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Michigan Department of Natural Resources

Summary of Data Submitted Via the Web-based DNR Cormorant Activity Report Form

Michigan Department of Natural Resources
Wildlife Division
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ISSUE

A double-crested cormorant activity report form was developed and implemented on the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) web site in 2005 (http://www.dnr.state.mi.us/cormorantobs/). The intent in developing this form was to allow staff to assess developing trends relative to potential cormorant impacts across the state. It was expected that this form would assist in identifying locations, currently unknown to staff, where congregations of cormorants were having detrimental effects on local fisheries, sensitive vegetation, and other resources for which the DNR has stewardship responsibilities. This data was expected to function as an adjunct to reports received via phone and email, or in person by DNR staff. These sites could then be considered and prioritized with all other sites identified statewide where management actions had been requested.

DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

Since 2006, 285 records have been submitted via the cormorant activity report form. Of these, 12 records did not relate to actual cormorant observations (e.g., tests of the database to ensure proper functioning, reports of beaver dams, complaints about dune destruction). Twenty-four records contained reports of cormorant sightings with an indication that the submitter was not unhappy to see a cormorant (e.g., “I just thought it was amazing to see one around here.”). The bulk of the records (235 records) specifically note concerns about impacts to fisheries. While most were non-specific in the fishery being impacted, 14 records specifically mention stocked fish, and two mention fish in private ponds. While 48 records cite concerns about vegetation damage, most of these records also cite fisheries concerns, which may indicate that vegetation damage alone is not a primary concern of most submitters. Ten records cite concerns with fecal matter, either aesthetic or health concerns.

Most submitters included comments with their submission, and these comments suggest that some of the categories included on the web form under “Nature of Complaint/Concern” may be getting interpreted differently by submitters than expected when the form was developed. Of note, the “Environmental” category was selected by a number of submitters with fisheries concerns, but not selected by some submitters who explicitly mentioned concerns about defecation. There appears to be similar confusion with the “Wildlife” category. These categories should be clarified or eliminated.

The pattern in observations and complaints submitted via the web form is similar to that seen in feedback from the public using more traditional avenues of communication. The Bays de Noc, Thunder Bay, Ludington, Au Sable River, and Saginaw Bay regions are in some of the counties with relatively high numbers of submissions. With the exception of Saginaw Bay, all of these locations have been under active management for a number of years. The concerns voiced about Saginaw Bay (e.g., “When I told some local residents what I observed, they commented that the walleye and perch fishing in the bay has declined dramatically in recent years.”; “The cormorants have ruined the perch fishing in the Saginaw bay [sic].”; “They are destroying the Little Charity Is. The vegatation [sic] has been wiped out… Lets [sic]

be proactive and do something about them before the [sic] destroy the Big Charity Island and our fishery.") via the web site are similar to comments received from the public via other communication channels. At this time, management action to reduce cormorant numbers on Saginaw Bay has not been recommended for two reasons: fisheries data suggest that the walleye fishery is healthy and improving; and both Big and Little Charity Island are owned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and are part of the Michigan Islands National Wildlife Refuge managed by staff at the Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge, and this landowner has neither expressed concerns about current or potential impacts to vegetation or other nesting birds or requested the assistance of the DNR in managing these sites. Additional counties which have had multiple reports submitted include Marquette, Huron, Sanilac, and Wayne. Increasing reports of flocks foraging on newly stocked fish were received through all communication channels in the past 2-4 years, and the DNR instituted a stocking notification system in 2011 to provide an advance notice of stocking events to volunteers, under the direction of USDA-Wildlife Services, so that local stakeholders would have the ability to protect these fish if they determine it would be beneficial. This harassment would likely address many of the concerns for Marquette, Huron, Sanilac, and Wayne counties. Beyond these sites, the most notable locations reported via the web form are Macomb and Monroe counties. Reports in these counties are primarily associated with Lake St. Clair and Lake Erie. Similar reports of congregations of birds have been received via other communication channels. Assessment of the resource impacts at these sites is ongoing. Based on feedback submitted via the web site, it was discovered that nine counties in the Upper Peninsula were not included in the drop-down county selection list on the form; most of these counties either have active cormorant management projects ongoing or are included in the stocking site notification list, so sites in these counties which would have been reported via the web form are likely already being managed. This omission will be corrected.

