

Illinois Department of Natural Resources  
Division of Fisheries

# Charter Boat Fishing in Lake Michigan: 2025 Illinois Reported Harvest

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## Executive Summary

Illinois charter boat operator permits were issued to 76 individuals in 2025. Most of the harvest (99%) and effort (99%) from charter fishing trips in Illinois waters of Lake Michigan was directed at salmon and trout. Illinois residents accounted for approximately 71% of the 10,969 sport anglers who fished on charter boats targeting salmon and trout in Illinois. Combined harvest by resident and non-resident anglers was 28,741 salmonids. Additionally, 14 charter anglers harvested 210 Yellow Perch during three (3) non-salmonid charter fishing excursions. Coho Salmon (49%) comprised the greatest portion of charter boat angler harvest followed by Lake Trout (28%) and Chinook Salmon (15%). Rainbow Trout (8%), Brown Trout (1%), Pink Salmon (<1%) and Atlantic Salmon (<1%) constituted smaller percentages of the harvest. The percentage of Coho Salmon in the 2025 harvest was below the long-term average (1979-2025 average 64%; range 43-83%). Annual total effort and harvest decreased compared to 2024 but was similar to that reported in 2023. The 2025 harvest rate for salmon and trout (53 fish per 100 angler-hours) remained above the long-term average (1979-2025) of 45 fish per 100 angler-hours.

## Introduction

Stocked salmonids are an integral part of the Lake Michigan fish community and the sport fishery. Pacific salmon and various trout species have been stocked in Lake Michigan since the late 1960s. Approximately 12 million salmonid fingerlings were annually stocked lakewide during 1976-2012; the current stocking target calls for approximately 10.3 million salmon and trout. Chinook Salmon comprised the greatest portion of salmonids stocked in Lake Michigan until 2006 when the number of stocked Chinook Salmon and Lake Trout were similar. Then, in 2023 Chinook Salmon stocking increased and once again surpassed the number of Lake Trout stocked. Lake Trout, which are native to Lake Michigan, are stocked to meet criteria set forth by *A Stocking Strategy and Evaluation Objectives for the Rehabilitation of Lake Trout in Lake Michigan* and to achieve the Salmonine Objective of the Fish Community Objectives for Lake Michigan. Salmonid stocking in Illinois waters (Table 1) constitutes approximately 8% of the salmonids stocked lakewide.

The purposes for stocking these fish are to provide sport fishing opportunities for Illinois and non-resident anglers, re-establish self-sustaining Lake Trout populations, and enhance naturalized populations of other stocked salmon and trout. The expansion of the Welland Canal at the turn of the century provided a bypass of Niagara Falls, which previously acted as a natural barrier to aquatic invaders from the Atlantic Ocean. Parasitic Sea Lamprey gained access to Lake Michigan and wreaked havoc on native predator populations. Alewife, another fish native to the Atlantic Ocean that was first discovered in Lake Michigan during 1950, drastically altered the food web and negatively impacted native fishes. Without predatory controls, Alewife populations reached nuisance levels of abundance. The original introduction of Pacific salmon in the 1960s was intended to take advantage of the abundant Alewife population by creating a popular sport fishery, while helping to control this overabundant non-native prey fish.

Charter boat operators receive a fee to provide sport anglers access to offshore fishing opportunities for salmonids. A catch reporting system is mandated through Illinois statutes governing charter boat licensees that engage in such activities in Illinois waters (Fish and Aquatic Life Code of Illinois, 515 Section 5/10-135). This report summarizes the reported charter boat angler effort and harvest from the Illinois waters of Lake Michigan in 2025.

## Methods

Lake Michigan Charter Boat Operator permits were issued to 76 individuals in 2025. Most operators (74%) submitted standardized catch report forms electronically through the ArcGIS Survey123 program while the rest continued to mail in paper catch report forms (Appendix). Data requested on the catch report included: date of fishing trip, jurisdictional grid fished, number of resident and non-resident sport anglers, number of fishing lines used, total number of hours fished (excluding running time), and number and species of harvested fish. State regulations require that charter boat operators submit these completed catch reports monthly March through November, even when no charter fishing trips occur within a given month.

