

# Fishing Tournaments: OPPORTUNITIES FOR LAKE HURON



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The Lake Huron coast is a fantastic setting for outdoor exploration. Promoting the region’s natural assets can help build vibrant communities and support local economies. This series of fact sheets profiles different outdoor activities that could appeal to residents and visitors of Michigan’s Thumb. We hope this information will help guide regional planning, business development and marketing throughout the region. **Here we provide an overview of fishing tournaments — including the types of events, economic impact, and opportunities for towns and fishing clubs to collaborate on fishing tournaments.**

## FISHING TOURNAMENTS ON LAKE HURON

Great Lakes tournaments offer a unique, competitive fishing opportunity that coastal communities can highlight as an element of their identity. Fishing clubs and towns host at least 40 different fishing tournaments on Lake Huron each year from April-September. Salmon Fest in Detour recently hosted its 25th annual tournament, and the Brown Trout Festival has been running for almost 40 years. The events and tournaments help publicize and celebrate local fishing opportunities.

During a fishing tournament, small teams of anglers compete, typically using their own boats and tackle. Each event has its own rules and scoring system for the competition, with cash awards for teams based on the combined weight, size or number of fish caught within a given time frame and area. On Lake Huron, most tournaments focus on walleye, salmon and trout species, but some are expanding to include more fish species or new techniques like kayak fishing. Unlike bass tournaments, which are usually catch and release, competitors of these tournaments keep the salmon or walleye caught or donate them to food banks. Fishing tournaments can provide a focal point for tourism, attracting visitors who may be likely to return to the area.

### Economic Impact

In 2009, researchers evaluated the economic impact that Lake Michigan fishing tournaments had on host communities. They surveyed captains at 16 tournaments on Lake Michigan, including tournaments that included festival activities like the Grand Haven Salmon Festival. This information is likely comparable to the larger salmon or trout tournaments on Lake Huron that include professional divisions. The economic impact of Lake Michigan fishing tournaments is explored before delving into Lake Huron’s fishing tournament and festival potential.

#### Lake Michigan Tournament Trail

- Average size of team: 6-7 people, including one non-angler
- Origin of participants: 80% from Michigan, 68% traveled more than 50 miles

Type of Expenditure	Spending per Team
Accommodations	\$204
Dock fees	\$161
Fuel for boat	\$338
Fuel for road travel	\$108
Groceries	\$135
Restaurants	\$155
Fishing equipment	\$135
Other	\$200
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,436</b>

Average spending by a fishing tournament team on Lake Michigan in 2009. Source: Okeefe and Miller, 2011.

- Average tournament participation: 64 teams
- Average economic impact to the community (from non-residents spenders): \$53,257

### Grand Haven Salmon Festival

Tournaments that are part of larger festivals contribute a larger economic benefit to host communities than stand-alone tournaments. For example in 2009, the Grand Haven Salmon Festival included a tournament with 63 teams, generating \$33,000 in sales. However, other festival events attracted more than 4,000 additional people and generated \$578,000 of spending and 7,709 employment hours.

### Additional Benefits

- Tournaments can expose visitors to the resources of an area and encourage them to return.
- Proceeds from many tournaments support local non-profit organizations.
- Tournaments bring people to a harbor during off seasons in the spring and fall.
- Many anglers support the businesses that sponsor events.

## RECREATION PROFILE: Fishing Tournaments



PHOTOS: LEE SHORT

- Fishing license sales increase among spectators at fishing festivals.
- Participants can aid in research and monitoring by providing fish parts or collecting samples.
- Hosting meetings with the fishing captains provides an opportunity to promote best fishing practices.

### LAKE HURON TOURNAMENTS

For this profile, 33 Lake Huron fishing tournament websites were reviewed and the people who organize nine of the Lake Huron fishing events were interviewed and surveyed. We found that tournaments in Lake Huron vary widely in size, prize amounts, and the people that they attract. However, they all similarly benefit from town support.

#### Organizing a Tournament

- Tournaments are typically organized by fishing clubs, towns, business associations, non-profit festival organizations or individuals.
- Most events last from one to three days.
- Volunteers and staff are needed to plan, promote and run the event. Tournaments reported using two to 12 staff and six to 12 volunteers.
- Sponsorship contributions and registration fees provide most of the operating budget.
- Registration fees range from \$10 to \$1,000, but most are between \$150 and \$300.
- Most of a tournament budget is used for cash prizes. Many events also donate to local non-profits. On average, only 10-30% of the budget is used to organize the event.
- Cash prizes range from \$100 to \$10,000, depending on the number of teams and entry fees.

- Walleye tournaments generally have smaller teams of about two people who fish on smaller boats; Salmon tournaments usually have 3-5 people per team and require larger boats.

