

New Large Research Vessel Headed to Sandusky

The Division of Wildlife recently initiated a contract with Andersen Boat Works of Douglas, Michigan, to build a new large research vessel for west basin fisheries work on Lake Erie. The 55 feet aluminum “R/V Walleye” will replace the 53 feet R/V Explorer in the field season of calendar year 2027 after a transition year in 2026. Delivery is currently slated for fall of 2025 but could be pushed back to spring of 2026 if necessary.

This replacement started with initial designs being created 9 years ago, which was followed by design modifications and ultimately was moved forward to the build process when ODNR allocated funds to the Division of Wildlife from the state’s capital budget. Compared to the tall single engine R/V Explorer, the R/V Walleye will have twin engines, and the pilot house will be lower to the water providing better direct sight lines for the captain. The new vessel will primarily be a trawler but will provide much greater flexibility to complete the Sandusky Research Station’s many other west basin surveys. Andersen Boat Works has previously built two vessels with similar hull designs.

While angler license dollars and federal sportfish restoration funds support a majority of the Division of Wildlife’s annual fisheries work on Lake Erie, large purchases like the new research vessel require alternative funding sources. We can thank Governor DeWine, ODNR Director Mertz and Assistant Director Gray, and Division of Wildlife Chief Wecker and Fish Chief Hale for their support of this project. The new research vessel will provide long term stability for west basin data collections that are required to annually set safe harvest levels.

Preliminary rendering of the new R/V Walleye:

