

Broad-scale Fisheries Monitoring Program

Science and Research Branch

Monitoring the health of Ontario's inland lakes

Recreational fishing is enjoyed annually by over 1.3 million anglers, and contributes nearly \$2.5 billion to the Ontario economy. The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) is working to maintain healthy fish stocks as they are an important environmental indicator. Healthy fish stocks ensure that present and future generations continue to enjoy high-quality fishing and the associated social and economic benefits.

In 2004, MNRF introduced the Ecological Framework for Fisheries Management to enhance fisheries management in Ontario. This new framework helps the ministry manage fisheries for the future by simplifying regulations and providing more public involvement. Increasing our understanding of inland lakes and their fisheries is an important part of this approach.

Broad-scale monitoring

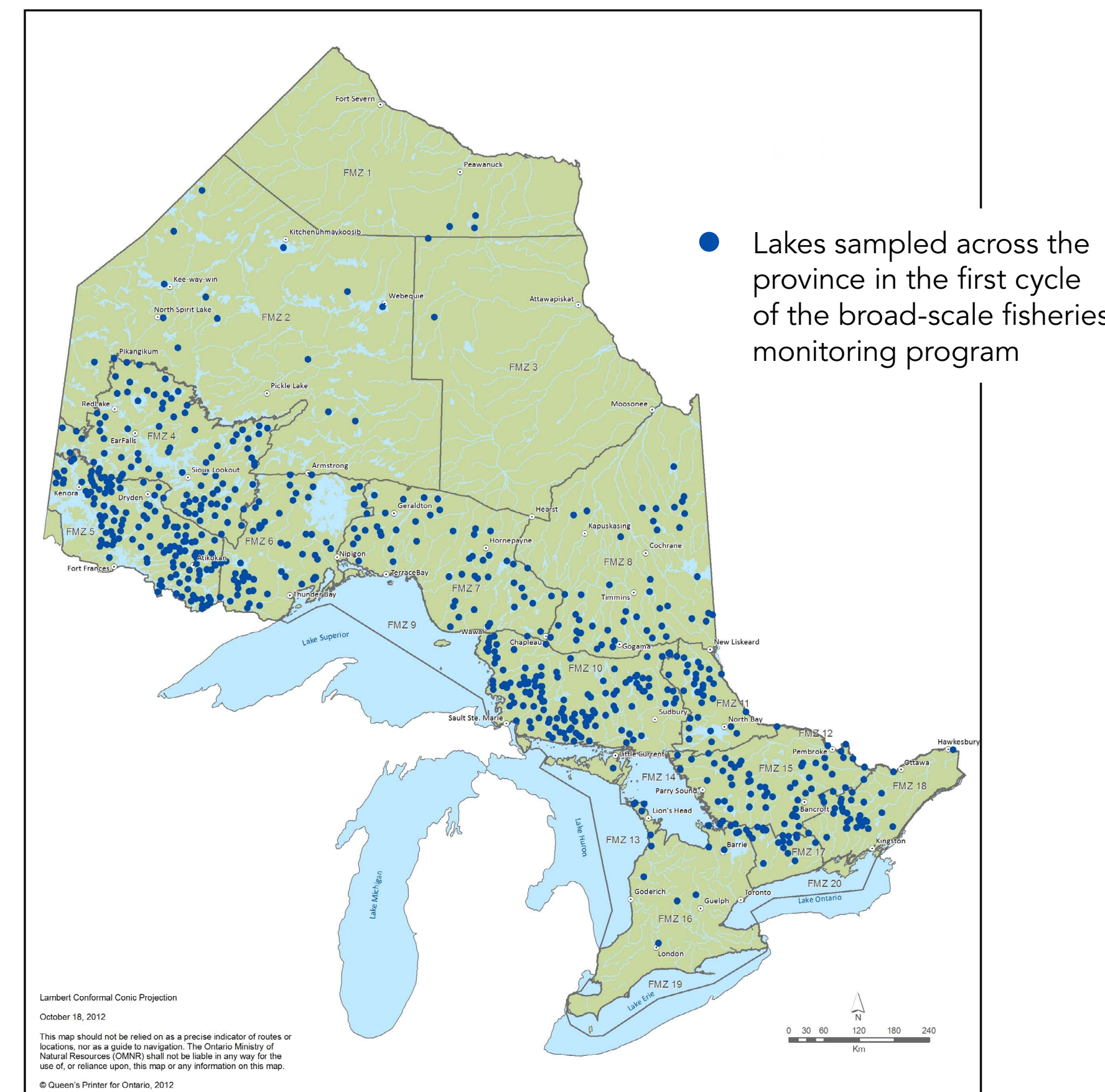
In 2008, MNRF began a long-term program to monitor the health of Ontario's lakes. The broad-scale fisheries monitoring program is improving the ministry's understanding of the current and changing state of fisheries and other aquatic resources, identifying stresses on the resources, and reporting on changes over time such as angling pressure. Lakes are randomly selected in each fisheries management zone for species like lake trout, walleye and brook trout, although the program monitors all species in the lake. Some lakes will be re-surveyed every five years for trend through time analysis.

Fisheries management zones

In January 2008, 20 fisheries management zones (FMZs) replaced the former 37 fishing divisions. These zones are now the unit of management for most lakes in Ontario. Fishing regulations, such as catch limits and seasons, are based on these zones. Fish will also be monitored and assessed at the zone level.



Monitoring highlights...



In 2012, MNRF science staff completed the first five-year cycle of the broad-scale monitoring program. Nearly 630 lakes were sampled across the province.

Approximately 160 lakes will be sampled in 2015, which is year three of the second cycle. Some lakes that were sampled in the first cycle will be resampled, and new lakes will be added to the program.

During these lake surveys, science staff sample fish to estimate abundance, and record characteristics such as length, weight, and age. Some fish are tested for contaminants. See the Guide to Eating Ontario Sport Fish at www.ontario.ca/fishguide. The Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change (MOECC) is responsible for publishing this information.

Water temperatures, oxygen levels, and water clarity are also recorded. Samples from selected lakes are sent to the MOECC for water-quality analysis.

Certain lakes are examined for invasive species like spiny waterflea and rusty crayfish. Invasive species were found in a number of additional lakes in the first cycle.



A crew getting equipment ready to fly into a lake. In addition, aerial surveys are flown over selected lakes during the summer, and sometimes again in the winter. The total estimated angling pressure is calculated for each zone.

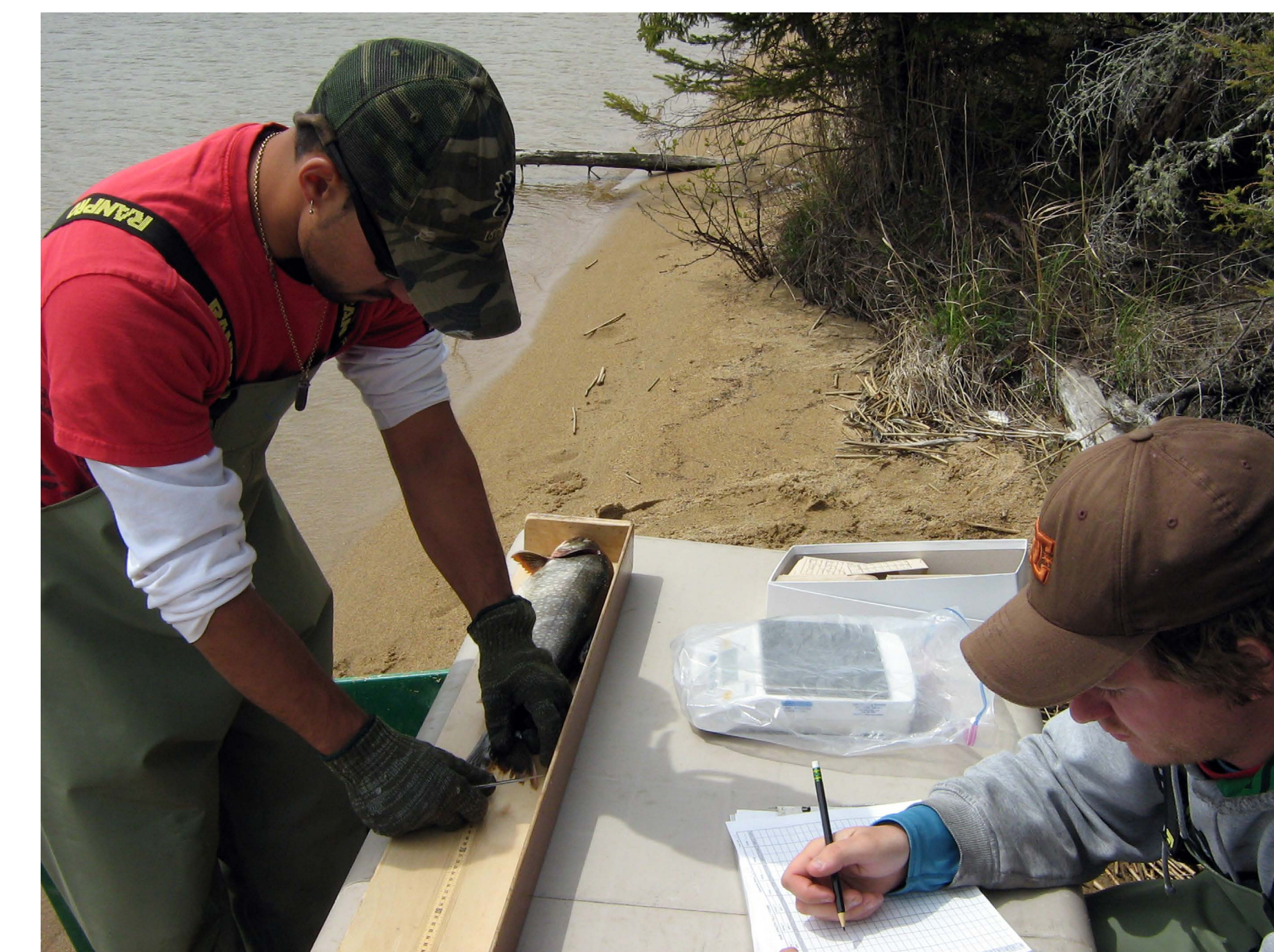
Broad-scale lake surveys



An MNRF science crew pulling in a gill net during a lake survey. Each lake is surveyed with two types of nets: large mesh that captures game fish, and small mesh that captures forage fish. The relative density (fish/net) of each species is calculated by lake and compared with other lakes in the zone.



Fish caught include lake trout, brook trout, walleye, northern pike, common white suckers, yellow perch, rock bass, redhorse sucker, whitefish, cisco, emerald shiner, spottail shiner, mimic shiner, and trout-perch.



A crew measuring and recording fish length and weight (as well as other characteristics not shown).

Science staff across Ontario



Science staff working for the broad-scale fisheries monitoring program across Ontario include postsecondary students. They spend their summer conducting fieldwork travelling from lake to lake netting and sampling fish. They are helping Ontario to put science to work managing our fisheries more effectively.



Broad-scale crews preparing to begin last summer's lake survey work. Most inland lakes can be reached by road or an ATV, but many remote inland lakes require flying in.

For more information on the broad-scale program, contact:

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