#### Festival Tournaments

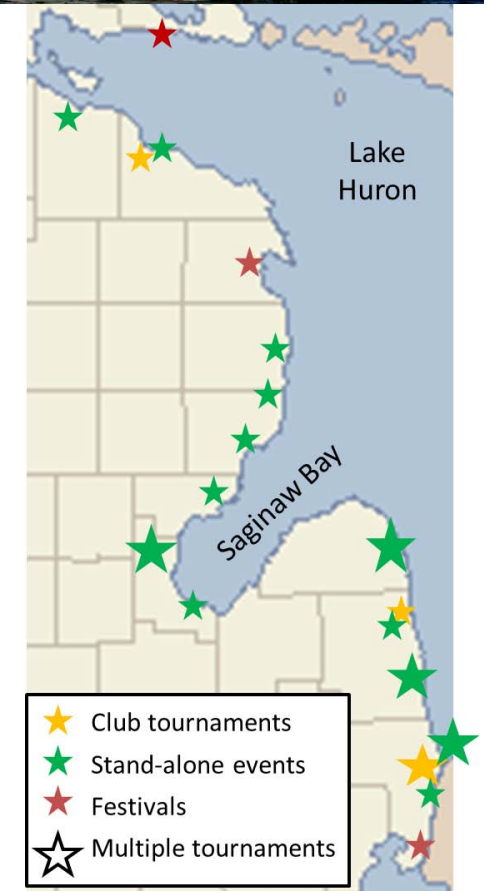
Some tournaments, such as the Brown Trout Festival and Freeland Walleye Festival, are at the center of much larger festivals that include more spectators than competitors. Festival tournaments tend to have larger prize pools (sometimes thousands of dollars), more participants and a larger variety of tournament categories. The festivals might also include concerts, poker tournaments, car shows, food and crafts.

#### Stand-alone Tournaments

The majority of tournaments on Lake Huron are one- or two-day events where the focus is a mid- to large-sized fishing competition such as the Salmon Stakes in St. Clair. The event may include a cook-out, fundraiser or activities for kids such as minnow races. Although participants are primarily from nearby towns, the events can grow over time. For example, about 50 percent of competitors at the Can2Can Tournament in Harbor Beach travel more than 50 miles to participate.

#### Club Tournaments

Although fishing clubs sponsor many types of tournaments, some smaller events are geared primarily for club members. Entrance fees are typically low, \$10 per boat for instance, and the prizes might be a trophy, gift certificate or small cash prize. The Blue Water Sportfishing Association organizes a club tournament trail that includes six half-day events over the course of the summer, for example.



Existing tournaments historically held on Lake Huron.

#### Opportunities to Support and Expand Tournaments

- Towns and business associations can help promote events and post event information online.
- Tournament organizers can coordinate advertising through a single promotional booklet or website, creating a circuit of events that would draw anglers to new ports.
- Anglers, clubs and the media can spread the word about the rebounding Lake Huron fishery.
- Tournament planners can continue to diversify the competition categories and add events for spectators.

## RECREATION PROFILE: Fishing Tournaments

- Towns and marinas can limit docking and start fees and provide temporary moorings.
- Towns and businesses can sponsor the event to increase cash prizes and attract more participants.
- Most tournaments end by 1 or 2 p.m. Organizers can encourage participants to stay for the evening with suggested itineraries.
- Hotels can offer package deals during a tournament weekend.
- Marinas can provide a place for safely cleaning and displaying fish.

### INDUSTRY OUTLOOK

In the recent past, Lake Huron tournaments were hurt by the decline in Chinook salmon, Michigan's struggling economy and high gas prices. However, interest in competitive fishing has increased in many parts of the country and the Lake Michigan Tournament Trail is growing. For example, a new television show, *333 TV*, focuses on Lake Michigan tournaments, drawing attention to Great Lakes competitive fishing. For a number of reasons, many of Lake Huron's tournaments reported improvements in both catch and participation over the last three years.

Traditionally, Lake Huron tournaments focused on Chinook and coho salmon, brown trout and steelhead, which all declined dramatically beginning in 2004. Although salmon fishing is gradually improving, fishing event organizers have had to change

the schedules and rules to capitalize on the current fishing opportunities.

Many events now include walleye as well as salmon species, and some events such as the Blue Water Tournament Trail, now accept fish of any species. Although competitors in the Brown Trout Festival now catch more large lake trout than brown trout, participation has remained fairly steady because the festival has added new events focusing on walleye and divisions for women and youth. Salmon fishing is often best in the spring and events are timed to catch the salmon as they migrate north in the spring and early summer.

Diversifying the species targeted in tournaments has a number of advantages. It lowers the event's dependence on a single fish species and reduces the fishing pressure on this fishery. Some event organizers are discussing a biodiversity category that would reward teams that catch the largest number of species. Such events can raise awareness and fishing expertise for other species like bass, burbot, carp and catfish that are abundant in certain locations. Many tournaments are diversifying activities for spectators, which benefits port towns and the fishing community.

### SOURCES

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Kerr, S. J. [ed.] (1999). Competitive Fishing in Ontario Workshop Proceedings, WP-01. Southcentral Sciences Section, OMNR.

### Lake Michigan Tournament Trail

Some Lake Huron tournament organizers are discussing creating a circuit similar to the Lake Michigan Tournament Trail. On Lake Michigan, entrepreneurs Scott and Fred MacDonald created a small but growing company that sponsors its own competition (the 333 Championship Series) in partnership with 16 different local tournaments. In 2011, 41 teams participated in at least seven tournaments, earning points to win a championship jackpot. The Tournament Trail website promotes each of the individual tournament websites and encourages anglers to participate in multiple events. More recently, a Lake Michigan Tournament Alliance has formed to create a more consistent experience for tournament anglers, increase sponsor support and maximize benefits for host communities. The Trail could be used as a model for Lake Huron event organizers to adapt and adopt.

O'Keefe and Miller (2011). 2009 Lake Michigan Tournament Fishing Study. Michigan Sea Grant.

Tournament websites including: [www.tournamenttrail.net](http://www.tournamenttrail.net) ; [www.bluewatersportfishing.net](http://www.bluewatersportfishing.net) ; [www.alpenami-browntrout.com](http://www.alpenami-browntrout.com)

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