I once caught a fish "THIS BIG"
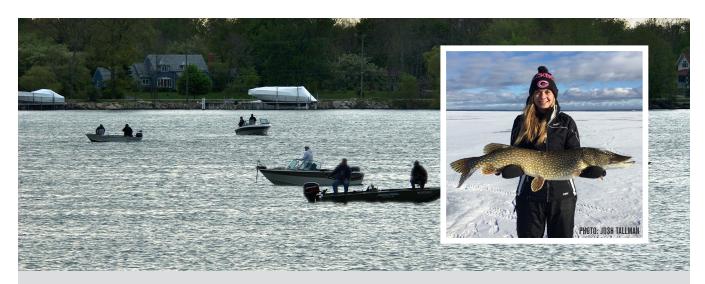
USING PARTICIPATORY PHOTOVOICE TO UNDERSTAND MICHIGAN'S GREAT LAKES ANGLERS

PHOTO: JOSH TALLMAN

CORE QUESTION:

Can encouraging Michigan's anglers to tell their own stories provide insights into the future of recreational fishing?

WHERE ARE THE ANGLERS?

What draws Michigan women to pick up a fishing pole? How does a Lake Michigan fishing trip differ from an experience on Lake Superior? What might attract new anglers to the pastime?

These are questions Erin Burkett, a doctoral student at Michigan Technological University, and researchers at the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) hope to answer. Recreational fishing rates are declining across Michigan, leading some to wonder whether this important economic engine will remain viable in the future.

GATHERING DATA THROUGH STORIES

To understand women's experiences and motivations for fishing, Burkett will engage groups of anglers in a form of qualitative data-gathering called "participatory photovoice." This research technique, developed in 1992, encourages participants to snap photographs that capture the essence of their individual experiences, then share the stories behind the images with peer focus groups.

Burkett will use facilitated meetings to tease out patterns among anglers of different ages, who live and fish in rural and urban areas of the state, and who participate in the activity for different reasons.

Burkett's data will complement ongoing MDNR efforts to better understand its constituents, design engaging outreach programs, and implement ecosystem-based management plans that incorporate humans into the broader ecological picture.

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