

Building on River Assessments for Michigan's Rivers

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Fisheries Division river assessments are documents prepared and used by fishery professionals to aid management of Michigan's fishery resources. These documents are also used by many other professionals in various fields for information and guidance about fishery resources. The assessments describe characteristics of a river, its biological communities, and unique resources present. They also record opportunities and problems regarding aquatic resources and fisheries values within a watershed and provide one method for public involvement in fishery management decisions.

River assessments consist of four parts: an introduction, assessment, management options, and public comment and response. The introduction explains the purpose of these documents, the principles followed in decision making, and how the public may comment or be a part of the process.

The assessment section provides the history and current status of the river, its aquatic resources, and the watershed. The assessment section is admittedly biased, as all aspects of the watershed are viewed from the perspective of the aquatic resources that inhabit it. Thirteen parts comprise this section: geography, history, geology, hydrology, soil and land use, channel morphology, dams and barriers, water quality, special jurisdictions, biological communities, fishery management, recreational use, and citizen involvement. Data from multiple sources is used to identify key details in a watershed.

The management options identify management problems and opportunities. Options are proposed that protect and preserve existing resources, that require additional data collection, that allow chances to rehabilitate degraded resources, and that improve an area or resource above the original condition. These options are intended to provide a foundation for public discussion and comment and guidance in management. These options are also intended to be a vision of the future of this watershed.

The public comment and response section documents all comments received, either in writing or at public meetings. Each comment is listed and a response given. Generally, the assessment section undergoes many changes as a response to the public comments.

Currently there are 9 completed river assessments: Raisin, Huron, Rouge, St. Joseph, Muskegon, Manistee, Jordan, Au Sable, and Flint. Four more are near completion: Manistique, Kalamazoo, Thunder Bay, Clinton. The Grand, Tittabawassee, Tahquamenon, and Menominee are in the process of being written. Eventually all river basins in the State will have a river assessment.

Completed river assessments for Michigan's rivers are available through the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Fisheries Division website at

http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,1607,7-153-10364_10951_19056-46270--,00.html.

