

# ***2015 Muskellunge Angler Survey***

*A collaboration between the Ohio Division of Wildlife and*

*Muskellunge angler clubs*



Prepared by

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During 2015, the Ohio Division of Wildlife partnered with local Muskie clubs to survey Muskellunge anglers. The purpose of the survey was to improve understanding of the characteristics, fishing behaviors, attitudes, and preferences of Muskellunge anglers fishing Ohio waters as well as evaluate use of the Muskie Angler Log (MAL). The survey was conducted online from March 30 to May 31. Invitations to participate in the survey, with an embedded link to the survey, were sent via email to registered users of the Muskie Angler Log (MAL). In addition, a link to the survey was posted on the welcome page of the MAL and on the Ohio Division of Wildlife website. Letters were sent to local Muskie Club officers encouraging their members to participate in the survey. Further, hard copies of the survey were sent to individuals identified by club officers as unable to access the survey online. Emails were sent to 700 individual anglers (600 valid emails) and 67 hard copies of the survey mailed. We received 257 responses to the survey. Of these, 235 were online and 22 were hard copies. The angler response rate was 39% for email recipients and 33% for hard copy recipients. However, the response rate for email recipients was difficult to measure given it is unknown how many online respondents did not receive an email. It is also not known how many anglers heard of the survey by word-of-mouth or accessed the survey via website links. The survey contained 39 questions divided into six sections evaluating different topics: general demographic information on anglers (age, gender, and residency); Muskellunge fishing behavior; club and tournament participation; attitudes about Muskellunge management in Ohio; and participation in the MAL. Topics and questions were developed in collaboration with Muskellunge angler clubs during club meetings and the 2015 Muskie Summit. Here we present a summary of the survey responses.

## ***Executive summary***

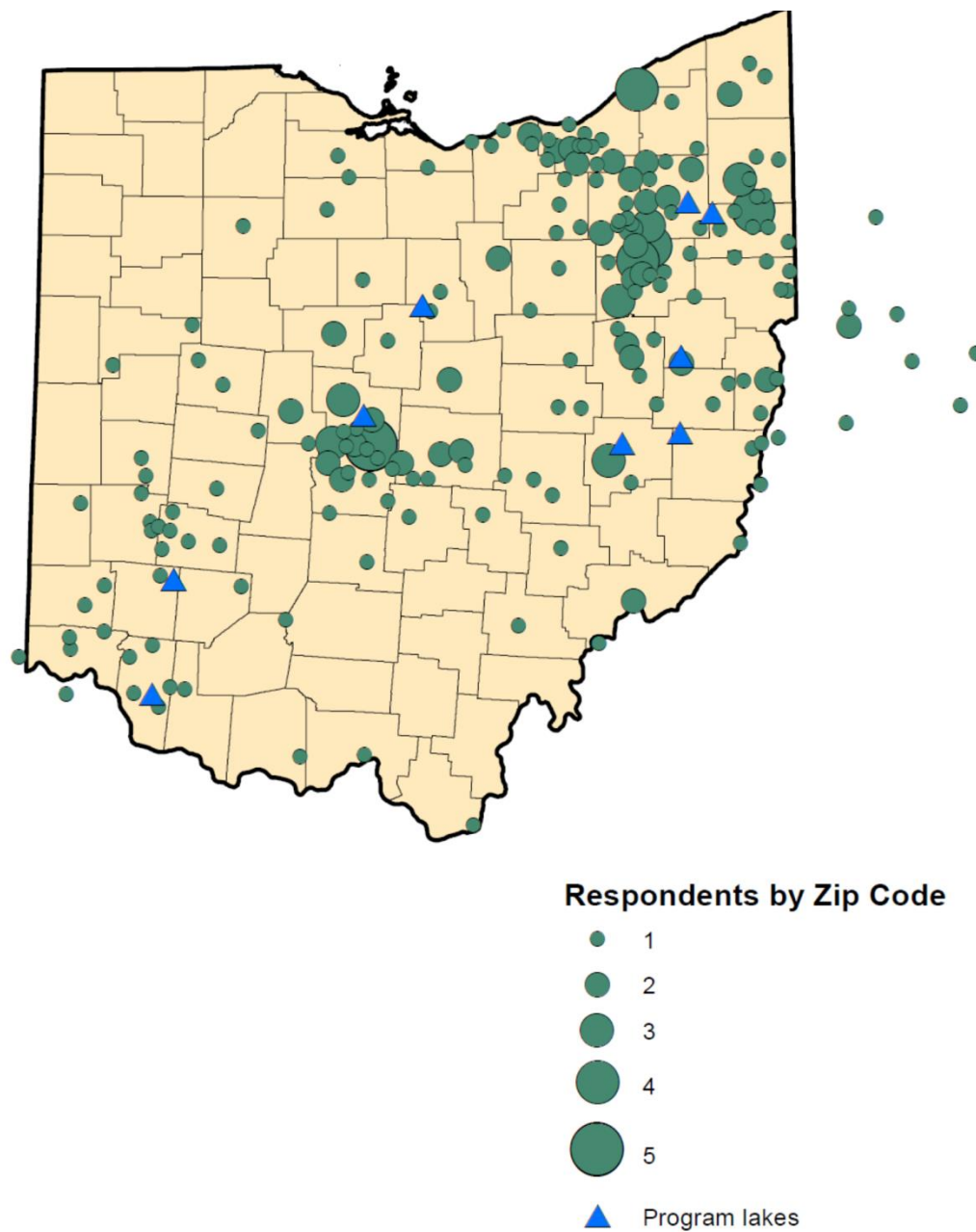
As expected, the majority of Muskellunge anglers were found to be male, generally older, and highly avid. They were also experienced, with most indicating they had been fishing for 20 years or longer. On average, anglers were heavily invested financially in Muskellunge fishing. However, while experienced overall, an appreciable portion of Muskellunge anglers were comparatively “new” to Muskellunge fishing; 18% fishing less than 5 years for Muskellunge. Most Muskellunge anglers (58%) were a member of a Muskellunge club, and considered supporting management efforts and promoting Muskellunge fishing to be the most important benefits of club membership. Similarly, nearly half of anglers participated in tournaments, with the vast majority doing so to support their club and Muskellunge management efforts. Interestingly, while the majority of anglers indicated that they had a “home” fishing location, they were prone to spending a substantial amount of their time fishing multiple locations within and among years. When asked to estimate the percentage of days dedicated to fishing various locations in 2014, with the exception of two locations (Caesar Creek and West Branch), fewer than half the anglers fishing a given location ever dedicated 50% or more of their fishing days to those locations; an indication that Muskie anglers were highly transient and most locations did not have a large “core” group of high fidelity anglers during 2014. Given “quality Muskellunge fishing” is the most important factor when deciding where to fish, assuming time and travel distance is not a factor, anglers, as a whole, may be focusing on locations with a “hot bite” (West Branch for example) and visiting other locations spuriously. Similar to other specialized fisheries, Muskellunge anglers were fairly content with various aspects of fishing, and highly supportive of management programs. However, anglers appeared less supportive of current harvest regulations. The Ohio Division of Wildlife’s Muskie Angler Log (MAL) appears to be well known and utilized among anglers surveyed. Anglers that were aware of the MAL, but choose not to use the MAL, generally preferred to keep their own catch records; although there was

