

Lake Ontario Fishing Boat Survey, Spring Report (April-May) 2024

NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, Lake Ontario Fisheries

This report summarizes Lake Ontario fishing quality during April-May 2024 and presents results in four lake areas compared with averages from the previous ten years (Figure 1, Table 1). According to anglers surveyed in this period, highlights include:

- Chinook salmon fishing quality was on fire in April-May 2024 with average or above average Chinook salmon catch rates in all lake areas.
- Above average brown trout fishing in west central and east lake areas. Average or below average catch rates for lake trout in all areas, however, catch rates for these species can be affected by good chinook fishing since they are targeted less when kings are available.
- Higher catches of Atlantic salmon across most lake areas.
- Coho salmon were down across all lake areas, although this species is usually a minor component of the fishery in most lake areas (except the west in spring)
- Lamprey numbers observed per trout and salmon caught in April were 1.5 times higher than the long-term average; however, they were much lower than the record highs observed in 2022. In May, lamprey numbers were slightly lower than average.

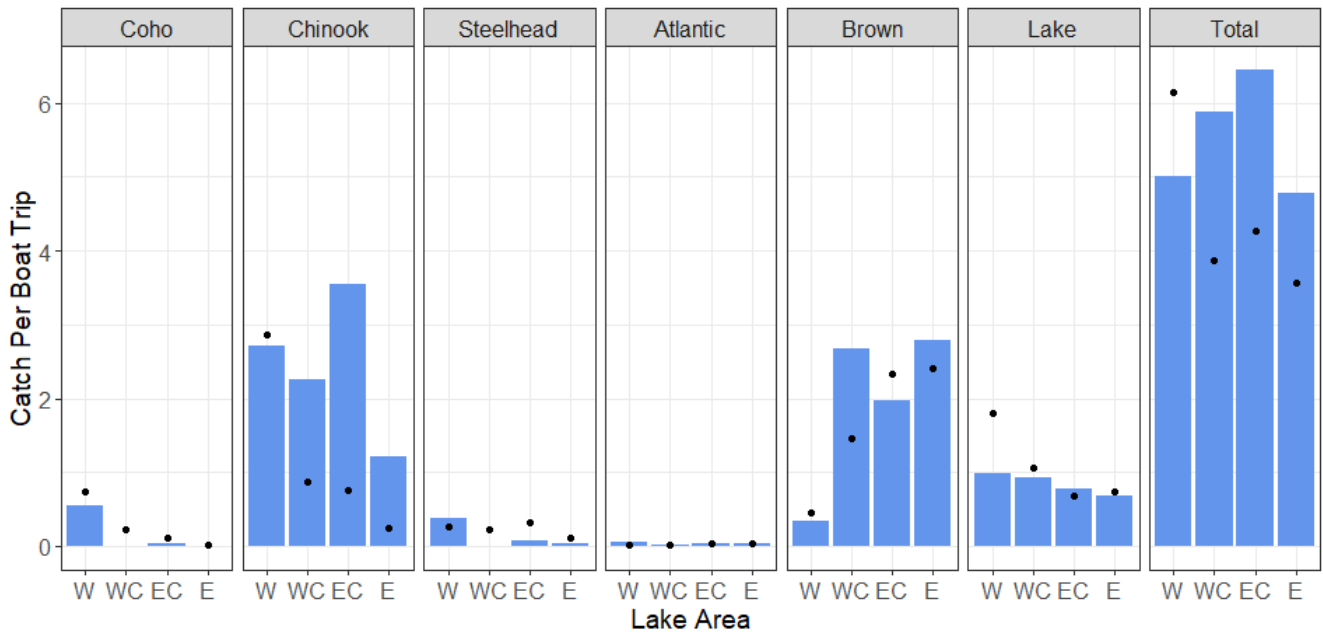


Figure 1. Average catch rate per boat trip for anglers targeting trout and salmon, April 15 to May 31, 2024 (blue bars) compared with previous 10-year average catch rates (black dots) in four lake areas of Lake Ontario including west (W), west central (WC), east central (EC) and east (E).

Lake Ontario provides anglers with a diverse world-class trout and salmon fishery. The six salmonine species monitored are the most sought-after fish in Lake Ontario and provide anglers with trophy fishing opportunities throughout the open lake season and in tributaries all year bringing an estimated \$564 million dollars annually to local economies.

The NYSDEC Lake Ontario Fishing Boat Survey has been conducted annually since 1985 to track angler effort, harvest, catch rate, fish size and other important information for management of the Lake Ontario fishery. In 2024, the Lake Ontario fishing boat survey is being conducted at 20 channels from Niagara River to Henderson Harbor ([Table 2](#)). From April 15- May 31 this year, two survey teams conducted 68 site visits and interviewed 423 boats and 1,360 anglers; of which 38% were on charters.

Table 1. Number of interviews, percent of trips with at least one fish caught, and mean catch rate per boat trip for anglers targeting trout and salmon, April 15- May 31, 2024, in four lake areas of Lake Ontario. Cells shaded in green are values above 10-year averages for each lake area, and cells shaded in red are values greater than 30% below 10-year averages. Yellow cells are below average but less than or equal to 30%.

Lake Area	Number of Interviews	Percent of Trips with at least one fish	Catch Per Boat Trip						Total
			Coho Salmon	Chinook Salmon	Steelhead Trout	Atlantic Salmon	Brown Trout	Lake Trout	
West	159	77%	0.55	2.71	0.38	0.05	0.35	0.98	5.0
West Central	39	82%	0.00	2.26	0.00	0.03	2.67	0.92	5.9
East Central	100	81%	0.04	3.54	0.08	0.04	1.97	0.77	6.4
East	106	79%	0.00	1.22	0.03	0.05	2.79	0.69	4.8

West Lake Area (Niagara-Point Breeze): Although the spring started off hot for Chinook, some anglers reported that the annual transition period came early and fishing quality cooled off in late May, ultimately leading to average catch rates of 2.7 fish per boat trip for the whole period. For other species, catch rates for rainbow trout (up 43%) and especially Atlantic salmon (up 112%) were above the ten-year average ([Table 3](#)). Brown trout and lake trout average catch rates were down in this lake area, but good fishing for Chinook came early in April which may have affected catch rates for these species (i.e., more anglers targeted and caught kings, rather than lakere and browns). Anglers caught at least one trout and salmon per trip in 77% of the boats interviewed.

West Central Area (Bald Eagle-Irondequoit): Catch rates for most species were above average in this area in April-May with a total trout and salmon catch rate of 5.9 fish per boat trip, about 52% above the 10 year-average ([Table 3](#)). Catch rates were especially up for Chinook (by 161%), Atlantic salmon (by 68%) and brown trout (by 82%). Lake trout and steelhead catches were down slightly but this species is targeted less when fishing for other species is good. Anglers caught at least one trout or salmon in 82% of the boats interviewed.

East Central Area (Bear Creek-Oswego): Fishing quality for Chinook in this area was on fire, 368% above average! Typically, Chinook are concentrated in the west areas in spring and brown trout are heavily targeted in east lake areas, however in 2024, Chinook were all over the south shore, and anglers targeted browns less. Brown trout catch rates were down slightly in this lake area (by 16%) compared to the ten-year average, along with Coho (down by 63%), and Atlantic salmon (by only 1%) but these two species are usually minor components of the fishery in this area in spring. Overall, 81% of boats interviewed caught at least one fish, and averaged 6.4 trout and salmon per trip which is 51% higher than the 10-year average.

East Area (Cattfish Creek-Association Island, Henderson): Fishing quality for Chinook was also exceptional, with catch rates 410% above average! Catch rates for brown trout (up 16%) and Atlantic salmon (up 46%) were also relatively good. Overall, boats averaged 4.8 trout and salmon per trip, 8% better than the 10-year average. Anglers caught at least one trout or salmon in 79% of boats interviewed.

Table 2. Number of days surveyed per channel during April 15-May 31, 2024. Sampling effort is stratified by day type (weekend, weekday) and channel type including medium (M), high (H), and super (S) use channels with higher use channels receiving more survey visits. Dates of sample, and whether sample occurred in first half (AM, ~7:30 AM – 2:30 PM) or second half (PM, ~2:30 PM-9:00 PM) of day are also provided.

Lake Area	Channel Location	Channel Type	Number of Days Sampled	April		May			
				AM	PM	AM	PM		
West	Niagara River	H	3		15	17, 26			
	Wilson	H	3		21	21	4		
	Olcott	S	5	28	16	19, 20	6		
	Point Breeze	S	5	25	20	23, 25	30		
West Central	Bald Eagle Creek	M	2	27			9		
	Sandy Creek	M	3	27			7, 12		
	Genesee River	H	4	24, 26			8, 11		
	Irondequoit Bay	H	3		19		5, 14		
East Central	Sodus Bay	S	6	30	19	11, 18	13, 31		
	Port Bay	M	2	22		27			
	Little Sodus Bay	S	5		26	4, 10	23, 25		
	Oswego (Wrights)	S	5	21, 23		2, 5, 15			
	Oswego Marina	H	3		28	3	27		
East	Catfish Creek	M	2	20		1			
	Dowie Dale	M	1			25			
	Little Salmon River	S	6	19	27	7, 12	17, 28		
	Salmon River	H	3	17			19, 21		
	Sandy Pond	M	2	17			19		
	Stony Creek	M	2	27			29		
	Association Island	H	3		29	14	26		
Total Days Sampled			68						

Table 3. Ten-year average number of interviews, percent of trips with at least one fish caught, and mean catch rate per boat trip for anglers targeting trout and salmon from 2013-2023 in four lake areas of Lake Ontario during April 15-May 31.

Lake Area	Number of Interviews	Percent of Trips with at least 1 fish	Catch Per Boat Trip						Total
			Coho salmon	Chinook salmon	Steelhead trout	Atlantic salmon	Brown trout	Lake trout	
West	141	82%	0.73	2.87	0.26	0.02	0.45	1.80	6.1
West Central	39	66%	0.23	0.87	0.23	0.02	1.46	1.07	3.9
East Central	142	71%	0.11	0.76	0.33	0.04	2.34	0.69	4.3
East	77	62%	0.03	0.24	0.11	0.03	2.40	0.74	3.6