

## **EXECUTIVE ORDER ISSUED FOR LAKE ERIE YELLOW PERCH**

*Weak hatches lead to bag limit reduction*

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In response to declining fish populations, Ohio Governor Ted Strickland has issued an executive order to reduce the sport fishing bag limit for Lake Erie yellow perch from 40 to 30.

The order will go into effect Monday, April 9, immediately reducing the bag limit while new rules are finalized and placed into affect. The normal Wildlife rule-making process would require about 90 days to be completed.

The Lake Erie yellow perch bag limit for sport anglers was only recently increased to 40 in 2006 and prior to that has been 30 over the past 10 years.

"Perch is an important species for our sport anglers in Ohio and an important part of Ohio's commercial fishing economy, and this collaborative action will help Ohio take the lead in maintaining our perch levels for Ohioans to enjoy in the future," Strickland said.

Lake Erie commercial netters will also see a reduction in their quota compared to 2006. Commercial allocations for Lake Erie yellow perch in Ohio will drop from 3 million pounds in 2006 to 2.1 million pounds in 2007. The recreational allocation will fall from 4.5 million pounds in 2006 to 2.8 million pounds in 2007.

"We are making the decision to manage the perch harvest in order to assure the long-term vitality of this important natural resource," said Sean Logan, director of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. "Like Ohio's deer herd, the perch population is an example of a continuous work in progress. Our goal as managers is to stay flexible, stay informed, and always be ready to adapt when change is needed."

These actions come on the heels of the March 23 announcement from the Lake Erie Committee of the Great Lakes Fisheries Commission, which significantly reduced the 2007 lake-wide total allowable catch (TAC) from 2006. The TAC represents the amount of fish that can be caught by recreational and commercial fishermen without putting the fish stocks at risk. Ohio's 2007 share or "quota" for yellow perch is 4.92 million pounds of the lake-wide TAC of 11.39 million pounds. Both figures represent a 34 percent reduction from last year's quota. Each year, the TAC is adjusted by the Committee in response to fluctuations in the lake's fish population.

"Recent estimates of perch abundance were lower than we initially expected and reflect weak hatches from 2002, 2004, and 2005, especially in the western basin," said Roger Knight, Lake Erie program administrator for the Division of Wildlife and Ohio's representative on the Lake Erie Committee. "Our projections indicate that the Ohio recreational fishery would exceed its quota allocation without a bag limit change."

The quota for yellow perch in Ohio's waters of Lake Erie is split between commercial netters and sport anglers, with roughly 40 percent of the quota being allocated to commercial and 60 percent to sport each year. Under existing laws and procedures, ODNR's Division of Wildlife can reduce the allocation of perch to netters by May 1, the first day of the commercial fishing season for yellow perch in Ohio waters. In contrast, sport fishing regulation changes generally are made during the fall prior to a new fishing year. The news of the TAC limits indicated the need for an adjustment of the sport quotas.

Late last week, the Ohio Wildlife Council voted unanimously in favor of reducing quotas and bag limits for both sport anglers and commercial netters. The Council also expressed their strong support for the governor's decision to issue an Executive Order to help ensure that Ohio does not exceed its quota set by the Lake Erie Committee.