some indication that improving the functionality of the MAL, such as integrating catch reporting between the MAL and the Muskies Inc. Lunge Log, could help encourage greater participation.

### ***A description of Muskellunge anglers fishing Ohio***

Nearly all Muskellunge anglers responding to the survey were male (97%) and generally older (58%, ≥50 years). Slightly less than a quarter of respondents (23%) were 40 years old or less, of which, only 8% were 18 to 30 years old. The vast majority of anglers (87%) indicated that they had more than 20 years of experience fishing Ohio waters for any species. Experience fishing Muskellunge in Ohio was more evenly distributed among respondents with 18% fishing less than 5 years; 24% fishing 5 to 10 years; 30% fishing 11 to 20 years; and 27% fishing more than 20 years. Most respondents (83%) considered their skills for fishing Muskellunge and knowledge of Muskellunge management in Ohio (84%) to be similar or greater than that of other Muskellunge anglers. The average estimated cost of fishing equipment (boat, rods and reels, lures and tackle) owned by surveyed anglers was \$23,498. Anglers responding to the survey resided (zip code) primarily within eastern and central Ohio.

## Distribution of anglers (zip code) responding to the Muskie Angler Survey



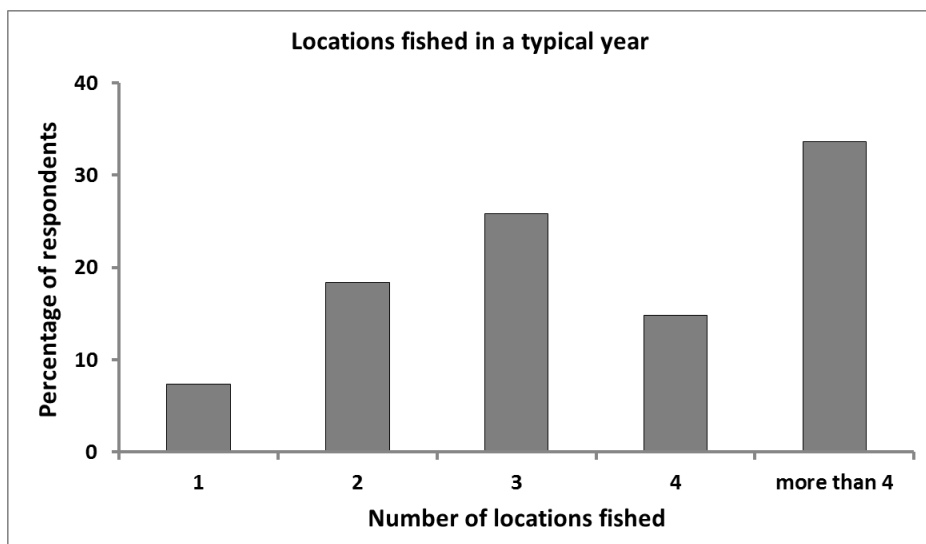
Overall, Muskellunge anglers were unexpectedly diverse in other aspects of fishing. For example, a third of anglers (32%) did not consider themselves primarily Muskellunge anglers and respondents spent nearly the same number of days, targeting other sport fish (29 days) as they did Muskellunge (28 days) in 2014. Of the sport fish other than Muskellunge targeted by anglers, the most popular for inland waters were Black Bass (56%), Walleye, Sauger, and Saugeye (51%), and Crappie (47%). Forty percent of anglers indicated that they fished for Walleye on Lake Erie.