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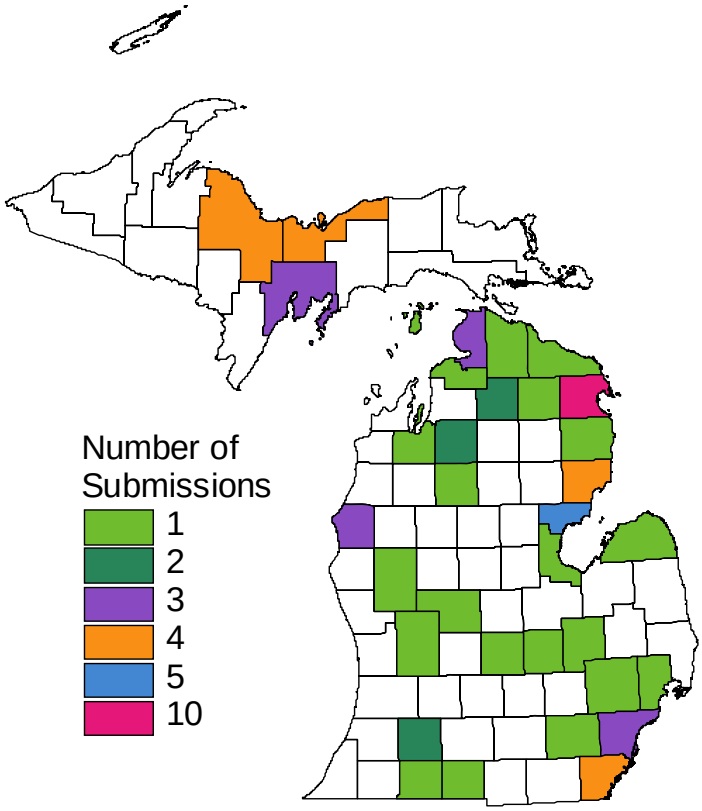
Year: 2006
Submissions: 73

Count of submissions by month of complaint:

April	6
May	10
June	9
July	9
August	13
September	20
October	5
December	1



Number of birds observed:

0	2
1-10	28
11-25	14
26-75	9
76-150	12
151-300	5
301-500	1
501-999	
1,000+	2

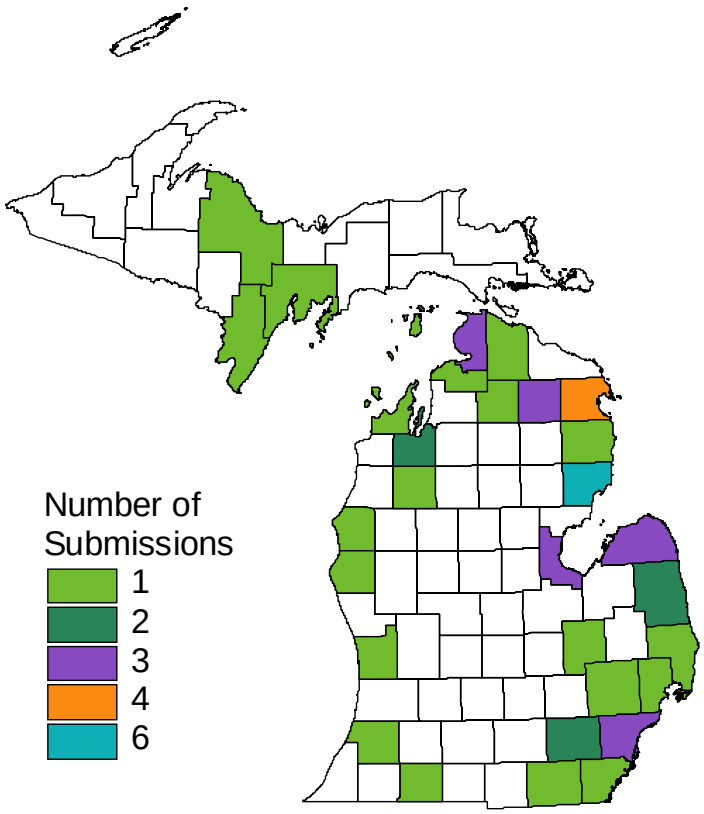
Nature of submission:

Database test	2
Not cormorant related	
Cormorants, not a complaint	8
Fishery foraging concerns	61
-general	54
-stocking site/stocked fish	4
-private fish pond	1
Vegetation damage	18
Fecal matter	7
Other	2
-competition w/ loons for nest sites	1
-competition w/ terns and gulls for nest sites	1

Year: 2007
Submissions: 58

Count of submissions by month of complaint:

January	1
April	4
May	21
June	4
July	5
August	11
September	9
October	1
November	2



Number of birds observed:

0	3
1-10	21
11-25	6
26-75	7
76-150	9
151-300	4
301-500	3
501-999	1
1,000+	4

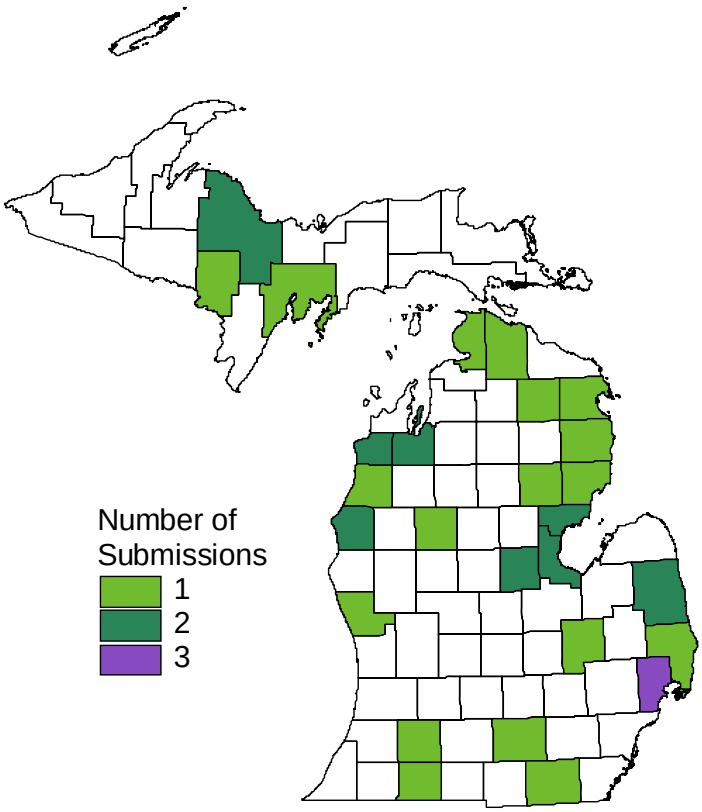
Nature of submission:

Database test	
Not cormorant related	
Cormorants, not a complaint	6
Fishery foraging concerns	43
-general	36
-stocking site/stocked fish	5
-private fish pond	
Vegetation damage	4
Fecal matter	2
Other	9
-fighting w/ loons	2
-difficult to steer boats around flocks	1
-duplicate entry	6

Year: 2008
Submissions: 38

Count of submissions by month of complaint:

April	5
May	11
June	3
July	3
August	6
September	6
October	4



Number of birds observed:

0	1
1-10	9
11-25	10
26-75	11
76-150	3
151-300	1
301-500	1
501-999	
1,000+	2

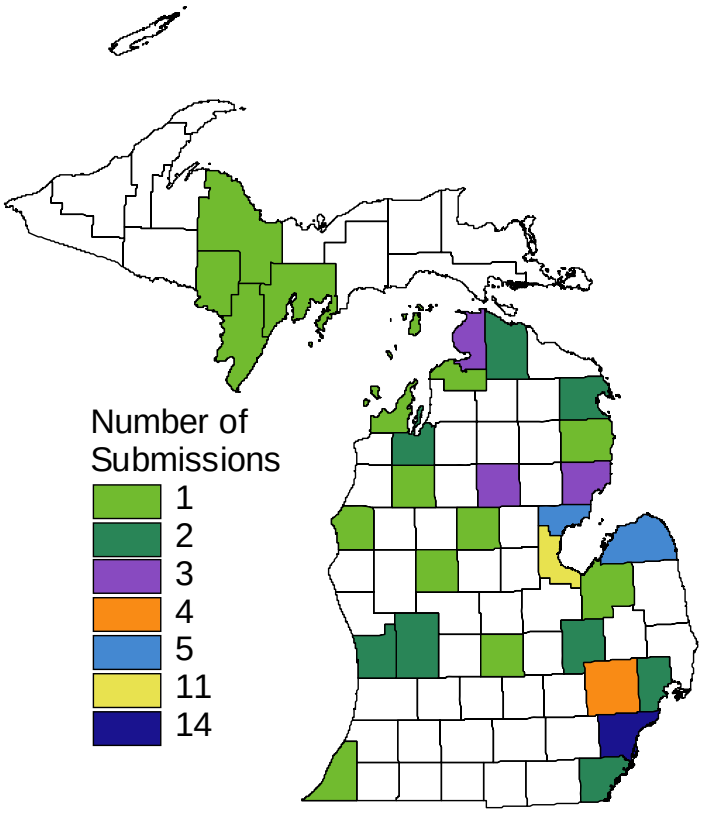
Nature of submission:

Database test	
Not cormorant related	3
Cormorants, not a complaint	1
Fishery foraging concerns	33
-general	32
-stocking site/stocked fish	2
-private fish pond	
Vegetation damage	2
Fecal matter	
Other	5
-competition w/ loons	1
-destruction of duck nests	1
-difficult to steer boats around flocks	1
-duplicate entry	2

Year: 2009
Submissions: 79

Count of submissions by month of complaint:

March	1
April	38
May	21
July	2
August	8
September	5
October	3
December	1



Number of birds observed:

0	
1-10	21
11-25	12
26-75	20
76-150	14
151-300	8
301-500	2
501-999	
1,000+	2

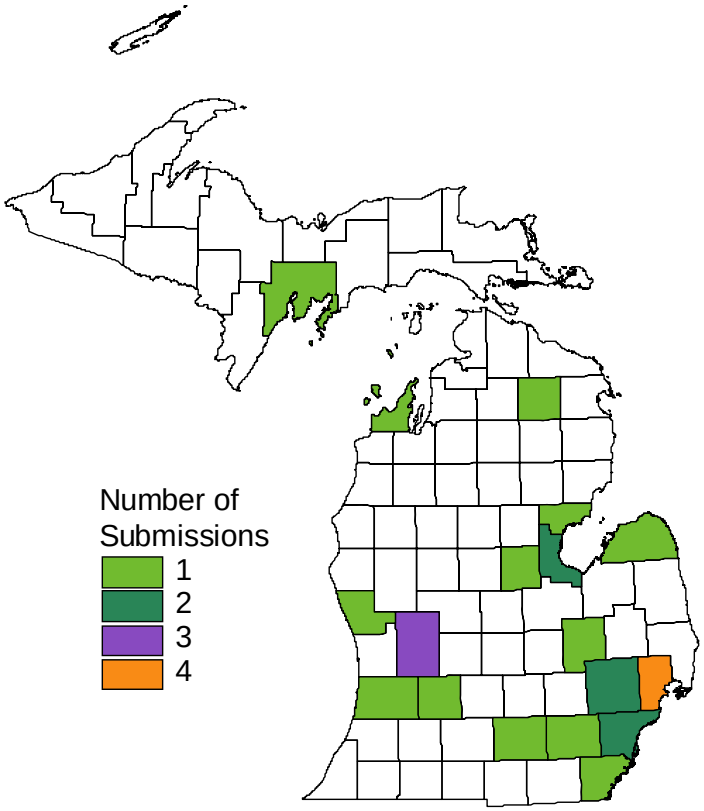
Nature of submission:

Database test	
Not cormorant related	2
Cormorants, not a complaint	3
Fishery foraging concerns	73
-general	70
-stocking site/stocked fish	3
-private fish pond	
Vegetation damage	20
Fecal matter	1
Other	2
-competition w/ waterfowl for nest sites	1
-duplicate entry	1

