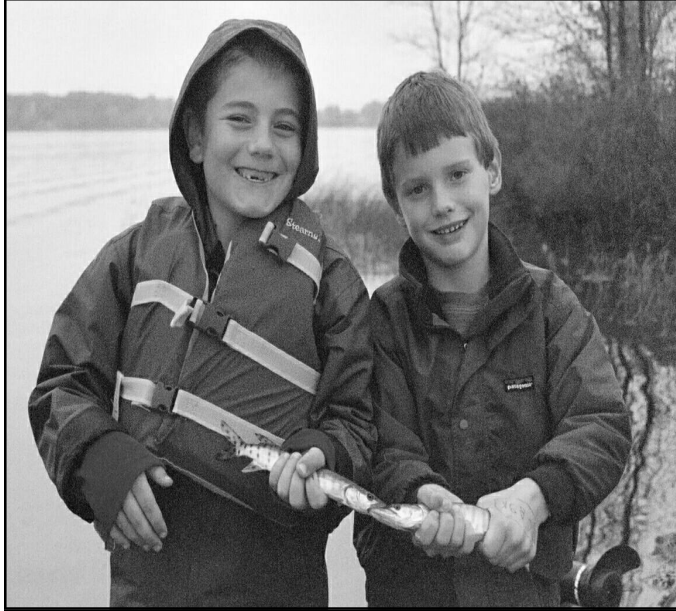


What Do We Do Now?

When the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) no longer needed the Hoosier Muskie Hunters' (HMH) muskie fingerlings to meet their regional biologist's requests, the Hoosier Muskie Hunters were at a crossroads. They had accomplished their goal of helping to establish a watershed muskie fishery in Indiana, so what should they do now? Would they become just a fishing club, or find a way to push the envelope in Muskie matters? When an organization has focused on one major project for many years (the stocking of muskies in Indiana lakes), it can be painful to move away from something it has become attached to. (See Photo) Challenged to look to the future if they were to remain a vital part of the Indiana Muskie Program, the Hoosier Muskie Hunters have responded in their usual forward thinking manner.

The Hoosier Muskie Hunters have a unique history. They were instrumental in saving Indiana's Muskie program. In the beginning, the Hoosier Muskie program consisted of stocking small fish into several Indiana Lakes. A partnership was born between the Indiana Department of Resources and an upstart Environmental Club Called the Hoosier Muskie Hunters. A core of founding HMH members pursued the IDNR in hopes of convincing them to not eliminate the small Indiana muskie stocking program.

The Hoosier Muskie Hunters convinced the IDNR that if they build it, they would come. The upper Tippecanoe watershed was selected and the program began. As a result of this union, funds were needed to accelerate the Muskie program while the state allocated resources to raise more muskies. The Hoosier Muskie Hunters started the Annual Indiana Muskie Classic as a way to raise funds to stock fish. Thanks to angler support, the Hoosier Muskie Hunters were able to respond by stocking over \$125,000 in spotted strain muskies into selected Indiana waters. Indiana muskie lakes have grown from a couple of lakes in 1995 to over 20 lakes as of 2004. Due to the IDNR becoming more efficient in raising fingerling, new Muskie lakes have been added. New additions to the Muskie program in 2003 were Upper Long Lake (Webster Club), and West Lake



Dane Gray and Conner Smith holding muskie fingerlings prior to release.
(Sons of HMH members)

in southwest central Indiana. Upper Long Lake is connected via stream to the established Barbee Chain of Lakes. West Lake is located in the Dugger unit watershed, Combined with Bass Lake, it provides almost 500 acres of Muskie water in a unique wilderness setting. Brookville Reservoir in eastern Indiana received over 20,000 fish in 2003, along with over 15,000 stocked in 2002. This should help the numbers in a lake where the average reported fish is over 40 inches. In 2004, Muskie were stocked in West Central Indiana's Waveland Lake giving Indianapolis residents a new muskie lake within one hour's drive. The number and quality of muskies raised by IDNR has improved greatly with the average of thirty thousand 8-10 inch fish yearly. IDNR decided in 2001 go to 100% forage finished fish ranging from 30 to 90 day finishing.

With the Muskie program in good health, the Hoosier Muskie Hunters are looking to the future of research, management, and resource improvement as their way of supporting the Indiana Muskie Program. In 2004, hatchery and GPS equipment were purchased. Webster Lake muskies will be im-

planted with a PIT (Passive Integrated Transponder) Tag to aid in future scientific studies beginning in 2005. The Hoosier Muskie Hunters will be financing the PIT Tag Program on an annual basis by purchasing implantation equipment, PIT tags, and readers, along with increasing their volunteer man-hours for brood stock netting and research projects where the new technology will be implemented. The PIT tags can be utilized in juvenile and adult fish opening up a magnitude of possible data collection opportunities for the biologist. HMH's will also be purchasing software for use in analysis of the data. The PIT technology is very similar to the chips that are placed in our dogs and cats. A passive implanted chip only activates when it is exposed to the

reader, which is passed over the animal issuing a chip number, which can be associated with a data set to learn the history of this individual fish. The PIT Tags are placed subcutaneous so there is not a constant breach in the slime coat as is the case with external tags.

The Hoosier Muskie Hunters are also researching re-establishing the Tippecanoe River fish ladder so original Webster Lake Muskie can move freely back up the watershed. These projects along with a heavy workload for the 2005 Muskie Symposium have the boys from Indiana staying busy.

Tony Gray - DNR Director



Dave Clary and Matt Burlingame of the IDNR checking for ripe male and female muskies collected from traps set in Lake Webster.