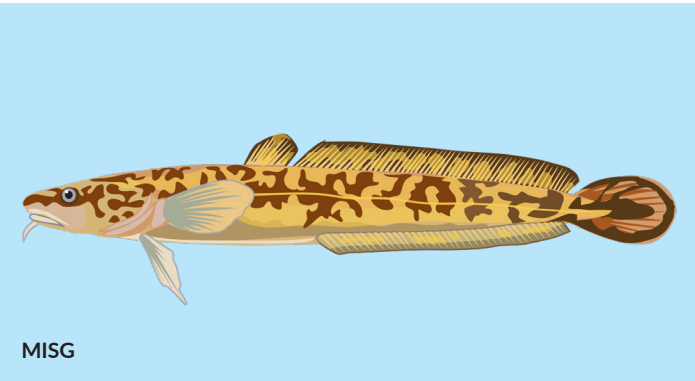


Getting out of the rough: Understanding shifting perceptions and the emergence of burbot as a recreational target



Core Question: What factors are bringing anglers to the emerging burbot recreational fishery? How have angler perceptions and interactions changed in regards to burbot?

Recreational fisheries are vital contributors to local and global economies, offering significant social and cultural benefits to the communities that support them. Effective fisheries management requires a deep understanding of angler participation rates and the values stakeholders place on specific species. While many popular sportfish are closely monitored, emerging fisheries often lack the data necessary to understand how recreational pressure might impact fish populations. This is particularly true for burbot, a native top predator in the Great Lakes that has historically faced very little fishing pressure but is now gaining popularity as a recreational target.

In the Great Lakes region, burbot have long been classified as a “rough fish.” This label has resulted in an unregulated status in Michigan waters, meaning there are few protections to manage their harvest. Recent data shows that burbot biomass in the nearshore waters of Lake Superior has been declining since the 1980s. This decline is concerning because most recreational fishing occurs in these shallow areas during winter months when burbot gather in large groups to spawn. Unregulated fishing on a spawning and potentially declining population

creates a significant risk for the long-term health of the species.

The proposed research project aims to address these concerns by gathering essential social and biological data. Scientists will implement human dimensions surveys to understand the attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions of anglers across the Lake Superior basin. Additionally, the team will conduct on-the-ground creel surveys and interviews at ice fishing locations along the southern coastline. These efforts will allow researchers to quantify how many burbot are being caught, kept, or released, while also estimating local population sizes. By integrating stakeholder perspectives with harvest data, this project will provide fisheries managers with the foundational information needed to develop sustainable regulations and protect this native Great Lake species.

Graduate Research Fellow
Greyson Wolf, Michigan Technological University, greysonw@mtu.edu
michiganseagrant.org/research



Michigan Sea Grant helps to foster economic growth and protect Michigan’s coastal, Great Lakes resources through education, research, and outreach. A collaborative effort of the University of Michigan and Michigan State University and its MSU Extension, Michigan Sea Grant is part of the NOAA-National Sea Grant network of 34 university-based programs.