Harvest and fishing effort data from 2,141 charter boat excursions in 2025 were summarized by season, month, and statistical grid, and trends in harvest and effort were compared to previous years. The 2025 harvest data reported fishing effort by 7,771 Illinois residents and 3,198 non-residents during 2,138 charter trips targeting salmonids in the Illinois waters of Lake Michigan. Additionally, a total of 6 Illinois residents and 8 non-residents were reported charter fishing for Yellow Perch during three (3) excursions. Since the number of fishing lines per angler was not equivalent among trips, fishing effort was instead expressed as angler-hours and calculated by multiplying the total number of anglers by number of hours fished per trip. Seasonal harvest rate was calculated by dividing the total harvest of all salmonids by total effort for the season. Harvest rate for each statistical grid within Illinois waters (map in Appendix) was based on total number of salmonids harvested within the grid divided by the fishing effort reported within the same grid. All harvest rates for salmonids were then standardized to 100 angler-hours because harvest rates are typically less than one (1) fish per angler-hour.

Estimated salmonid effort and harvest from non-charter anglers (shore and non-charter boats) provided by Roswell and Czesny (2025) and C. Roswell (personal communication, February 2026) were used to monitor total directed salmonid effort and compare catch rates between charter and non-chart boat anglers in Illinois water of Lake Michigan.

## Results and Discussion

Consistent with past years, most salmonids harvested from Illinois waters of Lake Michigan were Coho Salmon (Figure 1). Coho Salmon accounted for 49% of the 2025 salmonid harvest and have comprised the greatest portion of

annual salmonid harvest since 1979 (64%; average 1979-2025). Lake Trout (28%), Chinook Salmon (15%), Rainbow Trout (8%), Brown Trout (1%), Pink Salmon (<1%), and Atlantic Salmon (<1%) constituted smaller percentages of the 2025 charter fishing harvest. Harvest of all salmon and trout decreased 31% compared to 2024. The number of Coho Salmon harvested decreased by 54%, while Chinook Salmon (+47%) and Lake Trout (+21%) harvest increased compared to last year. Rainbow Trout (+37%) and Brown Trout (+59%) harvest also increased. Thirteen (13) Pink Salmon and four (4) Atlantic Salmon were also reported in the 2025 harvest.

Charter boat angler effort (54,103 angler-hours) decreased by 8% compared to 2024. Prior to 1999, charter boat sportfishing accounted for approximately 21% (1988-1998 average) of the total fishing effort directed at salmonids in Illinois waters of Lake Michigan. Then, that proportion increased to 29% (average 1999-2019) of the total angler effort for salmonids, due to a slow decline in shore-based salmon fishing after 1988 and a decline in non-charter boat effort after 1998. During the last five years, charter boat sportfishing accounted for 20-23% (2021-2025) of total directed effort for salmonids coinciding with an increase in non-charter boat fishing (Figure 2).

Annual charter boat harvest rate for salmon and trout in 2025 (53 fish per 100 angler-hours) was lower than the record high 71 fish per 100 angler-hours in 2024, but above the long-term average (1979-2025) of 45 fish per 100 angler-hours. The harvest rate of anglers fishing on charter boats was approximately 23% higher than that of anglers fishing on non-chartered boats (Figure 3).

Sixty-two percent of charter fishing trips occurred during the months of May, June, and July with an additional 20% of trips in August. The typical spring Coho Salmon season peaked in May and extended into June; 46% of Coho Salmon were harvested in May with an additional 28% harvested in June (Table 2). Chinook Salmon harvest was also seasonally typical; most of the Chinook Salmon harvest was nearly equally divided between July and August. Lake Trout were harvested April through December in 2025, but most of the harvest occurred during July, August, and September. Rainbow Trout and Brown Trout harvest were highest in August. Overall, salmonid harvest peaked in May (27% of total harvest) and remained relatively high in June (20%) primarily due to the harvest of Coho Salmon.

