

# Mohawk River Online Angler Survey

2024



Bureau of Fisheries  
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# MOHAWK RIVER ONLINE ANGLER SURVEY

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## Abstract

Despite being one of New York's most fished waterways, the characteristics of Mohawk River and adjoining Erie Canal fishery are poorly understood. This limits the development of an appropriate, effective management plan for the fishery. As an initial step to better understand the fishery, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Bureau of Fisheries conducted an online survey of Mohawk River/Erie Canal anglers to gain knowledge on their views, preferences, and use of the fishery. The survey was developed using Alchemer® and delivered to all subscribers to the DEC Fishing Line newsletter and to licensed anglers with valid email addresses in the Department of Environmental Conservation Automated Licensing System. The survey ran from January 12 – January 27, 2024, and included questions on primary fishing methods and fishing locations, satisfaction with access and fishing experience, fishing effort, primary species targeted, and level of concern with certain issues. The majority of respondents who fished the river or canal (89%) lived in communities near the river/canal and most of the fishing effort took place from those locations. Overall, more respondents fish from shore (55%) than from a boat (45%), but this varied by river section. Only about a third of the respondents were satisfied or highly satisfied with the amount and quality of access and their fishing experience. Smallmouth bass were the primary target throughout the river/canal, followed by walleye and largemouth bass. Among the options provided, respondents were generally concerned about invasive species, water clarity and water level management, and the least concerned about blueback herring abundance. The insights gained through this survey were instrumental in developing an on-site creel survey conducted in 2024 and will also be useful for developing a fisheries management plan for the river/canal.

## Introduction

The Mohawk River and adjoining Erie Canal east of Rome, New York, is a complex waterway with five permanent dams, nine movable seasonal dams, and five active hydropower facilities. It is the 18<sup>th</sup> most fished water in New York State (Duda et. al. 2019), providing a diverse warmwater fishery that includes black bass (smallmouth bass and largemouth bass), walleye, northern pike, stocked tiger muskellunge, and a variety of panfish. However, little is known about the characteristics of the fishery. This lack of knowledge prohibits the development of strategies that would allow for the management of the overall fishery. As an initial step to better understand and characterize current angler views, preferences and use of the fishery, Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Bureau of Fisheries conducted an online survey of Mohawk River anglers.

## Methods

A web-based survey using Alchemer® was developed and delivered to all subscribers to the DEC Fishing Line newsletter (approximately 180,000 recipients) and to all anglers that held a New York State annual or lifetime fishing license and had a valid email address in the DEC Automated Licensing System (approximately 350,000 recipients). The survey, which was active from January 12 – January 27, 2024, included questions on primary fishing methods and fishing locations, satisfaction with access and fishing experience, fishing effort, primary species targeted, and level of concern with certain issues (Appendix 1). The section of the river/canal that the survey questions applied to was the 120 mile stretch from Rome, New York to the confluence with the Hudson River at Waterford, New York. Survey responses were also assessed within five sections of the river/canal (see Appendix 1 for maps of the river/canal, including survey sections). The first survey question, “Have you fished the Mohawk River or Erie Barge Canal east of Rome to the Hudson River in the last 3 years?” was included to limit the responses to those who had recently fished the river or canal. Respondents who answered “yes” were directed through the remaining survey questions. Those who indicated that they did not fish the river or canal were directed to the end of the survey and were not asked any additional questions.

## Results

Fifty five percent of survey respondents (1,539 out of 2,799 total respondents) indicated that they had fished the Mohawk River or Erie Barge Canal east of Rome. The majority of respondents who fished the river or canal (89%) lived in zip codes bordering the river. The most common home zip codes were 13440 (Rome, N=66), 12065 (Clifton Park/Halfmoon, N=62), 12309 (Schenectady/Niskayuna, N=61), 12302 (Schenectady/Scotia/Glenville, N=59), 12306 (Schenectady/Rotterdam, N=47), and 12010 (Amsterdam/West Charlton, N=42). The number of days that respondents fished was relatively evenly split among 1-5 days (29%), 6-10 days (26%), 11-20 days (19%), and more than 20 days (27%). The zip code areas with the highest

total number of days fished were near Rome, Amsterdam, Schenectady, and Clifton Park (Figure 1).