### ***Muskellunge angler fishing behavior***

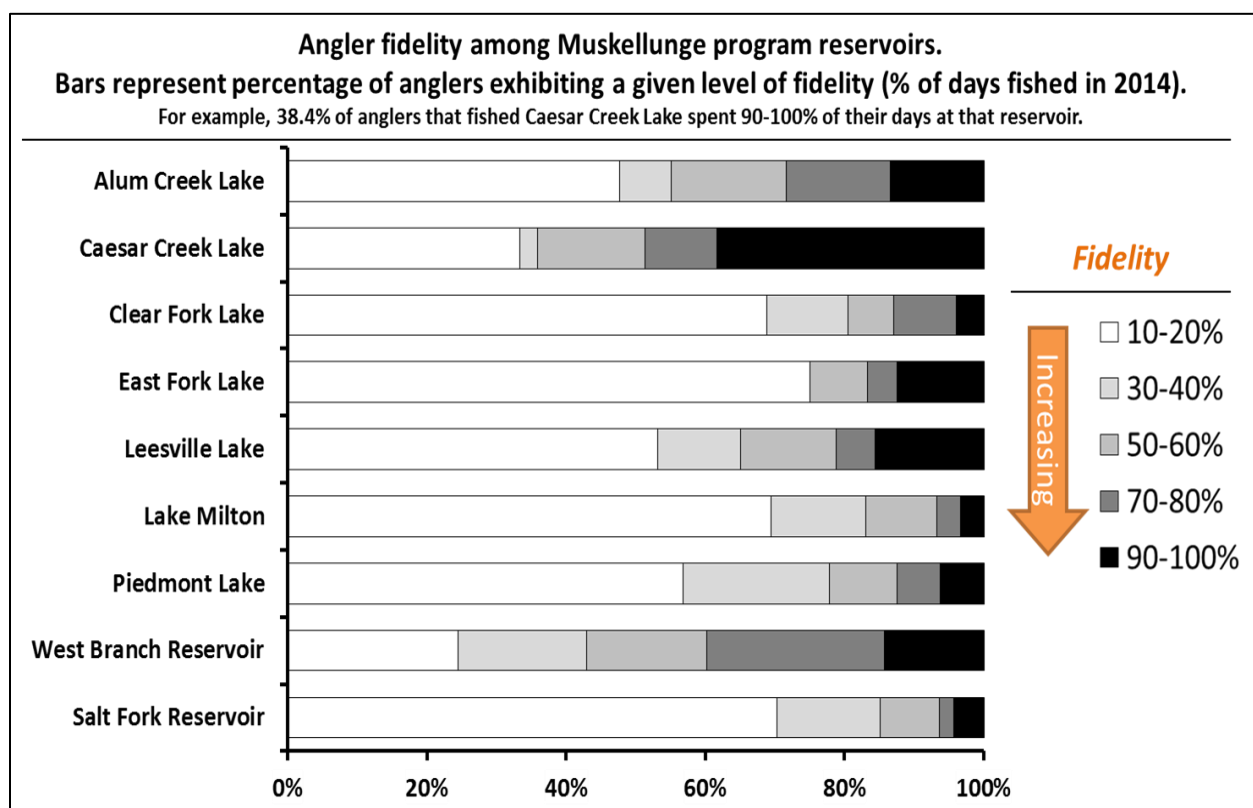
Anglers were asked to identify the locations they fish to develop a better understanding of fishing patterns among Muskellunge fisheries. Anglers were queried on which locations they preferred to fish and why, the number of locations visited, and their fidelity to certain locations. When asked if they had a location that they would consider their “home” body-of-water, overwhelmingly, 94% of anglers indicated that they did have a “home” body-of-water. Of the 15 location options presented to anglers, the top four locations that anglers identified as their “home” body-of-water were West Branch Reservoir (24%), Alum Creek Lake (15%), Leesville Lake (14%), and Caesar Creek Lake (10%); locations generally close to urban areas and core angler populations. However, when asked which locations they preferred to fish, assuming time and travel was not an obstacle, the top four locations identified were Leesville (19%), West Branch Reservoir (18%), Piedmont Lake (13%), and Clear Fork Lake (9%). When asked why they preferred one location over others, anglers indicated that the quality of Muskellunge fishing was a primary reason (70%), followed by location (close to home, 50%), scenery (26%), limited horsepower (10 hp or no wake; 24%), and no crowding (18%). Less important were access and facilities (13%), types of other fish species present (11%), and unlimited horsepower (11%). Other reasons

specified by anglers included camp sites (which could be consider facilities above), and knowledge/familiarity with a location.

When asked to indicate the number of locations they had fished in the past 5 years (2010–2014), three was the most popular response (20%); although nearly 60% of respondents indicated that they had fished 4 to 10 locations during that same time. Similarly, 26% of anglers indicated that they would fish 3 locations within a typical year, with nearly half (48%) of respondents indicating they would fish four or more locations within a typical year.