No salmonid fishing was reported in six (6) statistical grids. Approximately 53% of salmonids were harvested from Grid 2302 which also coincided with 51% of the fishing effort (Table 3). In general, harvest and effort are usually

highest in the north and in grids closest to shore (i.e., 2302 and 2402). Harvest rates among grids where fishing occurred in Illinois waters ranged from 36 to 79 fish per 100 angler-hours. A map of Illinois's Lake Michigan statistical grids is included within the Appendix.

A total of 210 Yellow Perch were harvested on charter trips during January 2025. The harvest rate for Yellow Perch was 3.8 fish per angler-hour.

### **Literature Cited**

Roswell, C. R., and S. J. Czesny. 2025. A survey of sport fishing in the Illinois portion of Lake Michigan: March through September 2024. INHS Technical Report 2025 (17). Illinois Natural History Survey. 48pp.

### **Acknowledgements**

I wish to thank Pat Bevell for monitoring reporting compliance and Marc Cullerton for data entry. Special thanks are also extended to Steve Robillard for his past efforts on database development and management as well as writing support in previous versions of this annual report.

Table 1. Number of salmon and trout stocked in the Illinois waters of Lake Michigan, 2006-2025.

Year	Coho Salmon	Chinook Salmon	Lake Trout	Rainbow Trout (Arlee)	Rainbow Trout (Skamania)	Brown Trout	Total
2006	304,242	242,542	67,849	49,462	55,201	93,000	812,276
2007	301,377	252,265	56,381	50,982	66,334	100,000	827,339
2008	282,201	253,809	126,631	51,003	56,040	100,144	817,297
2009	300,559	236,983	118,160	45,285	56,714	100,550	858,251
2010	308,805	255,752	120,166	51,156	61,132	104,953	904,964
2011	281,429	235,972	122,058	101,789	0	104,579	843,769
2012	300,748	253,244	125,692	49,261	52,160	99,460	874,873
2013	310,288	227,336	124,021	56,335	42,933	102,281	863,194
2014	311,184	236,625	123,784	60,409	58,528	111,397	901,927
2015	305,630	197,504	124,094	62,751	64,092	112,870	866,941
2016	299,396	231,378	123,120	60,068	54,432	110,791	879,185
2017	300,128	163,992	119,510	59,370	54,402	111,594	808,996
2018	258,505	172,642	120,485	57,284	52,422	96,038	757,376
2019	270,057	159,196	120,759	55,330	59,126	132,220	796,376
2020	317,577	185,734	0 <sup>a</sup>	60,092	88,297	120,095	771,795
2021	328,446	186,051	0 <sup>a</sup>	60,033	77,953	119,790	772,273
2022	270,074	210,070	121,563	60,371	79,854	123,760	865,692
2023	289,911	225,104	121,259	57,257	53,457	118,023	865,011
2024	87,890	100,877	121,171	295,721	132,596	126,578	864,843
2025	258,541	213,869	121,192	64,364	85,552	119,196	862,714

<sup>a</sup> Due to COVID-19 restrictions on operations, federally reared Lake Trout allocated to Illinois were stocked from shore in Wisconsin.

Table 2. Monthly fishing effort and salmonid harvest from the Illinois waters of Lake Michigan by charter boat anglers in 2025.

Month	Trips	Number residents	Number non-residents	Effort (angler -hours)	Coho Salmon	Chinook Salmon	Lake Trout	Rainbow Trout	Brown Trout	Pink Salmon	Atlantic Salmon	Total Catch
March	4	9	2	42	26	-	-	-	-	-	-	26
April	106	314	180	1,959	1,776	12	35	9	69	-	-	1,901
May	468	1,555	850	11,813	6,450	169	775	215	41	6	-	7,656
June	450	1,655	605	11,134	4,006	447	1,083	260	23	2	1	5,822
July	399	1,384	632	10,219	1,222	1,006	1,729	732	61	3	2	4,755
August	421	1,597	612	11,281	474	1,698	2,118	844	100	2	1	5,237
September	215	925	230	5,694	74	550	1,681	95	31	-	-	2,431
October	66	296	68	1,723	33	296	471	23	5	-	-	828
November	7	30	18	219	-	2	70	1	-	-	-	73
December	2	6	1	20	-	-	12	-	-	-	-	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,138</b>	<b>7,771</b>	<b>3,198</b>	<b>54,103</b>	<b>14,061</b>	<b>4,180</b>	<b>7,974</b>	<b>2,179</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>28,741</b>

