Outdoors

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Experts predict chinook salmon bonanza

The Class of '73 is not a movie sequel to the Summer of '42 or the Class of '44, but it could be the Greatest Show On Earth in the interest of Lake Michigan fishermen.

A report filed by fisheries biologist Harry White of the Illinois Dept. of Conservation last week, indicates the fall run of chinook salmon in 1976 should offer the biggest and best fishing in the brief sportfishing history of Lake Michigan.

White captained a team that surveyed eight inshore sites by collecting fish with monofilament gill nets and 230-volt alternating current boat electrofishing.

PRIMARY SITE samples were taken between Sept. 4 and Nov. 25, 1975 from catches at Jackson Harbor, Diversey Harbor, Belmont Harbor, the Chicago and Great Lakes Naval Training Center Harbor in North Chicago, the mouth of the Waukegan River in Waukegan and the mouth of Kellogg Creek in Zion.

In addition, tests were conducted at the discharge of the Waukegan power plant in Waukegan and the 59th St. Harbor in Chicago.

The 23 independent surveys resulted in a collection of 295 salmonids representing five species. Each fish was measured for total length and weight, sexed and checked for lamprey wounds or scars and fin clips.

MORE THAN one-half of the chinook taken in the sample were Class of '73 salmon. Since the chinook has a normal life cycle of four years, the 1976 fall run should be the most prolific on record.

Fishermen and snaggers enjoyed landing chinook that averaged 12½ pounds and measured 31.7 inches in the fall of '75. In another 9-10 months, these kings are expected to more than double their weight.

The coho salmon story, which represented 90 per cent of the fish caught during the regular 1975 season, is an expectedly bleak one narrated from a tragic outbreak of whirling disease at the Platte River Hatchery in Michigan that destroyed 2.1 million young coho.

UNABLE TO purchase a significant number of coho fry to be stocked into Lake Michigan, organizations such as Salmon Unlimited and the Illinois Dept. of Conservation predict two low-level years of coho fishing ahead.

Other results of the survey indicated that lake trout planted between 1967 and 1970 are returning to their original release site at Great Lakes Horbor.

Unfortunately the water quality, predation and the lake bottom itself, at such stocking areas as Kellogg Creek and the Waukegan River is not conducive for late trout propagation.

Under consideration are possible offshore plantings of yearling lakers over suitable spawning habitat. It appears that the Illinois ban on taking lake trout will continue, but a decision is expected in February.

ONLY SEVEN of 64 rainbow trout collected during the survey were mature (3-5 years old) and their largest numbers were taken from the northern sites in mid-November.

The great number of immature steelhead would indicate that most of these fish represent the 230,000 that were released during 1975. The average length of those caught was 25.1 inches and weighed seven pounds.

The devastating lamprey eel, the culprit that decimated the Lake Michigan trout population in the 1950s, is apparently no longer a nemesis.

Lamprey wounding incidence (an indicator of lamprey abundance) was .02 for chinook and a welcomed zero for lake trout.

But with lampreys out of our hair and off of our skin, Lake Michigan anglers are now faced with the polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB) problem which is still under investigation by the Dept. of Public Health.

THE CHEMICAL, similar in its composition and effects to DDT, is appearing in dangerous quantities in the fatty tissue of the bigger salmon and trout.

Officials suggest that the consumer remove as much of the fatty tissue as possible prior to preparing the fish and to limit consumption to one dinner per week.

It's a bitter pill to swallow, especially with such an exciting forecast for fall-run fishing ahead.

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