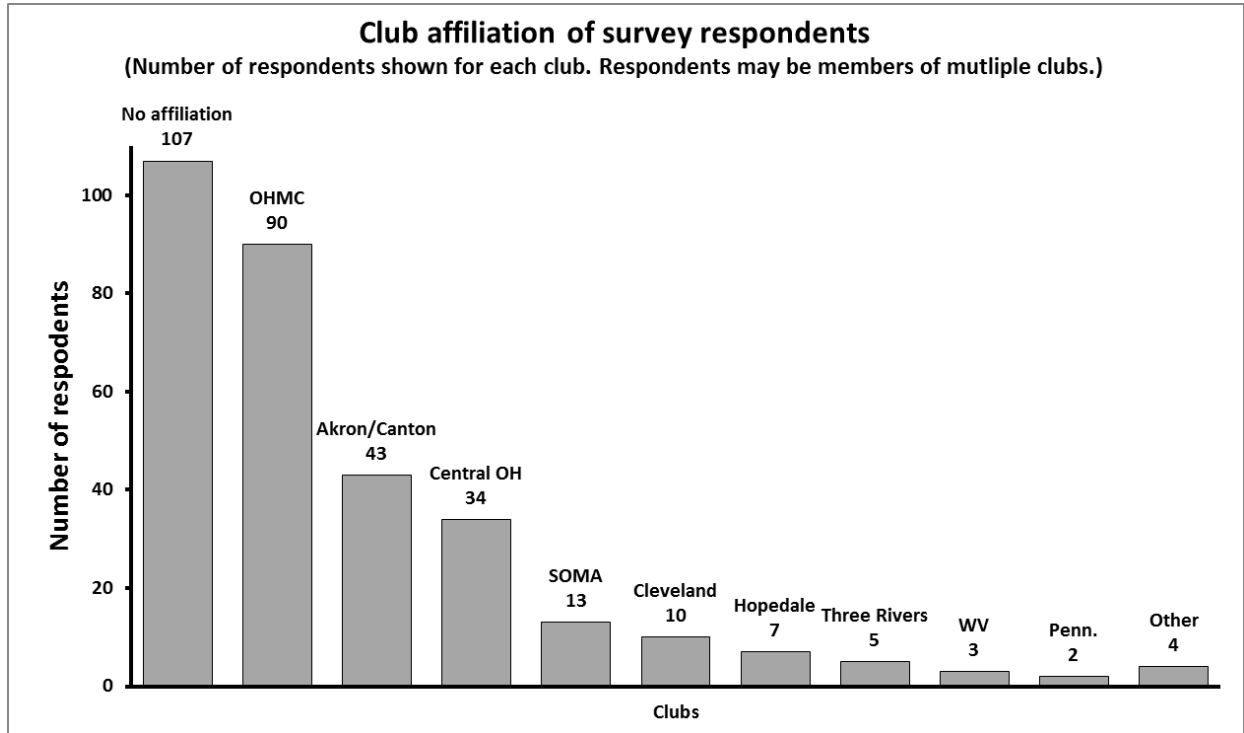
Anglers appeared to be transient, visiting multiple locations in a year, and generally never dedicating more than 50% of their days to any one location in 2014. Consequently, anglers had generally low fidelity to specific fishing locations in 2014. For nearly all fishing locations, most anglers that said they fished a certain location in 2014 dedicated only 20% or less of their total days fished to that location. In fact, only at Caesar Creek and West Branch reservoirs did a majority of anglers fishing these locations dedicate 50% or more of their fishing days to these locations. Among program reservoirs, the greatest number of anglers (42%) indicated that they had fished Leesville Reservoir at least once during 2014, followed by West Branch Reservoir (38%), Salt Fork Lake (37%), Piedmont Reservoir (32%), Clear Fork Lake (30%), Alum Creek Lake (26%), Lake Milton (23%), Caesar Creek Reservoir (15%), and East Fork Reservoir (9%).