Table 3. Number of salmonids, by Lake Michigan statistical grid <sup>a</sup>, harvested by charter boat anglers in 2025. No salmonids were harvested from grids 2306, 2406, 2502, 2506, 2606, and 2703.

Grid	Coho Salmon	Chinook Salmon	Lake Trout	Rainbow Trout	Brown Trout	Pink Salmon	Atlantic Salmon	Total harvest	Effort (angler-hours)	Harvest rate <sup>b</sup>
2302	8,929	2,707	2,288	1,273	103	5	-	15,305	27,370	56
2303	481	158	382	53	3	1	-	1,078	2,005	54
2304	25	16	35	3	2	-	-	81	186	44
2305	5	1	27	5	-	2	2	42	74	57
2306	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	na
2402	1,921	576	669	118	115	-	-	3,399	5,755	59
2403	237	209	323	77	44	2	-	892	1,408	63
2404	32	4	77	18	-	-	-	131	359	36
2405	1	-	68	4	-	-	-	73	192	38
2406	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	na
2502	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	na
2503	496	170	1,136	173	29	2	1	2,007	5,104	39
2504	284	137	1,585	195	1	-	-	2,202	5,326	41
2505	21	19	64	16	-	-	-	120	164	73
2506	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	na
2603	385	23	533	54	23	1	-	1,019	2,559	40
2604	260	68	559	134	3	-	1	1,025	1,821	56
2605	5	4	32	12	-	-	-	53	69	77
2606	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	na
2703	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	na
2704	847	67	91	33	6	-	-	1,044	1,318	79
2705	132	21	105	11	1	-	-	270	394	69

<sup>a</sup> See Appendix for grid map of Illinois waters.

<sup>b</sup> Harvest rate (fish per 100 angler-hours) = total harvest / effort x 100.