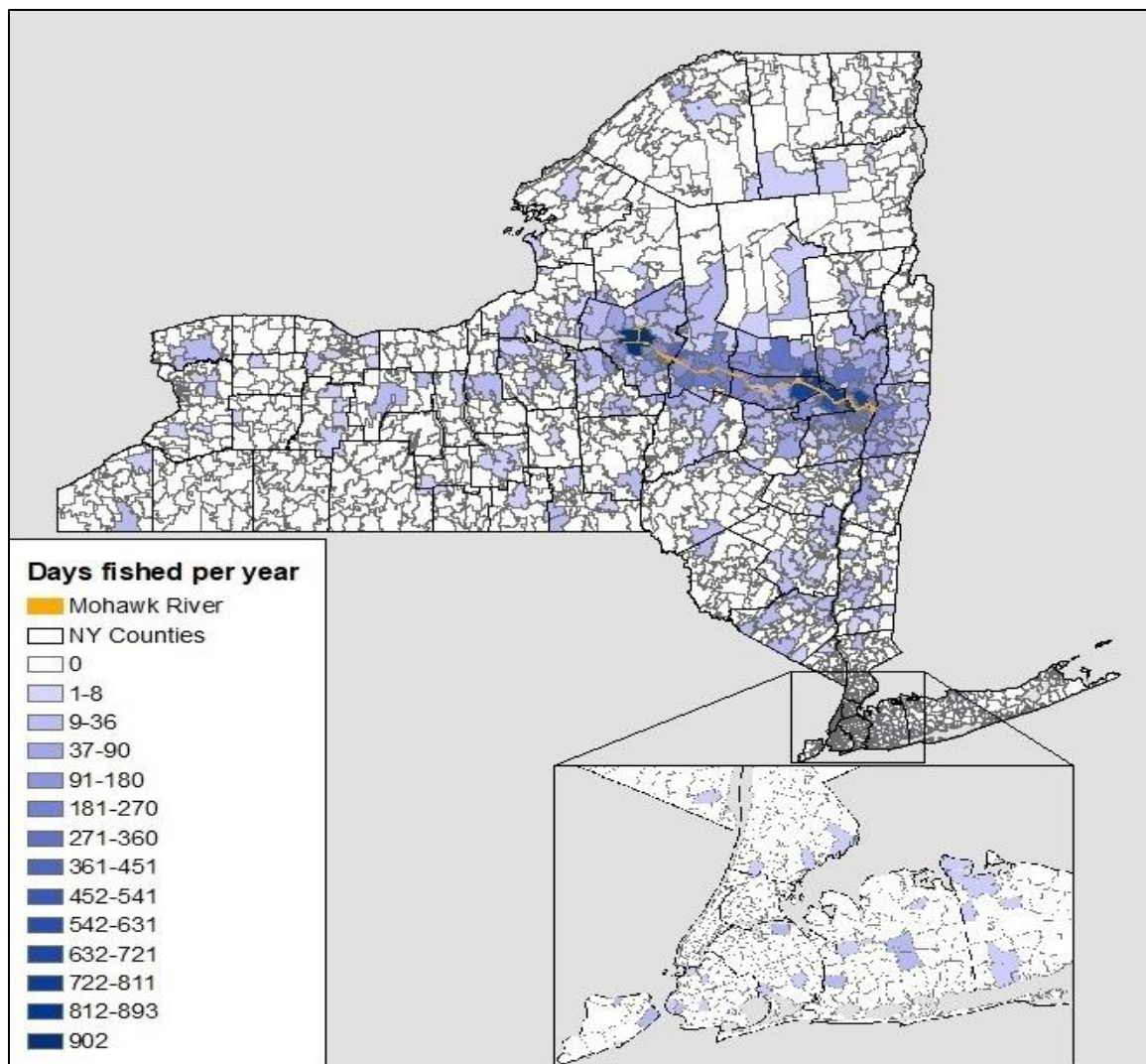


Figure 1. Range of total days fished per year by all Mohawk River angler survey respondents from 2021 - 2023 by zip code. Map produced by Stephen Manning, DEC Region 4.