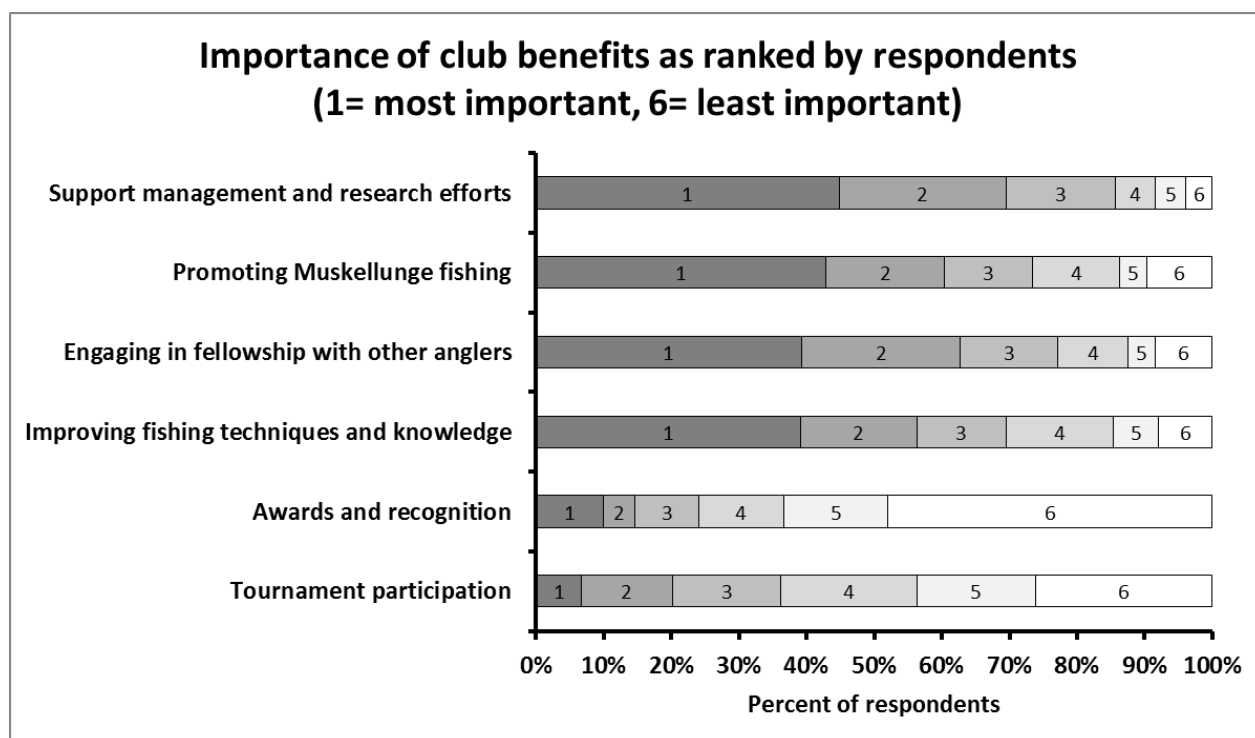


### ***Club and tournament participation***

Over half (58%) of anglers responding to the survey indicated that they were affiliated with a Muskellunge fishing club. Of these, most were members of the Ohio Huskie Muskie Club (OHMC), Akron/Canton Muskies Inc., or Central Ohio Muskies Muskies Inc.



Anglers were asked to rank the most important benefits of being members of an angling club. Anglers said that “Supporting management and research efforts” was the most important benefit, followed by “promoting muskellunge fishing”, “engaging in fellowship with other anglers”, and “improving fishing techniques and knowledge”. Benefits such as “awards and recognition” and “tournament participation” ranked low among respondents.

