



Great Lakes Fishery Commission

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STATUS OF SEA LAMPREY ABUNDANCES IN THE GREAT LAKES

Abundances return to pre-pandemic levels after resumption of regularly scheduled treatments

ANN ARBOR, MI—The annual Status of Sea Lamprey Control report for 2025 was recently released by the Great Lakes Fishery Commission (Commission). The report highlights that 3-year average adult sea lamprey abundances increased in Lake Superior but decreased in Lakes Michigan, Huron, Erie, and Ontario from 2024 to 2025.

According to the report, 2025 adult index estimates for each lake appear to have returned to levels seen before the COVID-19 pandemic, when lampricide treatments were limited during 2020 and 2021. The number of adult sea lamprey captured during 2025 was 37,800 adults, which is just below the 3-year pre-COVID average of 38,167 (2017-2019). Although some indices remain affected by elevated populations resulting from limited treatments during COVID, the resumption of treatment efforts indicates an encouraging shift in abundances, as decreases observed in the 2024 adult indices for Lakes Huron, Michigan, Erie, and Ontario have been maintained into 2025.

The report highlights the necessity of continued sea lamprey control and research into innovative control measures. Sea lampreys—native to the Atlantic Ocean—are an invasive species that have posed a constant, significant threat to the Great Lakes ecosystem. Feeding on the blood and bodily fluids of fish, attaching to prey with a tooth-filled suction cup mouth, a sea lamprey can consume up to 40 pounds (18 kilograms) of Great Lakes fish. Control efforts are critical to protection, preservation, conservation, and management efforts around the basin, and the 2025 report further elucidates that lampricide treatments and the sea lamprey barrier network are highly effective in controlling sea lamprey populations.

“The Great Lakes mean a great deal to the millions of people living, working, and recreating in the basin,” said Ethan Baker, chair of the Commission. “This \$5.1 billion industry will crash if sea lamprey populations get out of control again. No one wants to have a repeat of the early days when it was hard to find a fish without a sea lamprey wound. So, we are going to continue working hard—in collaboration with federal, state, provincial, and Indigenous partners—to make sure sea lamprey control will continue without pause.”

Earl Provost, vice chair of the Commission, continued: “If we were unable to control sea lamprey populations, our native fish populations would suffer immensely. As we saw in 2022 and 2023, sea lamprey populations easily skyrocket when control efforts are relaxed. We are just now getting back to a semblance of what it was like before the COVID-19 pandemic, but there is still much work to do.”



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The latest sea lamprey status, by lake, is as follows:

LAKE SUPERIOR: Though the adult sea lamprey abundance decreased for 2025, the 3-year average shows the abundance remains above target for Lake Superior. Stream-specific estimates showed the Bad and Tahquamenon rivers contributed the most to the lake-wide index estimate in 2025 (46% and 40%, respectively). Notably, the adult sea lamprey catch in the Tahquamenon River was the second highest on record, with a catch of 2,156 adults. In addition, the Brule and Middle rivers had below-average spawning runs in 2025, likely due to lampricide applications on both streams in 2024.

LAKE MICHIGAN: The 3-year average of adult sea lamprey abundance decreased in 2025, but remains above target for Lake Michigan. However, the index of abundance has remained relatively stable around the target level for the past 10 years with the exception of 2022 (COVID-19). Stream-specific estimates showed that the Manistique and Big Manistee rivers contributed most to the lake-wide index estimate in 2025 (37% and 22%, respectively).

LAKE HURON: The 3-year average of adult sea lamprey abundance decreased in 2025, but remains above the target for Lake Huron. Stream-specific estimates showed that the Echo and Cheboygan rivers contributed most to the lake-wide index estimate (28% and 26%, respectively).

LAKE ERIE: The 3-year average of adult sea lamprey abundance decreased in 2025 and is below the target for Lake Erie. Population estimates were generated using mark-recapture data for three of five index streams. The population estimates for Cattaraugus and Youngs creeks were modeled due to insufficient recaptures of marked sea lamprey. Stream-specific estimates showed the Cattaraugus and Big Creeks contributed most to the lake-wide index estimate (36% and 26%, respectively). Notably, surveys are having difficulties finding larval sea lamprey in Lake Erie tributaries, which corroborates the low adult abundances observed in recent years.

LAKE ONTARIO: The 3-year average of adult sea lamprey abundance decreased in 2025, but remains above the target for Lake Ontario. However, it is worth noting that adult sea lamprey abundance from 2023 to 2025 significantly decreased from 56,000 to 11,584. Population estimates were generated using mark-recapture data for four of five index streams. The population estimate for Sterling Creek was modeled due to insufficient recaptures of marked sea lamprey. Stream-specific estimates showed the Humber and Black rivers contributed most to the lake-wide index estimate (37% and 31%, respectively).

As a response to the cataclysmic damage to the Great Lakes fishery caused by sea lamprey, the governments of Canada and the United States established the Commission in 1955. Through the 1954 Convention on Great Lakes Fisheries, the Commission is charged with sea lamprey control and research, fisheries research, and fisheries management coordination. Sea lamprey control and research are conducted in partnership with Fisheries and Oceans Canada, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the US Geological Survey. Sea lamprey control primarily consists of the use of lampricides and barriers, with trapping adult sea lamprey as a means to measure and track abundance. Additionally, the Commission is evaluating new and supplemental controls to further enhance sea lamprey control. For more information, visit www.glfc.org/sea-lamprey.php.