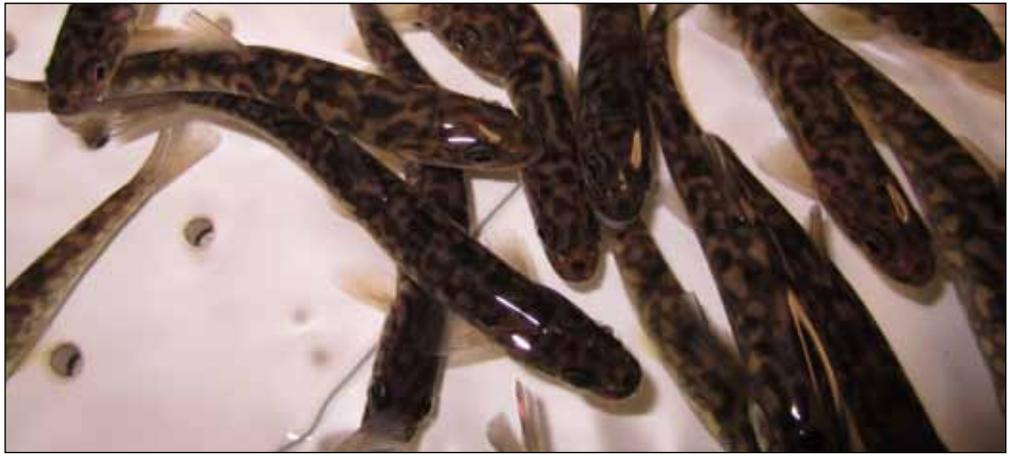


# Great Lakes Fish Tagging and Recovery Lab Enjoys a Busy Second Year

**F**ishery managers in the Great Lakes annually stock over 30 million salmonines (salmon and trout) to diversify sport fisheries, restore native fish populations, and control invasive fishes. However, little is known about how well these fish survive, contribute to the fisheries, and reproduce in the wild. To address these concerns the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service led a cooperative effort under the request of the Council of Lake Committees of the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, to develop a basin-wide program to tag all stocked salmon and trout. This effort will provide greater insight into survival of stocked fish, the contribution of stocked adults to restoration of native fishes, the ability to manage harvest away from wild fish, and the opportunity to evaluate and improve hatchery operations. The mass-marking program uses adipose fin-clips and coded-wire tags to track groups of harvested fish that were stocked from federal and state hatcheries.

This year is the second year of the tagging program and will involve tagging about 5 million lake trout raised by the Service for lakes Michigan, Huron, Erie and Ontario, and 4.7 million Chinook salmon raised by the states of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan and Wisconsin for Lake Huron and Lake Michigan. Tagging and clipping all these fish requires the use of a sophisticated, computer-operated automated system that rapidly sort fish by size and moves them down six tagging lines that quickly clip their adipose fin and place a small piece of wire in their snouts.

The “Tagging Lab” currently operates 4 automated trailers. The wire (tag) has a number (code, hence



*Juvenile lake trout wait their turn during mass marking effort. USFWS*



*What happens to hatchery fish once they are released into the wild? Mass marking will track hatchery fish to find out. USFWS*

“coded-wire-tag”) that allows groups of fish to be identified when they are recaptured by fishers and biologists later in life. Groups of fish could be those of the same strain or those released at a stocking site. When tagged fish are recovered, their snouts are removed and sent to the “Tagging Lab” at the Green Bay FWCO for extraction and reading. The analysis of many recoveries will assist with management decisions on stocking in the future years that will help improve and maintain the seven billion dollar sport fishery on the Great Lakes.



*The adipose fin is clipped by the mass marking machine. USFWS*

Staff from the lab are also assisting the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation with recovery of tag Chinook salmon from Lake Ontario and will work directly with anglers and charter boat captains to recover as many fish as possible this year. This program was partial funding by the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.

The full program will require nine automated trailers and four manual trailers. Annual operations including tags, recovery efforts, and tag extraction services, will cost about \$6 million. An operational plan has been completed to mark all fish prior to stocking, and to recover tagged fish as part of regular fishery surveys from anglers, commercial fishers, and charter boat operators. A data management system will be developed to cooperatively archive and analyze recovery data to answer questions of lake-wide or basin-wide scope. Efforts are underway to communicate to stakeholders the benefits of mass marking and to secure the necessary funding for equipment and annual operations. Project leaders expect this program to be fully implemented within five years but that schedule is predicated on funding levels and subsequent agency commitment. This project is an excellent example of cooperative, proactive efforts to improve and refine fishery management across the Great Lakes basin. 