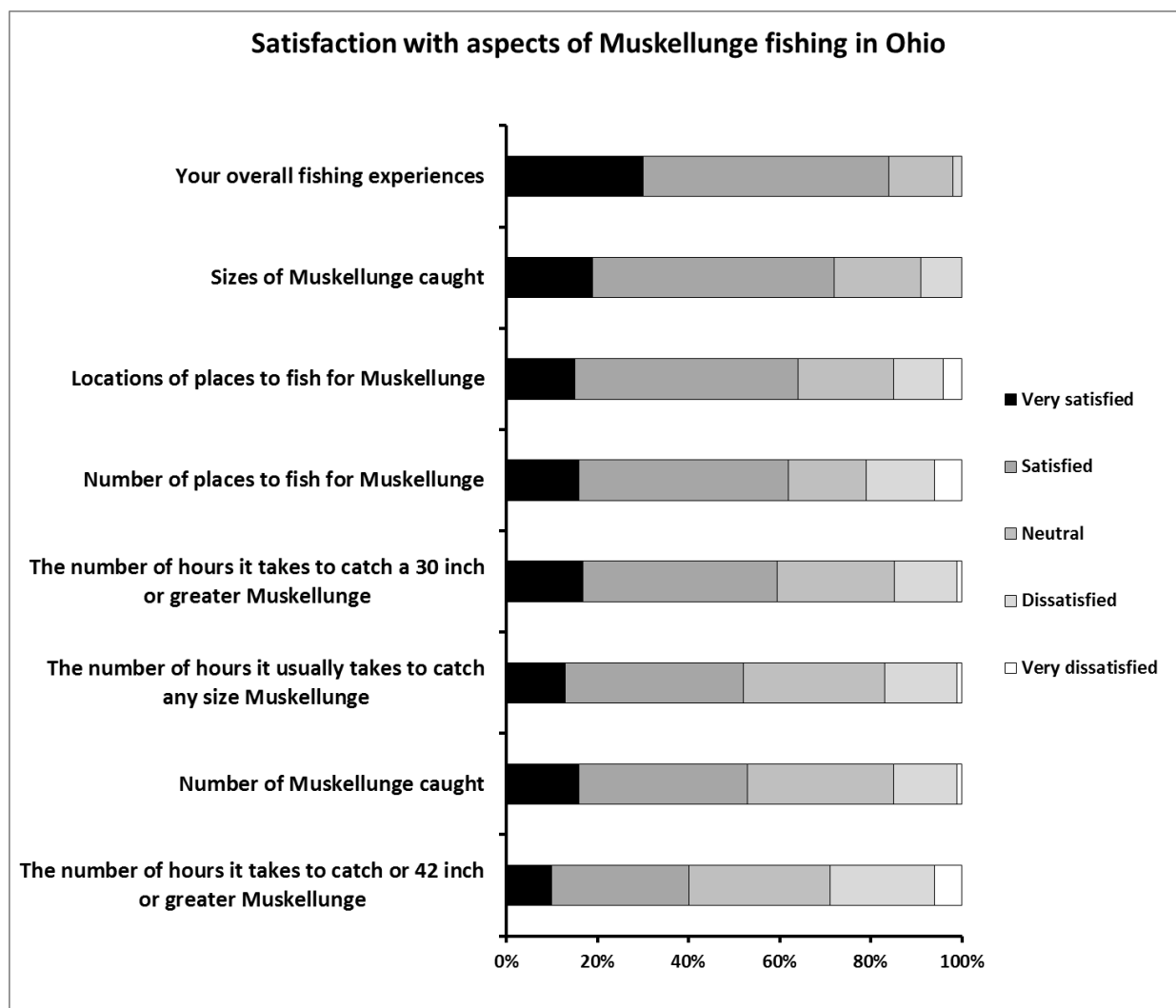


While “tournament participation” was not considered an important benefit to club membership among respondents, nearly half (48%) of respondents indicated that they had participated in at least one tournament during the past three years. On average, these anglers participated in more than three tournaments (mean = 3.5) during the previous year (2014). The majority of anglers (83%) were either “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with the tournaments in which they had participated, with only 5% expressing dissatisfaction with their tournament experience. When asked to select factors most important in deciding whether to participate in Muskellunge tournament, anglers identified “supporting Division of Wildlife muskellunge program and management” (73%), “support[ing] my club” (66%), and “travel distance” (55%) as the most important factors. Factors such as “available lodging” (18%), “entry fee” (18%), “awards/points” (10%), and “a big fish pot” (7%) were least important factors in deciding to participate in a tournament. When asked their opinion on the number of Muskie tournaments in Ohio, most anglers said they either believed the number of tournaments in Ohio was either “just right” (33%) or had no opinion on the subject (41%); the remainder believed there are “too many” (15%) or “too

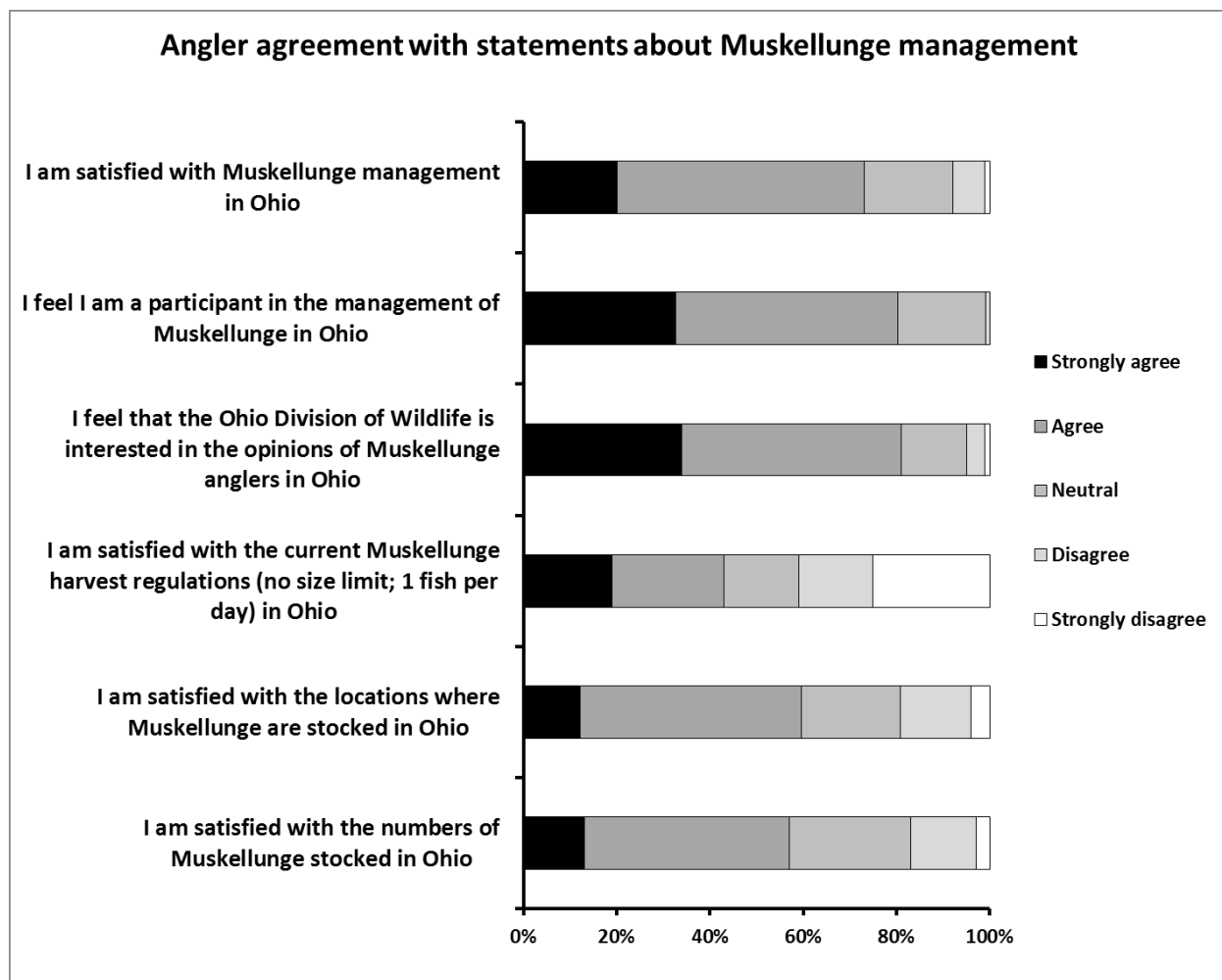
few” (11%). Opinions on whether cash prizes should be awarded at Muskellunge tournaments were evenly split between those who believed there should not be cash awards (38%) and those that had no opinion (34%); only 28% believed there should be cash awards. Of those anglers that actually participated in at least one tournament during the past three years, a slightly higher percentage believed there should be no cash awards (43%), with 34% having no opinion, and 23% believing there should be cash awards.

