify and implement strategies that protect, support and enhance the diversity, sustainability and viability of the Lake Superior fishery for state and tribal sport, commercial and subsistence fishing.
- Develop, evaluate, and implement strategies to maximize the resilience of Lake Superior fisheries through controls, management and mitigation of future threats.
- Identify strategies to coordinate with stakeholders to improve Lake Superior fisheries.

However, removal of the barrier would open 186 miles of tributaries to Lake Superior. There is concern about the potential spread of aquatic invasive species (particularly VHS) with alteration of the barrier (VHS is currently found only below Orienta Falls Dam). The Great Lakes Fishery Commission, US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and other partners and stakeholders would need to be consulted with any potential modifications to the barrier. USFWS has expressed concerns due to the proximity to the Iron River National Fish Hatchery.

Currently, there are healthy populations of brook trout in the headwaters of the Iron River and downstream brown trout become more abundant. The possible impacts on these populations would need to be assessed prior to alteration of the barrier. The Wisconsin DNR recently released the Fish Passage at Dams Strategic Analysis that would be used in any decision-making process.

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48. Would you support working with local conservation groups and the DNR to restore fish passage for migrating (lake run) fish to the Iron River in Bayfield County? 48. YES
 NO
 NO OPINION
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