

Saskatchewan River Sturgeon Management Board Spring Meeting

Prince Albert SK – MacIntosh Mall – Ministry of Environment Office
February 27-2008 9.00 – 3.30

Attendees:

Isaac Cook – OCN Resource Council
Rob Wallace (*science advisor*) – Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment
Al Young – Saskatchewan Watershed Authority
Vincent Harper – Fisheries and Oceans Canada
Marcy Bast – SaskPower
Shelley Matkowski – Manitoba Hydro
Murray Koob – Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment
Lennard Morin – Cumberland House Fisherman's Co-op
Robert McAuley – Cumberland House
Joe Fiddler – Cumberland House
Peter Young - OCN

1. Opening Prayer – Lennard
2. Introductions
3. Reviewed minutes – change made to number of sturgeon stocked in Tobin Lake. Change made to Rosemary Hanlon (not Young) with DFO Species at Risk. Otherwise, minutes accepted.
4. Record of Decisions from October 10-2007 meeting – decisions reviewed and accepted. Discussed funding opportunities through Cumberland House. There is a need to collect Traditional Knowledge from the area. Robert mentioned harvesting of sturgeon that used to occur, and areas where sturgeon were traditionally found. Cumberland House will pursue research / funding opportunities with Rosemary Hanlon. Other decisions were accepted.
5. Review of agenda – Peter Young raised the Lake Sturgeon consultation workbook. Cumberland House received a copy and it will be forwarded by Lennard as President of the Cumberland House Fishermen's Co-op. No new items added.
6. Membership updates – SK co-chair – Lennard Morin will be the SK co-chair with Shelley.
7. Member updates, proposed updates and budgets for 2008 –

Saskatchewan River Sturgeon Management Board Spring Meeting

Prince Albert SK – MacIntosh Mall – Ministry of Environment Office

February 27-2008 9.00 – 3.30

Cumberland House – conducted index fishing in 2007 with regular crew (7 fishermen). Fishing was done on Sask River and Cumberland Lake. The water levels in the Tearing River had dropped by August. Water is low and likely some problems this year with fishing. June 27 of 2007 there was an election with the Metis Nation. There have been difficulties with fraud and budget cuts. Lennard ran for the region and was elected for the Metis Nation, representing the Northeast Region (C. House to Sandy Bay). Metis Nation appointed him to the Fisheries Advisory Committee with reps in the province. Will be reporting to the new government. Also appointed to a Sask Watershed Authority board. Had been the project worker for index fishing with MOE in the past, and Joe Fiddler had done in the past also. During 2008, Joe Fiddler and Howard Mackenzie will be working with MOE. Lennard will be completing the workbook forms for DFO submission on behalf of the Cumberland House Fishermen's Co-op.

Robert McAuley noted that there have been many more smaller sturgeon in the river. Are there ways to track any stocking? Shelley noted that 500 fish were kept over winter this year to grow. They are about 12" long now, and are from the Nelson River system. Will be using PIT tags to track these fish. May also look at a visual marking system (scute removal?). Rob mentioned the difficulties and restrictions of marking on small fish. BC has had some success with scute removal and marking. MOE has no plan to go and find the small fish that have been stocked. Robert feels that by stocking, we are defeating the natural reproduction and knowing where the small fish are coming from. Robert notes that now we don't know if the positive results of recruitment are from the high water in 2005, or from re-stocking. Murray mentioned that the capacity in the hatchery is limited, as they cannot carry numerous fish over winter. Because of that, fish are very small when released. Marcy mentioned the Mississippi Namew group that was in Sandy Bay for a while, but nothing came of the group. In future, there may be an opportunity to restart the group.

Ministry of Environment – Murray expects funding may be same as 2007 (18K), but without knowing what may come from the new government it is hard to finalize. Robert suggested the fishing begin 1-2 weeks earlier than 2007. Murray said that it is dependant on when the spawn taking is done – may move to every second year to take spawn and fishing. Spawn taking is scheduled for 2008, but that may be changed in future. By creating gaps, may assist with assessing recruitment in future based on age. Funding will be available, Vincent asked if temperature was used to determine timing. Some temps were taken, and they did not correspond with ripe females. Followed by some discussion of where to put the spawn taken, and how they

Saskatchewan River Sturgeon Management Board Spring Meeting

Prince Albert SK – MacIntosh Mall – Ministry of Environment Office

February 27-2008 9.00 – 3.30

move downstream over time. Murray mentioned Fred Hnytka's point about the integrity of the stocking program and genetic viability etc. Stocking is not the long-term answer for recovery. MOE is hoping to get some direction from the board on whether or not stocking is something that should continue. Also, further to the last meeting, the hatchery will no longer be giving out fish to the public or schools.

Ministry of Environment – Rob presented the analysis completed with Dr. Arnason from the University of Manitoba (hand-outs provided at meeting). He uses POPAN (population analysis programming), and statistically there are roughly 1000 fish of 18 lbs and over. Results also suggest that the population is declining 1-2% per year. Pre-dam numbers have been estimated at 15000 fish of this size.