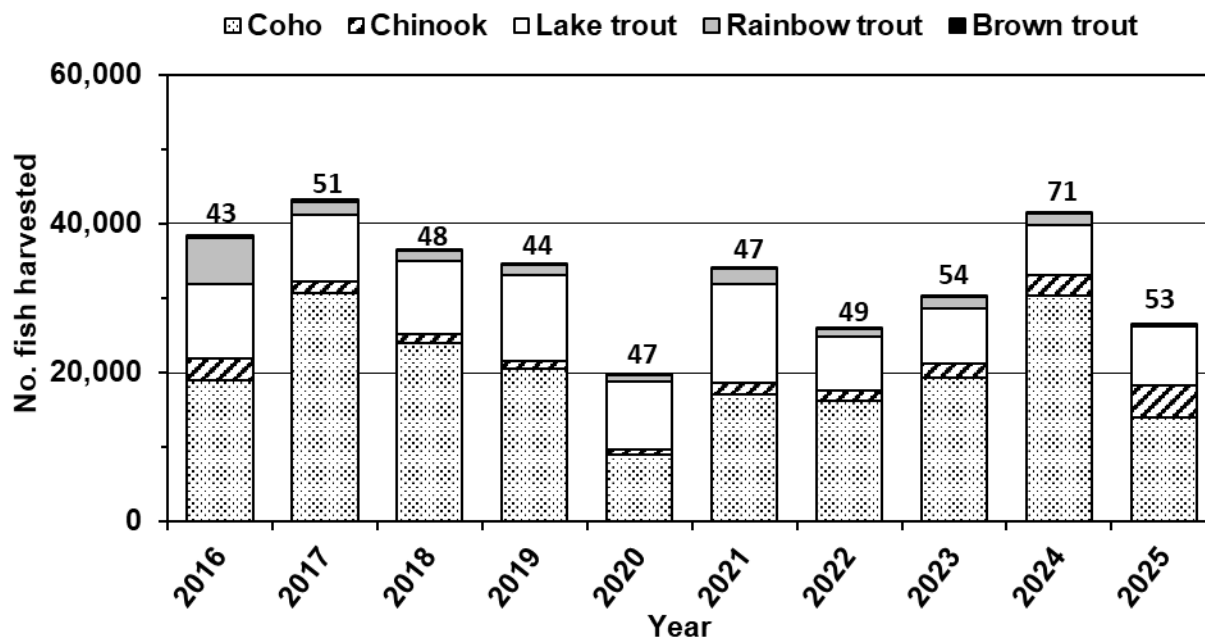


Figure 1. Reported harvest of salmon and trout by charter boat sport anglers, 2016-2025. The numbers above each column indicate the charter boat angler catch rate (number of salmonids per 100 angler-hours) in each year.

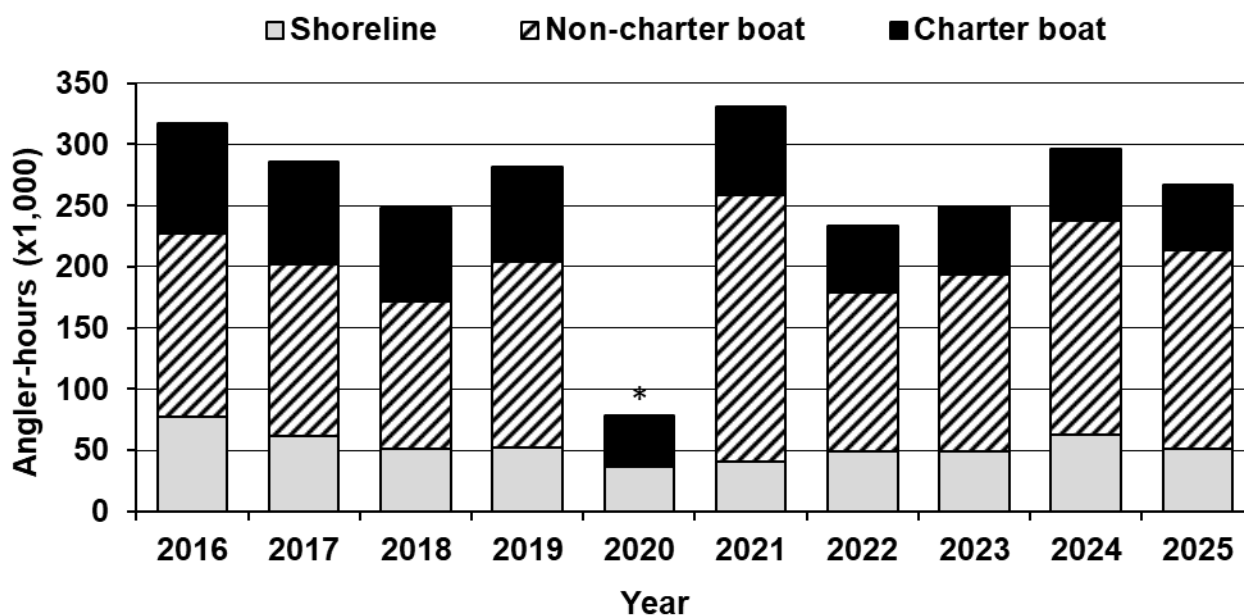


Figure 2. Salmonid fishing effort (angler-hours) by anglers fishing from shore, non-charter boats, and charter boats, 2016-2025. \*No directed non-charter boat effort for salmonids available in 2020 due to Covid related restrictions.

