

RESOURCE REPORT

FISHING LAKE SIMCOE NEWSLETTER 2006 Annual Issue

Introduction:

Another year has come and gone since our 2005 issue and as usual there is always lots going on in and around Lake Simcoe. This issue will cover the entire 2006 year beginning with the start of the 2006 winter season. This will also mark the last issue of the Fishing Lake Simcoe Newsletter that will be sent out by conventional mail to approximately 500 individuals, businesses and others with an interest in the fisheries of Lake Simcoe. Since 1994 we have been stuffing envelopes with paper copies of the newsletter and then mailing them out. However the time has come to provide the newsletter to a much wider audience electronically. So, for all those who wish to be included on an email list to receive pdf versions of this newsletter, please contact wil.wegman@ontario.ca. We will be sure to add you to a hidden email distribution list and your contact information will not be disclosed. In this newsletter please find a copy of our "Lake Simcoe Ice Fishing Pledge" along with a handy stocking record table that will help you determine when the lake trout or whitefish you caught was stocked based on the fin clip of the fish.

Feature Species:

Pefferlaw River Goby Monitoring and Removal Program

In August of 2004, the first incidence of a round goby in the Pefferlaw River was reported to the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) and the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH) Invasive Species Hotline. That fish was caught while angling by a student working for Sibbald Point Provincial Park at a location on the river at the end of Morning Glory Road near the village of Pefferlaw. That first fish sparked immediate action by MNR and OFAH staff who began trapping and seine netting right away to determine the extent of the goby population in the river.



The round goby is a very destructive invasive fish originally from the Caspian and Baltic Seas of Eastern Europe and brought to North America in the ballast water of ocean going ships. It was first found in Lake St Clair and Lake Erie in the early 1990s and then worked its way throughout the Great Lakes. It is also currently found in the Trent Severn Waterway near Hastings Ontario but so far it is not known to have worked its way into any other inland waterbody in the province. During the spring and summer of 2005, monitoring and removal efforts continued in the Pefferlaw River. This involved the use of electrofishing equipment, bottom trawling and more angling – as well as continued seining and trapping. No goby had been found in adjacent Lake Simcoe – a multi-million dollar fishery with some of the finest bass and perch fishing found in North America.

Early on, MNR and OFAH had already enlisted a host of other key partners such as the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority (LSRCA), Ministry of the Environment (MOE), Pefferlaw River Anglers Association, OFAH Zone G, Beaverton & District Conservation Club, Aurora Bassmasters, Bass Pro Shops, Johnston's Restaurant, and others. All were on board to try and organize a major initiative with the goal to eradicate round goby from the Pefferlaw River before they entered Lake Simcoe. After consulting with several other agencies, experts, stakeholders and the public, the application of rotenone was recognized as the only available option that could potentially accomplish the goal of eradication.

In October of 2005 a rotenone application to 5km of the Pefferlaw was conducted to try to eradicate goby and prevent them from invading Lake Simcoe. The application of this chemical piscicide was performed by licensed staff of the DFO's Sea Lamprey Control group by boat in the lower portions of the river and at the dam. Authorization and permits were obtained from DFO and MOE. A week before the application, approximately 10,000 fish including over 4,000 game fish, were captured by the MNR, DFO, Bait Association of Ontario (BAO) staff, and other volunteers and transferred via a Shimano Live Release Boat, out to Lake Simcoe where they were released into the lake.

The treatment went according to plan; all test traps containing bullhead and goby indicated 100% effectiveness of the treatment. Goby were not found in any areas not previously known to contain goby. Most of the fish collected after the treatment were carp and shiners. Native fishes reappeared at the mouth and the dam two weeks after the treatment and were one kilometre upstream from the mouth after the third week.

Water samples were taken before, during and immediately after the treatment. Results showed that rotenone did not enter into the groundwater system, and was completely detoxified one day after the treatment. In addition, it was confirmed there was no increase in volatile organic compounds (a by-product of motor boats and the rotenone application). By every indication the project had worked. It had raised public awareness as the first major goby eradication project in North America. It proved an invaluable experience for all agencies and volunteers who worked cooperatively on the massive project and it offered real hope that all goby were gone from the river before they had a chance to enter Lake Simcoe.

2006 Goby Monitoring:

Throughout 2006, MNR and its partners were committed to the ongoing round goby monitoring efforts. Staff from MNR's Aurora District began checking traps on the Pefferlaw River and shores of Lake Simcoe immediately after ice-out in 2006. All signs were positive; not only were other native fish species re-colonizing the river, but for the first little while, no goby were found. Then on a rainy May 18th while checking his traps, Wil Wegman from Aurora District found a small goby at the end of Morning Glory Road near the village of Pefferlaw.

The following week, staff from DFO and MNR combined efforts to seine the river with nets and found an additional three goby in one small site across from the Everglades Marina north of Hwy 48. Despite intensive seining in several other locations along the river – including the Morning Glory site – no additional goby were found. Needless to say all those involved in the project were disappointed at the findings but still they were determined not to give up just yet.

Pictured below ... First goby captured from the Pefferlaw River after the rotenone treatment. Note fused pelvic fin. Sculpin, native to the lake and very similar in appearance to goby have split pelvic fins



Advice was sought immediately to address the discovery of goby in the river and determine appropriate next steps. Experts from the DFO, MNR, OFAH, University of Windsor and Trent University were consulted. It was agreed then that the removal of as many remnant goby as possible and as quickly as possible would be the best course of action. By early June, MNR's Aurora District had secured two energetic university students whose summer duties would include monitoring and removing goby from the Pefferlaw River. Shawna Fallowfield and David May began checking and setting additional traps as well as seining, dip netting, electro fishing and, periodically, even angling – a highly effective method of capturing goby from the river.

During the second week of June/06 MNR and LSRCA crews electrofished the wadeable portions of the Pefferlaw River. Backpack electro fishing can be highly effective at shocking goby in shallow areas so that portion of the River from the CNR tracks to the dam in Pefferlaw was worked over diligently by the joint crews. Staff recorded and counted each species caught. For all their efforts, only one goby was found. By comparison, during a similar exercise in October, 2005 just before the rotenone treatment, a total of 530 goby were caught in the same one kilometre stretch of river.

Continued seining, electrofishing, angling and trapping of round goby in the Pefferlaw River showed that **33 of 37** native fish species, originally found in the river have returned post treatment. This does not include any additional fish species that MNR and other agencies staff had not physically sampled and verified such as the walleye which according to local residents were very abundant during the spring spawning run.

On the evening of June 28th, MNR Aurora District hosted a public meeting in the village of Pefferlaw that was attended by about 40 local residents and those interested in the status of the Pefferlaw goby project. An update on the project and the results of last year's treatment were shared with the public. It was emphasized at the meeting that all of the partners were still committed to this project.

Throughout 2006 small numbers of goby continued to show up in MNR traps and seines. On July 12th & 13th a major seine netting operation was conducted involving local professional bait harvester Ross McArthur, BAO president Michael Bennett, local volunteers Brent McIntyre and John Otter, Joe Gollon (a Michigan bait operator very interested in the project) and MNR staff. A total of eight goby were captured and removed from one site on the river at Peninsula Resort near the mouth of Lake Simcoe. Then again on July 25th, MNR staff along with bait harvesters Ross McArthur and James Meegs volunteered their time and equipment and revisited the site where the eight goby were captured. An all day seining effort here netted a total of 20 goby; equalling the number captured since the rotenone treatment last fall. 19 of these goby were of similar size to most of the others caught in 2006 (2-3 inches) however one was barely an inch long possibly suggesting that reproduction was already occurring in 2006.

Goby Found In Lake Simcoe

On Friday July 28th 2006, MNR Aurora District biologist and project lead Jason Borwick along with staff from MNR's Lake Simcoe Fisheries Assessment Unit, trawled the mouth of the Pefferlaw River in Lake Simcoe. Using specialized gear that can drag bottom even at great depths, the crew ended up capturing one goby in Lake Simcoe, in about 20 feet of water.

Since the presence of goby had been verified in Lake Simcoe, MNR staff and its partners reluctantly agreed that the opportunity to eradicate goby from the Lake Simcoe watershed was no longer possible.

For the remainder of the 2006 field season however staff continued to monitor and removed as many goby as possible from the river mouth. Most traps were moved from the river to the nearshore areas of Lake Simcoe – with particular emphasis on shorelines adjacent to the river mouth where ideal goby habitat exists. By the end of the field season in December no additional goby directly from the lake were found.

As always, anglers are asked to help stop the spread of Invasive Species and to keep and report any possible goby captures from Lake Simcoe or its tributaries to the OFAH/MNR Invading Species Hotline at 1-800 563-7711.

Lake Simcoe News

Simcoe Legend Passes On: In August of 2006, Lake Simcoe legend Casey Creber of Port Bolster passed away after a long bout with cancer. Casey's knowledge of the lake was remarkable and he operated a very successful ice hut operation, inn and restaurant there for 43 years. Casey was also a baitfish harvester for 50 years who volunteered his services to help with the MNR goby removal project on the Pefferlaw River in 2005. He was also a long-time tournament bass angler along with his wife Leona. The couple were a very popular team on the Bassmania Circuit. *"In remembrance of Casey, we will now call our Phenix Open on Lake Simcoe the Casey Creber Cup"*, Andy Pallotta, owner of Bassmania revealed. The catch and release tournament will be held out of Pefferlaw's Everglades Marina on June 24, 2007. Leona will continue to operate the Ice Fishing business, Inn and restaurant as well. She also plans to compete in the Casey Cup and other bass tournaments in 2007.

Heavy Fines For 113 Illegal Lake Simcoe Perch: NEWMARKET: Two men were fined a total of \$2,250 for having 113 more fish than the legal catch limit for yellow perch and for obstructing a conservation officer. Thanh Tuan Van, 27, of Toronto, and Cuong Tuan Van, 35, of Mississauga, pleaded guilty to catching and keeping more than the legal limit of perch and were fined \$750 each. Cuong Tuan Van was also convicted of obstructing a conservation officer and was fined an additional \$750. Both men forfeited their catch. The court heard that on April 17, 2006, Aurora District conservation officers observed two men catching a large number of perch at Jackson's Point on Lake Simcoe. The men were found to have 29 more fish than the legal limit and were charged. The men then drove away together in one car after denying ownership of a second car parked nearby. Shortly after, Cuong Tuan Van returned and eventually admitted to owning not only the vehicle, but a container in the trunk containing 84 more yellow perch. Justice of the Peace Douglas Clark heard the case in the Ontario Court of Justice, Newmarket, on July 7, 2006. The Ministry of Natural Resources reminds the public that they can call 1-877-TIPS-MNR (847-7667) toll-free any time to report a natural resources violation or contact your local ministry office during regular business hours. You can also call Crime Stoppers anonymously at 1-800-222-TIPS (8477).

Sold-out Bass Fisheries Workshop: Almost 100 people attended this workshop on April 1/06 on the shores of Lake Simcoe in Sutton. Organized by the Ontario BASS Federation Nation (OBFN) and the MNR, the workshop saw presentations on various bass related research projects. The written proceedings were prepared by MNR's Steve Kerr and a pdf copy will soon be available on the OBFN website: www.ontariobass.com under the Conservation link.

Barrie Hosts Biggest Bass Tournament in Canadian History

July 14 to 16, 2006 the CRK Canadian Fishing Tour hosted the richest payout in Canadian bass tournament history out of Barrie's waterfront on Lake Simcoe. The first place finisher of this Pro-Am event was Mike Desforges who earned a record \$100,000 for his win. Mike weighed in 73.35 pounds for his heaviest 15 bass over the three days of fishing.

Lake Simcoe Set's New Canadian Bass Tournament Record ... Again

In the fall of 2003 Lake Simcoe made news throughout the bass fishing world when it played host to a one day bass tournament where the winners weighed in an incredible 29.59 pounds for their five heaviest bass. These smallmouth turned out to be the heaviest five bass limit ever weighed in during a Canadian bass tournament. Every year since then, the anglers who fish this late fall event are anxious to try and top the magic 30 pound mark and on November 5th 2006 two anglers came very close. John Macdonald & Steve Hawkins weighed in 29.90 lbs (all smallmouth) breaking the old Simcoe and Canadian record – but falling just short of that elusive 30 pound mark. Their fish came primarily by dragging tube jigs with a few caught on jigging spoons. The largest of their five bass weighed 7.14 pounds but was not even the heaviest bass of the tournament. Those honours went to the third place team (with 27.54lbs) of Mike & Howard Gifford who brought in a smallmouth that weighed 7.16 lbs. 2nd place went to Dave Johnson & Barry Graves who weighed in 27.75 lbs.

Tagged Bass In Simcoe



Bass from some Lake Simcoe tournaments were sampled as part of an MNR Community Fisheries and Wildlife Improvement Project by the Aurora Bassmasters Club. Here, under the supervision of MNR biologist Jason Borwick, bass were weighed, measured, scale and dorsal spines collected, and each fish was fitted with two uniquely numbered white tags. Any angler catching one of these tagged fish is asked to call the Aurora District Office phone number on the tag and report the tag numbers, when it was caught, length of fish, where in Lake Simcoe it was caught and if the fish was released or not (anglers are strongly encouraged to live release these tagged bass). Four of the largest bass from the Crackle Cup Tournament now reside in the Vaughan Mills Bass Pro Shops public aquarium. One of this year's tagged bass has already been caught by Aurora Bassmaster Brian Ogden (pictured to the left) who recorded the numbers, took a photo, informed MNR and then released the fish back into Lake Simcoe.

Barrie Great Site for Kids Fishing Event: The second annual Kids Fishing Day took place in Barrie on June 25, 2006. This event gave 1,500 children an opportunity to experience fishing on the shores of Lake Simcoe's Kempenfelt Bay. At the same time they also learned about conservation, had lots of fun, and took home some great prizes compliments of the Rotary Club of Barrie-Kempenfelt and many corporate sponsors. According to Coos Uylenbroek, one of the key organizers *"We give all registered participants, a grab bag with free drinks, chips, hotdogs, conservation pamphlets, a fishing hat & shirt, lures and so on."* For more details about the 2007 event, check out www.teachakidtofish.com

Species By Species Report

Lake trout: The winter of 2006 was noticeably warmer then the year before and most big water anglers could not get to the main lake until almost mid winter. The late start to the hardwater season also meant a shorter then usual season for many ice hut operators who rely on lake trout and whitefish for much of their livelihood. Once the trout anglers could get out, they did report fairly good fishing until March 15 (when the winter season closes) despite missing the customary hot action normally associated with early winter. As soon as the 2nd Saturday in May, spring opener came around anglers in boats enjoyed good open water success trolling hard body baits or bright flashy spoons. As the season progressed, down riggers were used effectively to fish the 60-85 foot depths the trout were holding at but by mid summer lake trout fishing became more difficult so there were very few recreational anglers even targeting them anymore on the lake.

Whitefish: Along with the lake trout, this popular cold water species received later than usual attention during the winter of 2006. Many anglers reported that some traditional whitefish grounds provided only sporadic action, yet other areas of the lake were holding good concentrations of this popular bottom dwelling species. In fact those with underwater cameras remarked that pods of whitefish would seem to come into these areas almost in waves – sometimes attacking anglers' baits, other times only feigning mild curiosity. Productive baits seem to vary, with bottom hugging horizontal lures being best when worked with quivering motions right near the lake's floor. Active whitefish were also not averse to racing up and slamming spoons when they were jigged (up to 30' in some cases) off bottom.

During the open water whitefish season which opened along with lake trout on the 2nd Saturday in May, anglers found the high winds and rough water frustratingly difficult and often too dangerous to fish. Effective open water jigging (with many of the same lures used in the winter) typically requires travelling to main lake holding areas and either anchoring or holding still with an electric trolling motor. With the high winds, many spring anglers could not reach or fish these whitefish – so other than the occasional day when it was calm enough, spring whitefish action in 2006 was rather slow.

Northern Pike: The winter of 2006 saw some pike action later in the season in typical locations such as Cooks Bay, however unsafe ice conditions prevented some pike anglers from targeting their favorite winter species. This was the case for contestants in the 2006 Lake Simcoe Ice Fishing Contest that was to be held out of Keswick on Cooks Bay on February 4th. Unfortunately for the 3-4,000 anglers who normally fish for pike at this popular event every year, there was not enough safe ice and no fishing occurred during the Contest.

In the spring, after the 2nd Saturday in May opener, anglers were faced with a cold start until temperatures began to warm up and new weed growth began to re-emerge. Consistent warm stable weather patterns seemed to spark the northerns into biting and anglers reported good success for pike between 4-10 pounds. Jerk baits and spinner baits were productive in shallow water right up until the opening of bass season (last Saturday in June) when pike seemed to move to deeper weedgrowth. During the summer months pike were still caught along deeper weedlines- often by trolling long thin crankbaits or in-line spinners. As the days cooled and water temperatures fell in the fall, pike were less willing to follow and chase lures but for those who slowly worked a jig and plastic combo on the deep (15-20') edge of weeds, the action was still good for ardent pike enthusiasts.

Yellow Perch: Simcoe perch are very reliable when it comes to providing hot action during the first ice period and the start of 2006 was no exception. When much of the lake was unsafe for other species, shallower, more protected perch haunts were adequately frozen for hard water enthusiasts to safely walk out on and most reported very good action. Perch averaged 8-12 inches but some larger jumbos near the 14 inch mark were taken. As the winter season progressed places like Cooks Bay, the Virginia basin and out from Pefferlaw became busier and busier as even die hard lake trout and whitefish ice anglers had to revert to fishing perch as they could not reach the mid lake sections for their preferred gamefish. By mid winter perch action began to slow as is often the case, but the last ice period through the end of March still provided some outstanding yellow perch fishing.

The spring perch fishing on Simcoe in 2006 focussed to a large extent on the northern section of the 725 square km lake with areas like the Atherly Narrows and McPhee Bay providing good numbers of 8-11 inch perch. The summer period saw the typical slow down when fewer 'perch-specific' anglers were targeting this popular species. By early fall when the big schools of perch had re-grouped and congregated in their favorite locations such as out from the mouth of the Pefferlaw River, the keenest of all perch anglers were not far behind catching lots of perch. Interestingly enough by the end of December 2006, open water still prevailed throughout the lake and in places that would usually have ice there were still boat anglers casting to open water for Lake Simcoe's tasty yellow perch.

Largemouth & Smallmouth Bass: The season began on June 24th and for the most part, the majority of bass had finished spawning despite the cool, wet spring. Exceptions however did occur within the abundant smallmouth bass population – particularly up at the north end of the lake. Here, several smallmouth bass were still seen on the nests guarding their young for as long as a week or so after the opener. Smallmouth bass fishing during the first half of summer was great for those who

fished relatively shallow (less than 15 feet deep) and knew that the clear water conditions (caused by the filtering effects of zebra mussels) made these fish weary of poor presentations and easily spooked.

By late summer and early fall the largemouth fishing really seemed to turn on as these bass moved out of their shallow weedy haunts to occupy areas closer to deep water. Deep diving crankbaits and tube jigs worked slowly in the 12-20 foot range near deep weed breaks were very productive for these largemouth. Smallmouth fishing in the fall did not seem to pick up until at least mid October in 2006 as water temps were still close to 60 degrees F (15 C) during the 2nd weekend in October. Once the temperature fell ten degrees however the smallmouth began to group up in some of their traditional late fall locations. Dragging heavy tube jigs and working jigging spoons near bottom in depths from 18-35 feet were effective.

Last Casts: At press time in early January 07, the lake was still completely ice free and no ice fishing had yet taken place. As we anticipate colder, ice making weather let us not forget that Ice Safety must always be paramount in our minds. At 725 square kilometres the big lake never freezes uniformly; there could be over a foot of ice in Cooks Bay yet open water to the north in Kempenfelt Bay. Please check with local ice hut operators for the latest ice conditions. Once the lake has frozen completely even with a good base of solid ice, pressure cracks can form and in some cases even open up. A case in point was during the winter of 1997, 10 years ago, when the following made news around the world and was originally reported right here in this newsletter. Where were you during all of this?

01/25/97 ... Lake Simcoe Pressure Crack Opens – Leaves Anglers Stranded

The opening up of a major pressure crack on Saturday, January 25, 1997 attracted world-wide attention. The huge crack zig-zagged 32 kms across the southwestern portion of the lake. Pressure cracks are normally found in this general area every year. However, the cracks usually don't open up in a matter of seconds to widths stretching over 50 meters across in some places. Fluctuating weather and ice conditions for several days prior, along with high winds gusting to over 90 km/h on the day of 'the crack', were thought to be responsible for it opening up. More than 300 ice anglers had to be air lifted to safety when they were caught on the 'other-side' of the crack. Hundreds of others either found a way off on their own or were rescued by local ice hut operators, police forces, fire departments and numerous volunteers. Many ice anglers who fished other parts of the lake that day (such as the author of this report) did not even know the pressure crack opened up until they turned on the car radio on their way home. Remarkably, there were no casualties, other than a few cases of frostbite and mild hypothermia.