River section 4 (canal lock pools from Rotterdam to Cohoes) was fished most frequently (33% of respondents), followed by section 3 (lock pools from St. Johnsville to Rotterdam, 23%), section 1 (canal lock pools from Rome to St. Johnsville, 20%), and sections 2 (natural river channel winding from Rome to St. Johnsville, 12%) and 5 (Tailwaters and braided channels from Crescent Dam to the Hudson River, 12%). Overall, 55% of respondents primarily fished from shore, and 45% primarily fished from a boat. This varied by river section, with a higher percentage of boat fishing than shore fishing in sections 3 and 4 (Table 1).

Overall, only about 33% of respondents indicated that they were satisfied or highly satisfied with the amount and quality of public access to the river/canal. A higher percentage of boat anglers (39%) were satisfied or highly satisfied with access than shore anglers (28%). Similarly, only 30% of anglers were satisfied or highly satisfied with their fishing experiences on the river/canal over the last three years. Boat anglers were somewhat more satisfied or highly satisfied (36%) than shore anglers (25%, Table 1) with their fishing experience. The percentage of all respondents who were satisfied or highly satisfied with access was consistent among river sections (31%-34%), whereas those who were satisfied or highly satisfied with their fishing experience was more variable (i.e., range of 24% in section 1 to 41% in section 5; Table 1).

Overall, the majority of respondents primarily targeted smallmouth bass (64% of all respondents), which was consistent between shore and boat anglers and throughout all river/canal sections, except for shore anglers in section 3 (Table 2). Respondents also targeted walleye (43% of all respondents), largemouth bass (40%), anything (29%; i.e., no specific species targeted), northern pike (23%) and panfish (15%). Only 7% chose tiger muskie as a primary target. Other primary targets included catfish/bullhead (8%) and carp (5%). Shore anglers were more inclined than boat anglers to target anything and panfish, whereas boat anglers were more inclined than shore anglers to target smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, and walleye (Table 2).

For respondents who primarily targeted walleye, there was no clear preference in the time of day they typically fish for them (Figure 2). Shore anglers were somewhat more inclined to fish for walleye during the evening than boat anglers (32% vs 21%, respectively), while boat anglers were slightly more inclined to fish for them in the morning than shore anglers (25% vs 19%, respectively).

Most survey respondents were at least somewhat concerned about invasive species (85%), water clarity (84%), water level management (72%) and blueback herring abundance (55%) in the river/canal (Figure 3). Invasive species and water clarity were the most concerning issues overall (53% and 49% of respondents concerned or very concerned, respectively). Relatively few respondents (24%) were concerned or very concerned about blueback herring abundance. Levels of concern for all issues were consistent between shore and boat anglers and among river sections.

Table 1. Survey results from Mohawk River/Erie Canal anglers by River Section, including levels of satisfaction with the amount and quality of access and fishing experience over the last three years (2021-2023).

River Section	Type of Fishing	Number of respondents	Percent of respondents within each section	Percent satisfied/highly satisfied with access	Percent satisfied/highly satisfied with fishing
<b>Mohawk River – All</b> (Rome to the Hudson River)	All	1,528	100%	33%	30%
	Boat	690	45%	39%	36%
	Shore	838	55%	28%	25%
<b>Section 1</b> (Canal lock pools from Rome to St. Johnsville)	All	303	100%	34%	24%
	Boat	95	31%	40%	30%
	Shore	208	69%	32%	22%
<b>Section 2</b> (Natural river channel winding from Rome to St. Johnsville)	All	180	100%	31%	27%
	Boat	56	31%	30%	38%
	Shore	124	69%	32%	23%
<b>Section 3</b> (Lock pools from St. Johnsville to Rotterdam)	All	356	100%	34%	28%
	Boat	201	57%	38%	32%
	Shore	155	44%	28%	22%
<b>Section 4</b> (Canal lock pools from Rotterdam to Cohoes)	All	502	100%	32%	33%
	Boat	276	55%	41%	39%
	Shore	226	45%	22%	25%
<b>Section 5</b> (Tailwaters and braided channels from Crescent Dam to the Hudson River)	All	179	100%	32%	41%
	Boat	60	34%	40%	49%
	Shore	119	67%	28%	36%



Table 2. Percent of Mohawk River/Erie Canal angler survey respondents that primarily target smallmouth bass, walleye, largemouth bass, anything, northern pike, panfish, and tiger muskie.

River Section	Type of Fishing	Smallmouth bass	Walleye	Largemouth bass	Anything	Northern pike	Panfish	Tiger muskie
	All	64%	43%	40%	29%	23%	15%	7%
<b>Mohawk River – All</b> (Rome to the Hudson River)	Boat	80%	48%	51%	16%	25%	11%	8%
	Shore	50%	40%	31%	39%	22%	18%	6%
	All	50%	41%	33%	36%	25%	20%	7%
<b>Section 1</b> (Canal lock pools from Rome to St. Johnsville)	Boat	68%	50%	40%	20%	30%	18%	15%
	Shore	42%	38%	29%	43%	23%	21%	4%
	All	57%	45%	29%	30%	24%	19%	9%
<b>Section 2</b> (Natural river channel winding from Rome to St. Johnsville)	Boat	79%	63%	32%	20%	32%	16%	5%
	Shore	47%	37%	27%	34%	21%	21%	11%
	All	74%	56%	38%	23%	21%	9%	7%
<b>Section 3</b> (Lock pools from St. Johnsville to Rotterdam)	Boat	86%	53%	48%	11%	20%	4%	8%
	Shore	59%	61%	24%	38%	21%	16%	5%
	All	67%	40%	51%	27%	25%	13%	8%
<b>Section 4</b> (Canal lock pools from Rotterdam to Cohoes)	Boat	83%	42%	61%	17%	25%	11%	7%
	Shore	48%	39%	39%	40%	26%	14%	8%
	All	62%	28%	38%	32%	19%	17%	5%
<b>Section 5</b> (Tailwaters and braided channels from Crescent Dam to the Hudson River)	Boat	68%	40%	52%	18%	22%	13%	7%
	Shore	59%	22%	31%	40%	18%	19%	4%

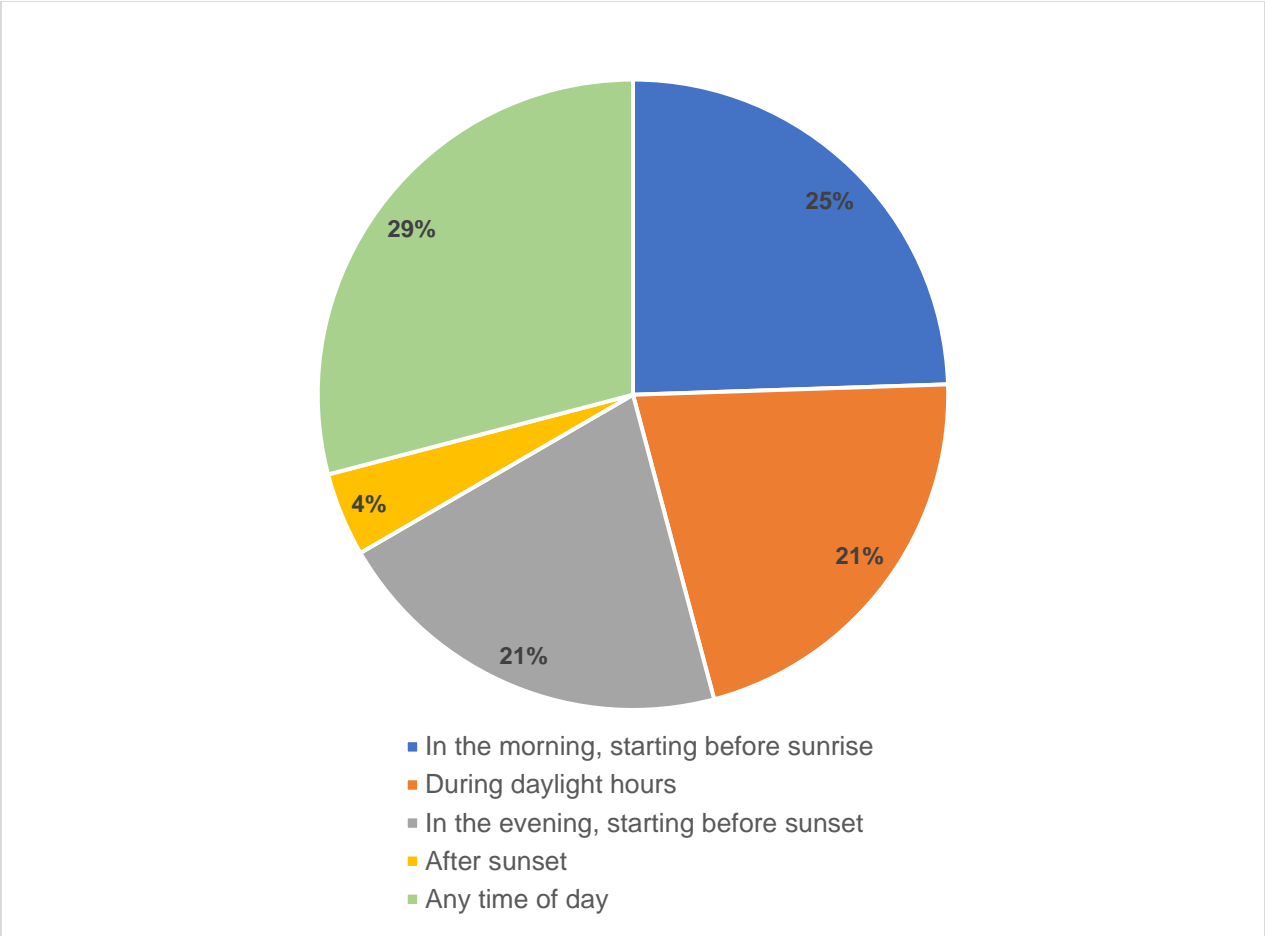


Figure 2. Percent of Mohawk River/Erie Canal angler survey respondents who typically fish for walleye during a certain time of day.

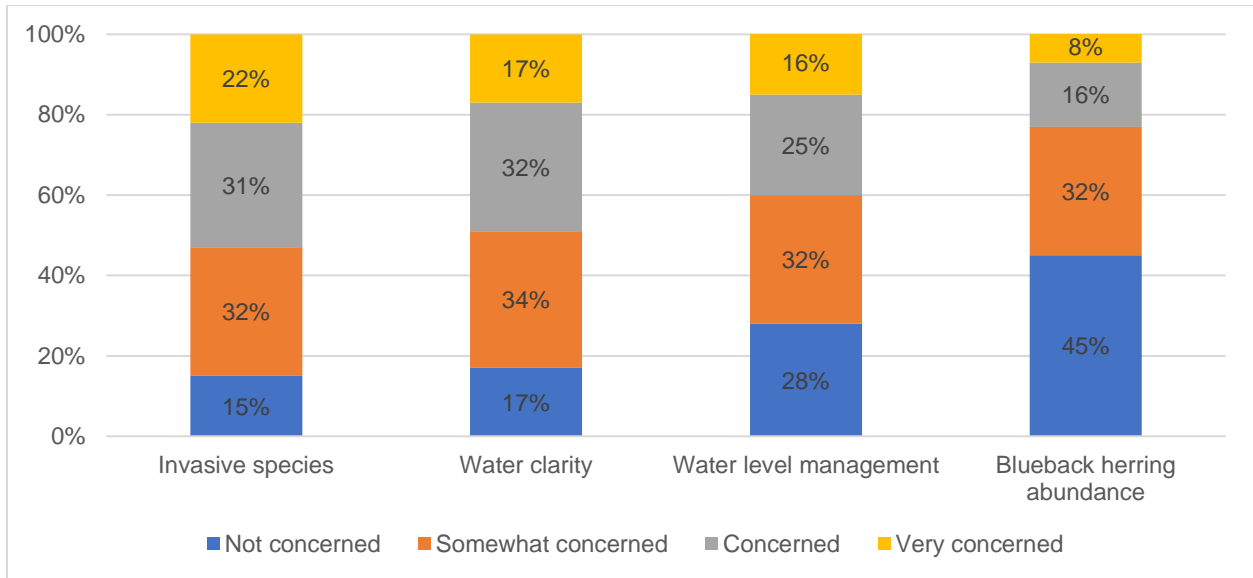


Figure 3. Percent of Mohawk River angler survey respondents who were either not concerned, somewhat concerned, concerned, or very concerned about invasive species, water clarity, water level management, and blueback herring abundance. Total percent may exceed 100 due to rounding.

## Discussion

The Mohawk River/Erie Canal is one of the most fished waterbodies in New York State (Duda et al. 2019), but it was evident from this survey that it is primarily a local destination, with most respondents residing in areas close to the river. Most of the fishing effort was from respondents in the major population centers along the river (e.g., Rome, Amsterdam, Schenectady, Clifton Park). It does, however, draw some effort from residents across the state.

Adequate and appropriate access is a critical aspect of a quality fishery. For the Mohawk River/Erie Canal, access is perceived as a problem as respondents generally had a low level of satisfaction with the amount and quality of access across all sections by both boat and shore anglers. There are 38 boat launch sites along the river (including 19 hand launches, 17 hard surface launches and one unimproved launch), which equates to approximately one boat launch every 3.2 miles. Only four of those access sites are owned or maintained by DEC. The quantity of boat launch sites appears to be sufficient, therefore the quality of these sites may be the primary concern. Further insights need to be gained on both shore and boat access to determine where improvements might be made. Anglers were given an opportunity to provide comments on the Mohawk River/Erie Canal fishery during the 2024 on-site creel survey. Comments received on access site issues may help in gaining those insights.

There was a similarly low level of satisfaction with respondent's fishing experiences on the river over the last three years. Additional insights are needed to better understand why satisfaction with fishing was generally low. The planned 2024 on-site creel survey will provide much needed

current angler catch, harvest and preference information that will be useful for improving our understanding of the quality of the fishery, which is likely linked to satisfaction.

While the Mohawk River/Erie Canal provides diverse opportunities to catch multiple warmwater sportfish species, survey results suggest that it's primarily a smallmouth bass fishery throughout its length for both shore and boat anglers. This is consistent with results from the 2017 statewide angler survey, which reported smallmouth bass was the most sought-after species (41% of the overall angler days) on the Mohawk River (Duda et al. 2019). Also consistent with the statewide angler survey, walleye, largemouth bass and anything ("no preference" in the statewide survey) were the second, third and fourth most targeted or sought after species/categories, respectively. Knowledge of angler preferences is important for determining management priorities, objectives and strategies. The additional data collected about the Mohawk River/Erie Canal fishery during the 2024 on-site creel survey will also provide valuable information needed for development of a fisheries management plan.

Walleye are sensitive to light and prefer low-light conditions for foraging. Because of this, walleye angling is often believed to be best during early morning or late evening hours when walleye are typically most active. Therefore, there was a concern that an on-site creel survey may not adequately characterize the walleye fishery if interviews were not scheduled during appropriate times of the day. Results from this survey suggest that most of the walleye fishing effort (75%) is likely to occur during times (morning, daylight, anytime of day) when interviews are taking place, which alleviates this concern to some degree. Walleye angling during the late evening into night will not be captured, therefore this should be recognized when analyzing catch and harvest data for this species.

A relatively high percentage of respondents were at least somewhat concerned about invasive species, water clarity, and water level management. Knowing that these are issues of concern for anglers may help in the development of management strategies for the river/canal. Fewer respondents were concerned about blueback herring abundance, which may be due to a lack of knowledge about this species' spawning behavior in the river and their seasonal importance as prey for sportfish. Outreach on the importance of blueback herring to the fishery may be warranted. Anglers will be given an opportunity to comment on issues of concern during the on-site creel survey, and those comments could shed additional light on the level of and reasons for concern about these issues.

This online survey of Mohawk River/Erie Canal anglers provided valuable insights on where they are from, how often they fish, how satisfied they were with access and their fishing experiences, how they fish, what species they typically fish for, and what concerns they have about the river and fishery. This information was instrumental in developing the 2024 on-site creel survey of the river/canal and will also be useful in the development of a fisheries management plan for the river.

## Literature Cited

Duda, M. D., M. Jones, T. Beppler, S. J. Bissell, A. Center, A. Criscione, P. Doherty, G. L. Hughes, C. Gerken, A. Lanier. 2019. New York angler patterns, preferences, and attitudes regarding the state's freshwater fisheries. Responsive Management National Office, Harrisonburg, Virginia.

## Acknowledgments

We thank Stephen Manning for his help in developing Figure 1, and Emily Grausgruber and Greg Kozlowski for reviewing the report.

# Appendix 1

## Mohawk River Angler Survey Questionnaire

The DEC is in the early stages of evaluating the Mohawk River fisheries for developing management strategies. As a first step, we are conducting a survey to better understand and characterize current angler views and use of these fisheries. Taking this very short survey will help inform the development of a fisheries management plan for the river.

**Survey scope - Main stem Mohawk River / Erie Barge Canal from Rome east to Waterford, NY (~120 river miles), including the natural channel between Rome and St. Johnsville**



• **Logic: Show/hide trigger exists.**

1) Have you fished the Mohawk River or Erie Barge Canal east of Rome to the Hudson River in the last 3 years?

- Yes
- No

- **Logic: Hidden unless: #1 Question "Have you fished the Mohawk River or Erie Barge Canal east of Rome to the Hudson River in the last 3 years?" is one of the following answers ("Yes")**

**2) Do you primarily fish the river/canal from shore or from a boat?**

- Shore
- Boat

- **Logic: Hidden unless: #1 Question "Have you fished the Mohawk River or Erie Barge Canal east of Rome to the Hudson River in the last 3 years?" is one of the following answers ("Yes")**

**3) How satisfied are you with the amount and quality of public fishing access to the river/canal?**

- Not satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Satisfied
- Highly satisfied

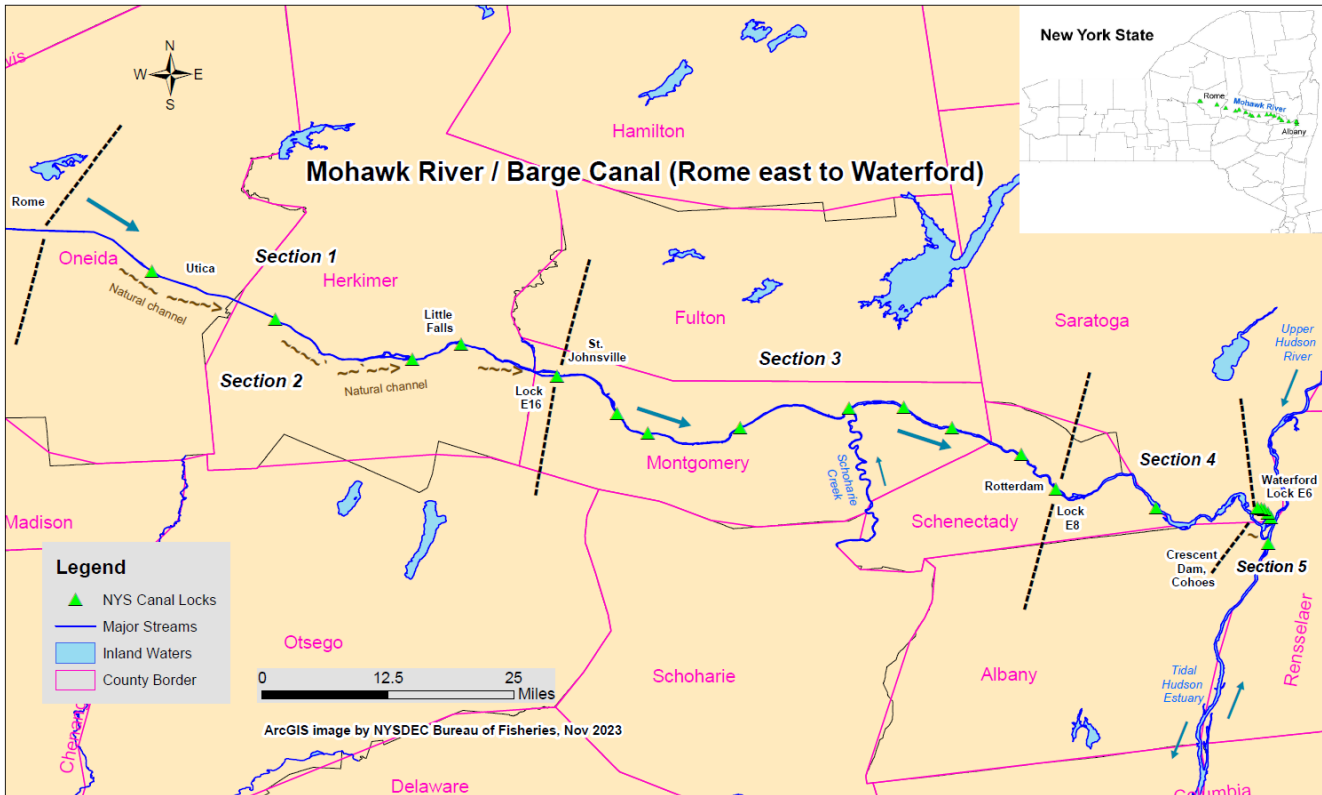
- **Logic: Hidden unless: #1 Question "Have you fished the Mohawk River or Erie Barge Canal east of Rome to the Hudson River in the last 3 years?" is one of the following answers ("Yes")**

**4) How many days per year do you typically fish the river/canal?**

- 1-5 days
- 6-10 days
- 11-20 days
- More than 20 days

- **Logic: Hidden unless: #1 Question "Have you fished the Mohawk River or Erie Barge Canal east of Rome to the Hudson River in the last 3 years?" is one of the following answers ("Yes")**

5) What section of the river/canal do you fish most frequently?



- ( ) Section 1: Canal lock pools from Rome to St. Johnsville (Locks E20 to E16)
- ( ) Section 2: Natural river channel winding from Rome to St. Johnsville
- ( ) Section 3: Lock pools from St. Johnsville to Rotterdam (Locks E16 to E8)
- ( ) Section 4: Canal lock pools from Rotterdam to Cohoes (Locks E8 to E6)
- ( ) Section 5: Tailwaters and braided channels from Crescent Dam to the Hudson River

• Validation: Max. answers = 3 (if answered)

• Logic: Show/hide trigger exists. Hidden unless: #1 Question "Have you fished the Mohawk River or Erie Barge Canal east of Rome to the Hudson River in the last 3 years?" is one of the following answers ("Yes")

6) Please select the fish species or species groups that you primarily target in the river/canal (choose up to 3).

- Walleye
- Smallmouth bass
- Largemouth bass
- Panfish (Sunfish, Crappie, Yellow perch, Rock bass)



- Northern pike
- Tiger muskie
- Catfish/bullhead
- Carp
- Anything
- Other

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• **Logic: Hidden unless: #6 Question "Please select the fish species or species groups that you primarily target in the river/canal (choose up to 3). " is one of the following answers ("Walleye")**

**7) When you're fishing for walleye, what time of day do you typically fish for them?**

- In the morning, starting before sunrise
- During daylight hours
- In the evening, starting before sunset
- After sunset
- Any time of day

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• **Logic: Hidden unless: #1 Question "Have you fished the Mohawk River or Erie Barge Canal east of Rome to the Hudson River in the last 3 years?" is one of the following answers ("Yes")**

**8) How satisfied are you about your fishing experiences in the river/canal within the last 3 years?**

- Not satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Satisfied
- Highly satisfied

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• **Logic: Hidden unless: #1 Question "Have you fished the Mohawk River or Erie Barge Canal east of Rome to the Hudson River in the last 3 years?" is one of the following answers ("Yes")**

9) How concerned are you about the following issues in regard to the fishery in the river/canal?

	Not concerned	Somewhat concerned	Concerned	Very concerned
Invasive species	( )	( )	( )	( )
Water clarity	( )	( )	( )	( )
Water level management	( )	( )	( )	( )
Blueback herring abundance	( )	( )	( )	( )

• Validation: Min = 00000 Max = 99999 Must be numeric Max character count = 5 Min character count = 5

• Logic: Hidden unless: #1 Question "Have you fished the Mohawk River or Erie Barge Canal east of Rome to the Hudson River in the last 3 years?" is one of the following answers ("Yes")

10) What is your home zip code?

• \_\_\_\_\_

• Logic: Show/hide trigger exists. Hidden unless: #1 Question "Have you fished the Mohawk River or Erie Barge Canal east of Rome to the Hudson River in the last 3 years?" is one of the following answers ("Yes")

11) Would you be willing to take a follow-up survey?

- ( ) Yes
- ( ) No

• Logic: Hidden unless: #11 Question "Would you be willing to take a follow-up survey?" is one of the following answers ("Yes")

12) Please enter your email address below:\*

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Thank You!

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Thank you for taking our survey. Your response is very important to us.

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