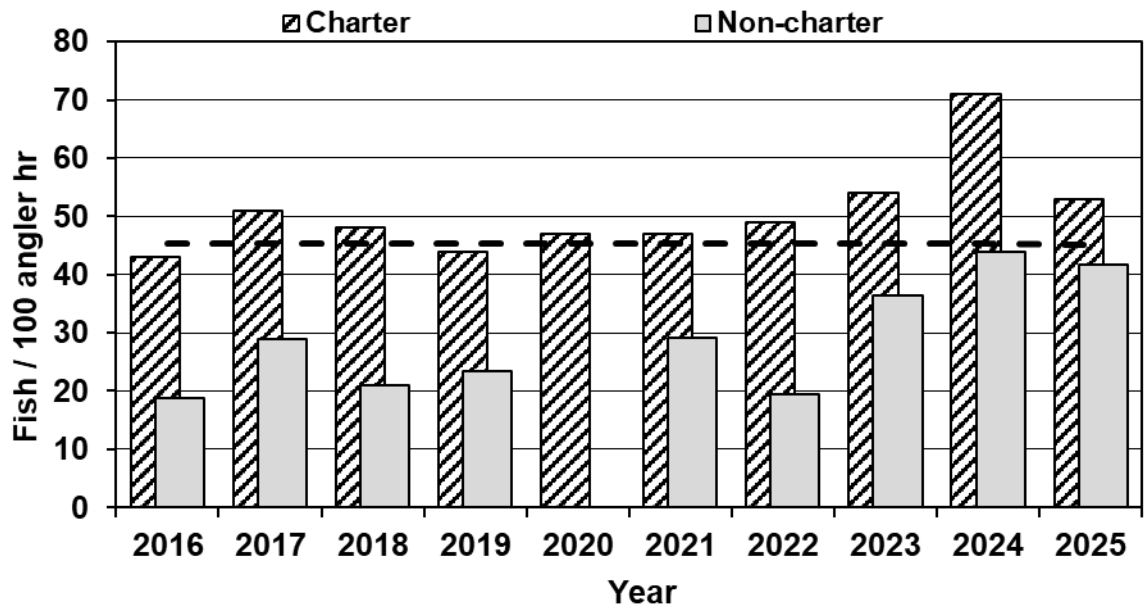


Figure 3. Illinois charter boat and non-charter boat harvest rates for all salmonids, 2016-2025. The dashed line represents the long-term average (1979-2025) charter boat harvest rate.



The Illinois Department of Natural Resources is requesting disclosure of information that is necessary to accomplish the statutory purpose as outlined in the Fish Code of Illinois, Section 5/10-135. Disclosure of this information is required by law. Failure to provide such information could result in the denial of future charter boat permits under Section 5/20-35. This form has been approved by the Forms Management Center. Information given on this report is confidential and no information revealing private enterprise will be given out.

**Reports must be submitted for EACH month (March through November) and received on or before the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the following month, whether fishing occurred or not.**

**When no more fishing will occur for the season, the report must be submitted stating “NO MORE FISHING FOR CURRENT YEAR”, and reports will NOT have to be submitted for subsequent months.**

INSTRUCTIONS FOR PREPARING REPORT

CHARTER BOAT OPERATOR PERMIT NUMBER – Enter your **current** Illinois operator permit number.

PORT – Enter the port of your **departure**.

MONTH – Name of the month (and year) for which the report is being prepared.

DATE – Enter the date on which the fishing occurred. **Use a separate line for each trip.**

LOCATION BY GRID NUMBER – Refer to the lake chart below and determine the number of the grid in which most of the fishing was done. Enter this number in the space provided.

NUMBER OF ANGLERS, RESIDENT AND NON-RESIDENT – Enter the number of **Illinois** residents and non-resident anglers in the fishing party and include crew members if they fished.

NUMBER OF LINES – Enter the number of lines being fished from the boat.

HOURS FISHED – Enter the number of hours in which the party was engaged in fishing. **Do not include running time.**

CATCH DATA – Enter the number of fish of each species **kept** during the trip. Enter the color and number on any tags observed on those fish caught during the trip.

**Preparer of form must sign and date on the bottom of the form in the space provided.**

**Mail completed forms to:**

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