New fishing regulations will come into effect across much of Ontario in 2007. However, until copies of the 2007 Recreational Fishing Regulations Summary are ready to be printed, anglers are instructed to follow the same regulations outlined in the 2005/06 summary. For 2007, Lake Simcoe will continue to have the same perch limits as before (50 daily/100 possession with a Sport Licence, 25/50 with a Conservation Licence) and will continue with a closed season for cisco and muskie. A complete report on the 2006 Lake Simcoe Muskie Restoration Project is available at: www.muskiescanada.ca or by contacting the author of this newsletter to request a copy. **As in 2006, the winter walleye season will close on March 15th 2007 not March 30th.** The new bass season will see the opener on the 4th Saturday of June, not the last.

As outlined at the start of this newsletter, **we will no longer be mailing this annual publication** out. Please contact Wil Wegman (see contact information below) if you would like to receive this newsletter **electronically through e-mail**. Efforts will also be made to have this newsletter posted on several websites covering Lake Simcoe and its fisheries.

Wil Wegman
Ministry of Natural Resources, Aurora District
50 Bloomington Rd W
Aurora, ON L4G 3G8. 905 – 713-7730
wil.wegman@ontario.ca

***** OMNR Lake Simcoe Fish Stocking Records From 1985
to 2006 *****

Lake Trout		
Year Stocked	Number Stocked	Fin Clips Applied
1985	108,904	RPAC
1986	98,076	RVAC
1987	142,480	LV
1988	21,091	LP
1989	69,584	RV
1990	59,806	RP
1991	90,196	AC
1992	71,960	LVAC
1993	95,365	RPAC
1994	107,515	LPAC
1995	90,249	RVAC
1996	92,207	LV
1997	102,583	LP
1998	102,883	RV
1999	116,115	RP
2000	94,199	AC
2001	123,718	LVAC
2002	146,126	RPAC
2003	118,294	LPAC
2004	98,863	RVAC
2005	89,757	LV
2006	95,978	LP

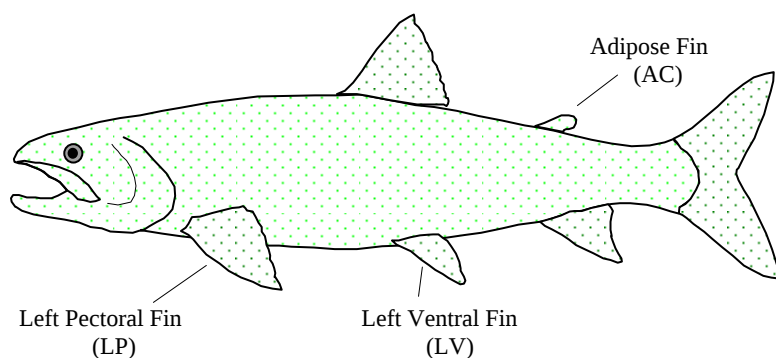
Lake Whitefish		
Year Stocked	Number Stocked	Fin Clips Applied
1985	27,074	LV
1986	97,817	RP or RVAC
1987	164,598	LP or LVAC
1988	177,258	RV or RPAC
1989	140,856	LVAC or LPAC
1990	135,971	LV or AC
1991	139,929	RP or RVAC
1992	202,049	RV or LP
1993	141,405	RPAC
1994	146,109	LPAC
1995	79,301	LVAC
1996	134,432	LV
1997	144,210	AC
1998	117,662	RVAC
1999	187,398	RP
2000	163,910	RV
2001	150,369	RPAC
2002	141,196	LVAC
2003	130,141	LV
2004	151,167	AC
2005	135,622	RVAC
2006	140,997	RP

When identifying the fin clips, position the fish with the belly down and the snout pointing straight ahead of you (i.e., as if you are following the fish). The right side of the fish is now on your right, and the left side of the fish is now on your left.

At least one of the following 5 fins is removed (clipped) to mark stocked fish:

left pectoral (LP) right pectoral (RP)
left ventral (LV) right ventral (RV)
adipose clip (AC).

As seen in the above table, one of the pectoral fins or ventral fins is often clipped in conjunction with the adipose fin - creating another 4 possible combination clips (LPAC, RPAC, LVAC, and RVAC).



For more information, please contact: Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Lake Simcoe Fisheries Assessment Unit, c/o Sibbald Point Provincial Park, Sutton, Ontario LOE 1R0 (905) 722-0254 or 0252.