Saskatchewan Watershed Authority – During 2007 spent time on the Torch R. and also time on the Sask R. including the main section and north and south branches (near PA). Received funding from HSP and FWDF (MOE) to look at habitat for sturgeon, including netting and electroshocking. In 2 years, no sturgeon were caught on the Torch R. The final report will be attached to the SRSMB web site when completed. The Torch R. has abundant sturgeon habitat. The study area was from Candle Lake to the entry at the Sask R. Water levels can vary on the Torch R. due to flows out of Candle Lake, and very little low-water work was conducted due to high water years. Macroinvertebrates were measured using colonization plates. Looked at known sturgeon areas on the Sask R. around PA, near the forks, and on the lower portion of the south Sask R. Wanted to focus capture techniques towards juvenile sturgeon. On the Sask R. 12 sturgeon were caught, all below 128 cm (not mature adults), and marked. During 2008, focus will be on elements of habitat. Also will be looking at Gardiner Dam and impacts to sturgeon. This season will look at macroinvertebrates and habitat requirements for juvenile sturgeon. Study area will include 2007 locations, and closer to Saskatoon on the Sask R. Habitat will be mapped on those reaches. Will also be capturing fish to link them to habitat use. Shelley mentioned research similar to this being done on the Winnipeg R. where they are catching many small sturgeon (yearlings) in the deep areas. There have also been measurements on stress due to handling, which suggests that there may be limited mortality after release. Also for 2008, work will look at substrate type and habitat use using hydro-acoustics – may partner with MOE and/or DFO for use of equipment. Can North is also working near that area on the Shore Gold environmental assessments, and sharing information with the Watershed Authority. Lennard asked if SWA still plans to do work on the

Saskatchewan River Sturgeon Management Board Spring Meeting

Prince Albert SK – MacIntosh Mall – Ministry of Environment Office

February 27-2008 9.00 – 3.30

Sask R. downstream of the Torch R. and closer to Cumberland House. At the present time, SWA work will focus near Gardiner Dam.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada – Vincent mentioned the SARA consultation input is due by April 25, 2008. The E.B. Campbell Aquatic Assessment work is in a final draft and being reviewed internally. Some discussion about the minimum flows that are coming out of the facility. Cumberland House sees benefits of having the minimum flow rather than shutting the units down completely. Vincent outlined the process in BC, to give an example of how water management is taking place for numerous species. Peter from OCN stated his concern with water flows downstream of E.B. Campbell, and that they plan to pursue this issue.

Opaskwayak Creek Nation – Peter wanted to ask Manitoba Water Stewardship about the tagging information and catch data. At the next meeting, they look to get more information from the Swampy Cree work proposed.

**** ACTION ITEM – Lennard will talk to contacts at the Ministry of First Nations and Metis Relations and see if there is anyone that can attend the board meetings.**

SaskPower – Will have 20K again for 2008, some of which will be contributed to the MOE index fishing as before. The remainder will be divided as prioritized by the board.

Manitoba Hydro – Presented the SRSMB website (www.saskriversturgeon.ca). Any comments can be forwarded to Shelley.

8. Ten-year Management Plan – goals outlined and reviewed.

Goal 1 – concerns about over-fishing noted and discussed. Possible to have signage posted in critical spawning areas in the spring to limit fishing. Peter gave example from OCN where agreement being signed between resource council and COs to close and restrict fishing during spring. Given the results that still show some decrease in mature populations, the population may not be stabilized. Work towards goal 1 continues.

Goal 2 – This goal is on-going for a further 15 years.

Goal 3 – This goal includes voluntary limits to maintain sustainable use, and Peter gave an example of how that has worked for moose populations

Saskatchewan River Sturgeon Management Board Spring Meeting

Prince Albert SK – MacIntosh Mall – Ministry of Environment Office

February 27-2008 9.00 – 3.30

in their area. May look further into education, signage etc. Progress will continue.

**** ACTION ITEM – Marcy to look into signage on the river.**

Goal 4 – This has not been done. Some information is being collected through the SARA process, that may be extrapolated across other sturgeon populations.

**** ACTION ITEM – Shelly will look into having a consultant scope out a process to look at population objectives.**

**** ACTION ITEM - Lennard has asked that someone from the SRSMB present at the Fish Advisory Committee on information of the board, and he will pursue that with the group.**

9. SARA consultation on listing of lake sturgeon – Discussion on whether or not a formal response should come from the board. Members feel that it would be good to send communication to DFO outlining the board activities, 10-year Management Plan, and to keep the board in mind with future activities through the listing process.

**** ACTION ITEM – Co-chairs Shelley and Lennard will draft a letter for review by the board prior to April 25, 2008.**

10. Other items – none noted.

11. Next meeting – late November in the Pas.

**** ACTION ITEM – Shelley will forward a date and location for next meeting, and send agendas etc.**

**** ACTION ITEM – Lennard and Murray will discuss start-dates for spawn camp and index fishing.**

12. Closing prayer

13. Adjourned ~ 3.00