

United States Fish & Wildlife Service Great Lakes Lake Trout Restoration Program Offshore Stocking and the M/V Togue



Lake Trout Stocking

Native fish restoration is among the highest priority activities for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Service has stocked more than 22 million yearling lake trout into Lakes Huron and Michigan during the past seven years. Stocking offshore reefs is the only available method to utilize yearling lake trout to colonize historically productive offshore reefs, a strategy specified in multi-agency restoration plans for Lakes Huron and Michigan. Mature lake trout now abundant on offshore reefs in Lakes Huron and Michigan, especially those designated as refuges by fishery agencies, are the direct result of the offshore stocking capabilities of the M/V Togue. Also, recent assessment data from Lake Huron show that survival of yearling lake trout released offshore is greater than fish released near shore.

Offshore Operations

Year	# Stocked	Reefs	Miles
1997	3,327,000	45	3,485
1998	3,581,500	51	3,035
1999	3,280,000	47	3,288
2000	3,369,700	46	2,850
2001	3,416,700	37	2,993

Offshore stocking operations typically begin in mid-April each year and continue through the end of June. In 2001, the Togue traveled 1,207 statute miles to 9 reefs in Lake Huron and 1,786 statute miles to 28 reefs in Lake Michigan between April 25 and July 3. The Togue is the only hatchery fish distribution vessel out of 63 science vessels operating on the Great Lakes.

Condition of the M/V Togue

The Togue was built in 1975 as a shrimp trawler and operated for 12 years in salt water before being confiscated in Florida by the U.S. Coast Guard for carrying contraband. During those 12 years the vessel was not properly maintained. The Service acquired the Togue in 1989 and retrofitted the vessel for stocking lake trout in the Great Lakes. Several deteriorated hull sections were replaced in 1993-1994 and the original hull sections have continued to deteriorate compromising the structural integrity of the vessel. A report completed in fall 2001 by JMS Naval Architects Salvage Engineers, estimated that the Togue has 3 years of service left.

A replacement vessel for the Togue is currently being planned and is expected to be operational in 2006. The new vessel is needed to continue the successful offshore stocking program requested and supported by State, Tribal, and Federal fishery agencies. The new vessel will be designed for lake trout stocking and include sampling capabilities to support hatchery product evaluation programs. The estimated cost for the new distribution vessel is 6.5 million dollars. The Service has identified costs for replacement of the Togue as a priority in fisheries program planning processes.



The 85 ft M/V Togue has been used to stock more than 22 million lake trout into Lakes Huron and Michigan since 1995.