### ***Muskellunge fishing and management in Ohio***

Muskellunge anglers were queried to determine their satisfaction and opinions regarding Muskellunge fishing and management. In general, anglers were satisfied with most aspects of Muskellunge fishing in Ohio, and when they were not, they were mostly neutral on the subject. In only one aspect of fishing, “number of hours it takes to catch a 42-inch or greater Muskellunge”, did dissatisfaction exceed 20%, and the satisfaction fall below 50%. In terms of fishing quality, many anglers indicated that they perceive changes in the quality of fishing as either improved or stayed the same for Muskellunge numbers (56%, improved; 28%, stayed the same), Muskellunge sizes (49%, improved; 39% stayed the same), and the overall quality of Muskellunge fishing (52%, improved; 31% stayed the same). For all three measures of fishing quality, the percentage of anglers who felt that there was a decline was below 20%; although in all cases, the percentage of anglers that felt that fishing had greatly improved never exceeded 10%.



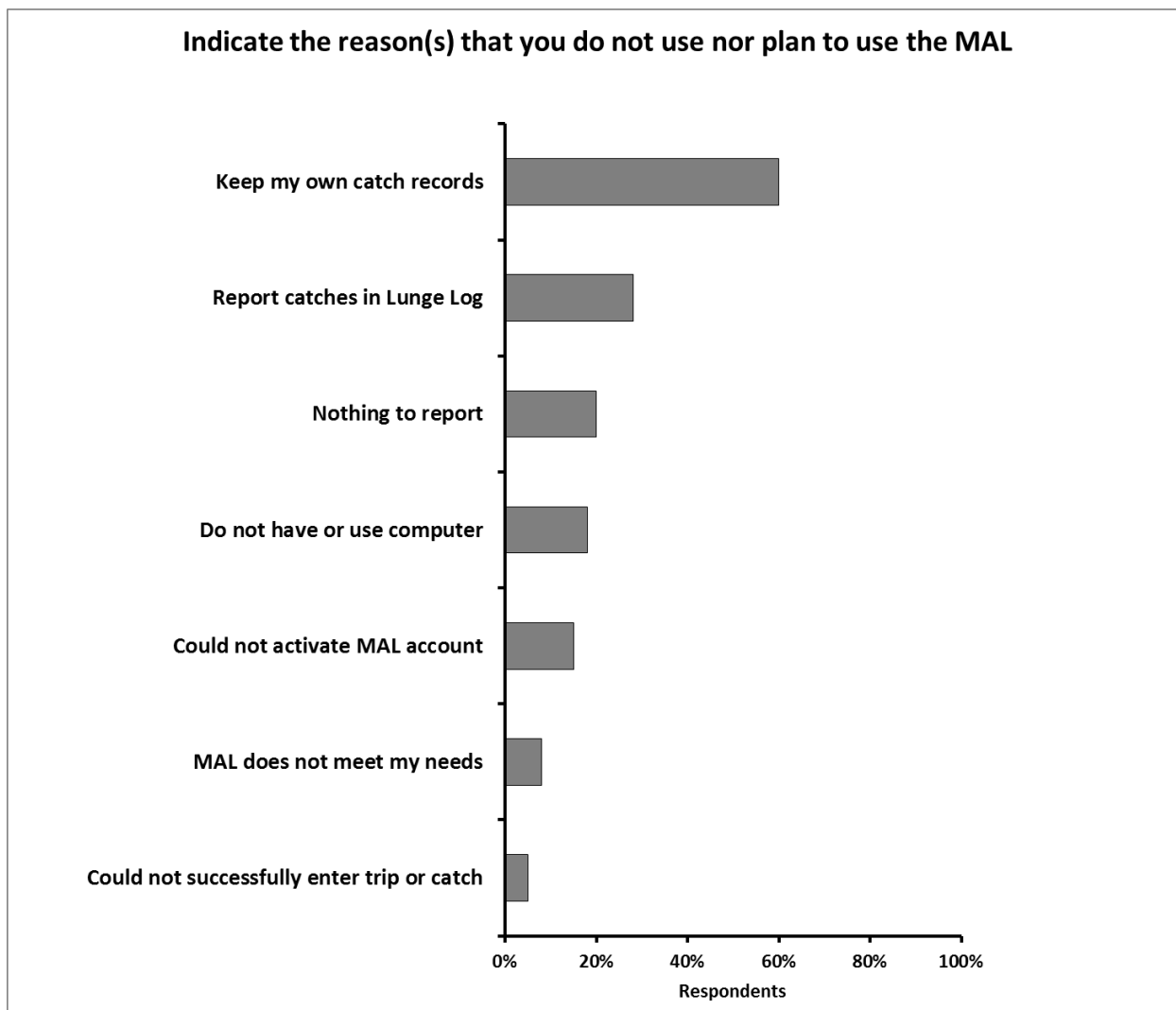
Anglers were also generally positive when asked whether they were in agreement with statements regarding certain aspects of Muskellunge management in Ohio. Over 70% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “I am satisfied with Muskellunge management in Ohio”. Greater than 80% agreed that they were a participant in Muskellunge management in Ohio and that the Ohio Division of Wildlife was interested in angler opinions on Muskellunge management. Anglers agreed somewhat less with statements regarding their satisfaction with stocking locations (59%) and numbers stocked (57%). Only for the statement regarding satisfaction with the current harvest regulation did anglers indicate a strong dissatisfaction (41%); although a similar percentage of anglers were satisfied with the regulations (43%).