Year: 2010
Submissions: 29

Count of submissions by month of complaint:

March	1
April	3
May	2
June	4
July	4
August	4
September	3
October	5
November	2
December	1



Number of birds observed:

0	2
1-10	10
11-25	4
26-75	6
76-150	2
151-300	5
301-500	
501-999	
1,000+	

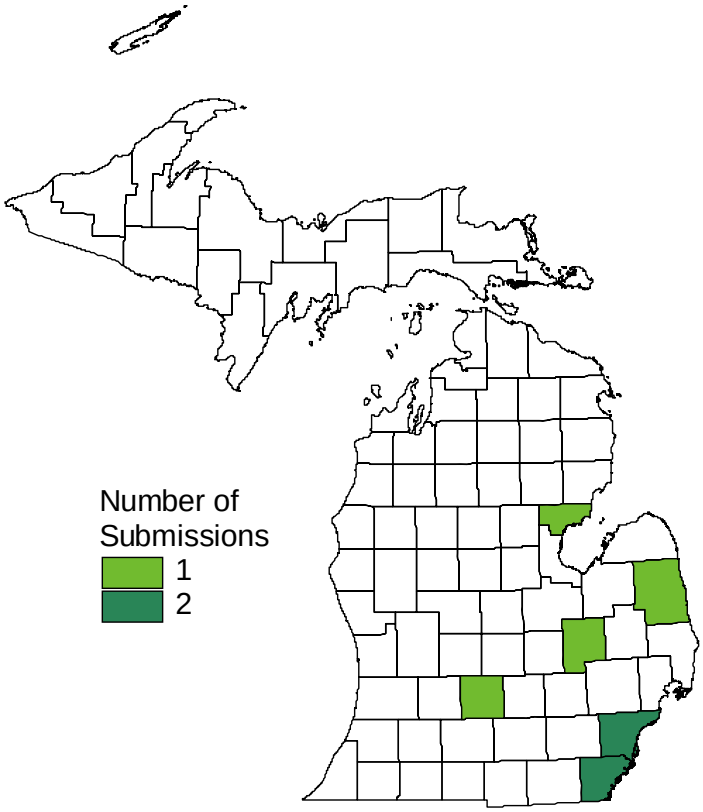
Nature of submission:

Database test	
Not cormorant related	4
Cormorants, not a complaint	5
Fishery foraging concerns	19
-general	18
-stocking site/stocked fish	
-private fish pond	1
Vegetation damage	4
Fecal matter	
Other	1
-duplicate entry	1

Year: 2011
Submissions: 8

Count of submissions by month of complaint:

April	5
May	3



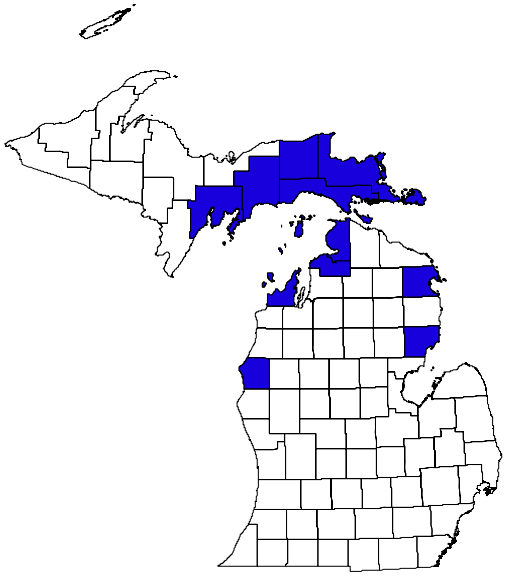
Number of birds observed:

0	1
1-10	1
11-25	1
26-75	
76-150	2
151-300	2
301-500	1
501-999	
1,000+	

Nature of submission:

Database test	1
Not cormorant related	
Cormorants, not a complaint	1
Fishery foraging concerns	6
-general	6
-stocking site/stocked fish	
-private fish pond	
Vegetation damage	
Fecal matter	
Other	

Counties where lethal management actions are currently in use:



Counties where DNR fish stocking events are accompanied by notification of local volunteer groups: