

Archaeological Reconstructions of the Lower Great Lakes Prehistoric Fishery

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Fishing is an important recreational and subsistence activity in the lower Great Lakes. However, the modern Lake Erie fishery appears to bear but a fading resemblance to that of the prehistoric and early historic periods (Regier and Hartman 1973). Recent research suggests that the Lake Erie ecosystem is resilient (Munawar et al. 2002) and focused rehabilitation efforts may help to reverse this ecological tailspin (Kelso 1996).

Archaeological studies can provide baseline information about former ecological conditions currently absent from the historic record, which will prove useful as attempts to rehabilitate native species are made (Lyman 1996). Bones recovered from prehistoric fishing sites are suitable for radiocarbon dating, and can aid in the reconstruction of certain native fish community characteristics. In conjunction with artifacts, features and other information from sites, these data can be used to infer the location of former spawning grounds, and associate prehistoric fishing practices and technology with specific cultures, time periods and environmental conditions.

Unfortunately, information is lacking on these topics because few fishing campsites have been formally excavated, and those that have tend to lack detailed faunal (bone) studies. The goals of this study are to generate these data, create a comparative collection to aid in further archaeological research, and spur multidisciplinary approaches to paleo-environmental reconstruction and rehabilitation.

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