### ***Awareness and participation in the Muskie Angler Log (MAL)***

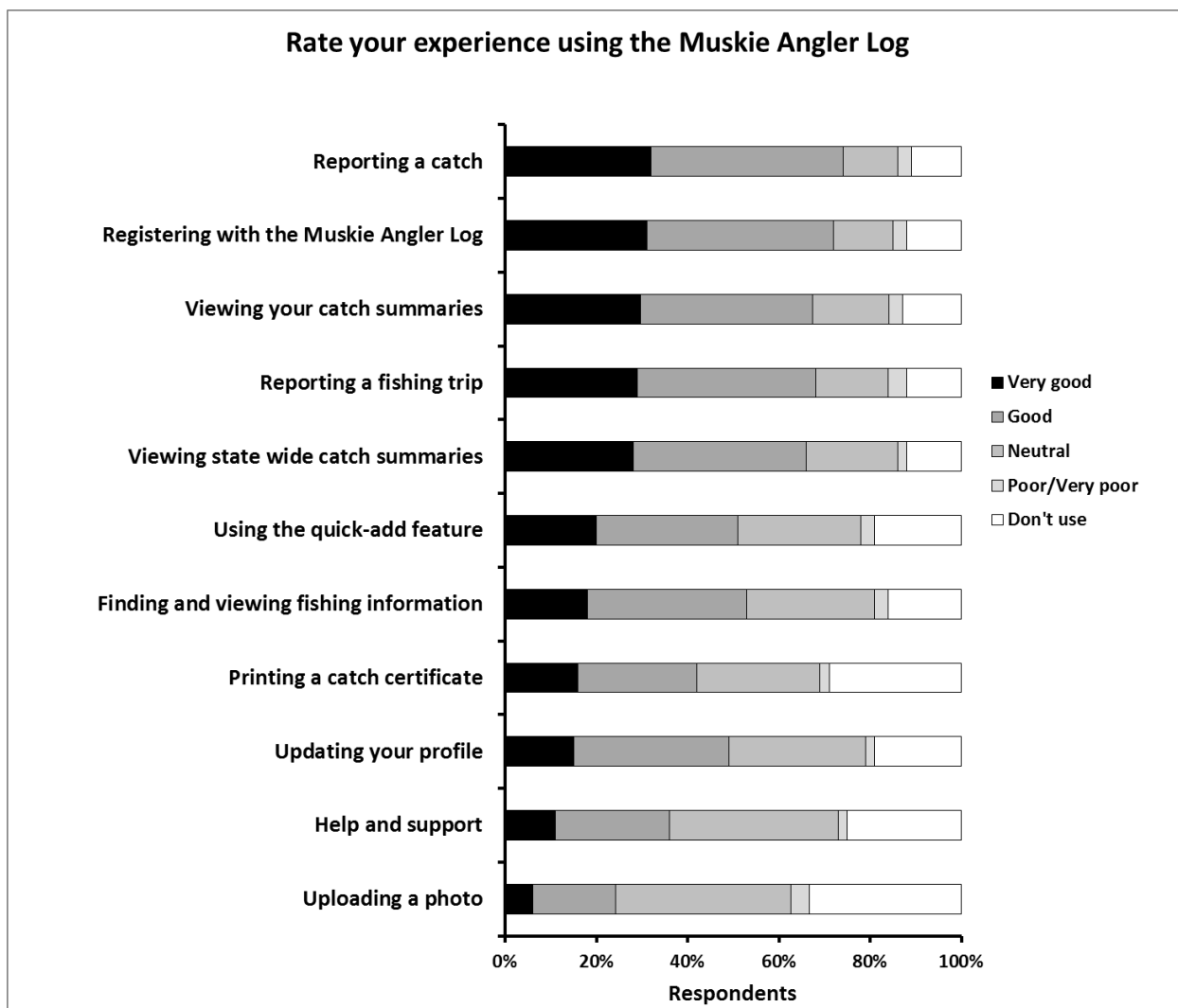
The Muskie angler survey provided useful insights into angler use and opinions regarding the MAL. An overwhelming number of anglers (90%) were aware of the MAL. Most anglers heard of the MAL through Muskie clubs (45%), followed by the Ohio Division of Wildlife website or news release (36%), angler message boards (32%), word-of-mouth or through a friend (25%), access ramp signs (19%), Ohio Division of Wildlife presentation (16%), and the Outdoor News (3%). More than a third of anglers (36%) indicated that they had heard about the MAL through multiple sources. Of those aware of the MAL, 80% said they were registered with the MAL and 83% said they had or planned (some needed to

register) to report trips and Muskellunge catches in the MAL. Of those anglers that had not or did not plan to enter trips or catches in the MAL, the majority of anglers said that they keep their own catch records (60%), while a quarter said they report their catches in the Muskies Inc. Lunge Log (28%) or indicated they had issues using the MAL or the MAL did not meet their needs (28%). Just 20% indicated that they had nothing to report, and 18% did not have or use a computer.



In general, anglers that used the MAL gave it positive ratings (good to very good). Most anglers found that registering with the MAL, reporting catches and trips, and viewing personal and statewide catch summaries was a positive experience. However, for other MAL applications such printing catch

certificates, help and support, and uploading photos, anglers were less positive. Overall, two thirds of anglers said they report their catches in the MAL, with 27% reporting catches in both the MAL and Muskies Inc. Lunge Log, and 4% reporting using catch cards. The remaining anglers either do not report catches altogether (27%) or only in the Muskies Inc. Lunge Log (7%).



## How do you report your Muskellunge catches from Ohio?

