

Saskatchewan River Sturgeon Management Board

26 November 2013, 10:00 AM – 4:00 PM

Kikiwak Inn, The Pas, Manitoba

Meeting Minutes

Attendees:

Raymond Lathlin, Opaskwayak Cree Nation
Diane Ballantyne, Opaskwayak Cree Nation Resource Council
Ron Campbell, Manitoba Conservation and Water Stewardship
Shelley Matkowski, Manitoba Hydro
Marcy Bast, SaskPower

1. Opening prayer - Ray
2. Introductions
3. Review Agenda

Added discussion of future of board, activities and participation

4. Reviewed minutes of September 6, 2012 meeting.

Action item regarding sending letters to membership to canvas level of commitment was not followed through, since through communications among the members over the past year it has become self-evident that some no longer have the staff or resources to participate. Letters have been sent in the past and have not made a difference.

Action: Marcy will speak to Chris Dunn, Fisheries Manager with Saskatchewan Environment to determine whether they have identified a staff member in charge of Species At Risk who might participate in the SRSMB.

5. Report of activities in 2013

Due to lack of funding Manitoba Fisheries Branch did not conduct index fishing in 2013.

Cumberland House fishermen and Saskatchewan Environment conducted index fishing as usual in summer, with funding assistance from SaskPower. Analysis has yet to be conducted.

Diane indicated that Opaskwayak Cree Nation (OCN) continues to maintain posters at various locations in the community and at boat launches to inform fishermen about the importance of sturgeon stewardship. Some sturgeon tags have been returned to Ron by OCN fishermen.

Saskatchewan Water Security Agency has completed its sturgeon studies between Gardiner Dam and Nipawin. They identified a substantial population of sturgeon in this reach of the river and conducted movement and habitat use studies. Since there are still sturgeon with functioning transmitter tags in this section of river, SaskPower has committed to continuing this research by maintaining receivers over the next 3-4 years, while the tags are still operational.

Rob Wallace, who served as scientific advisor to the SRSMB and analyzed the Saskatchewan index fishing data retired from Saskatchewan Environment in August. The SRSMB would like to express its appreciation to Rob for his years of dedication to sturgeon stewardship on the Saskatchewan River.

6. Future of SRSMB, Activities and Participation

As discussed in the previous SRSMB meeting and agenda item 4 above, some members of the SRSMB have not been active in the recent past due to travel restrictions, reductions in resources and/or staffing. Saskatchewan Environment, in particular, has been unable to attend recent meetings.

Action: Marcy will contact Chris Dunn of Saskatchewan Environment to determine whether they have identified who will have responsibility for Species At Risk.

Diane and Raymond discussed the importance of lake sturgeon harvest, stewardship and population recovery to OCN. Diane asked about the recent article in the Winnipeg Free Press about an agreement on sturgeon stewardship between Manitoba Hydro and Manitoba Conservation and Water Stewardship. Shelley explained that an agreement has been drafted to coordinate sturgeon stewardship and recovery activities between Manitoba Hydro and Manitoba Conservation and Water Stewardship, and to ensure that the Manitoba Sturgeon Management Strategy is followed.

Action: Shelley will post the Manitoba Lake Sturgeon Management Strategy (2012) and, once it is signed, the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Sturgeon between Manitoba Hydro and Manitoba Conservation and Water Stewardship to the SRSMB web site.

Ron indicated that Fisheries Branch of Manitoba Conservation and Water Stewardship is committed to participation in the SRSMB, however their budget has been cut. He would like to work with OCN to continue index fishing and undertake a stocking program in Manitoba. Grand Rapids Hatchery or the Saskatchewan Environment hatchery at Fort Qu'Appelle could be potential egg incubation and fish rearing sites. Grand Rapids Hatchery is currently rearing sturgeon for stocking the Nelson River,

but would incubate eggs and rear fish as space is available. Eggs could also be incubated streamside if an incubation system was constructed.

Action: Marcy will speak to Chris Dunn to determine whether the Fort Qu'Appelle hatchery is a potential site for egg incubation and sturgeon rearing in future.

In spring of 2014 Fisheries Branch and OCN would like to begin by investigating spawning sites and the feasibility of collecting sturgeon eggs from spawners captured in Manitoba. University College of the North has offered to construct egg collection mats. Ron estimates that spawning investigations could be done in combination with index fishing at a cost of approximately \$20,000. The new MOU on sturgeon between Manitoba Hydro and Manitoba Conservation and Water Stewardship includes a commitment of funding from both parties for cooperative research and could possibly be a funding source for this project.

Action: Once the MOU is signed and the implementation committee has been established Shelley and Ron will propose the Saskatchewan River spawning investigations and index fishing be funded under the MOU in 2014.

Index fishing data collected over the recent past from Saskatchewan and Manitoba will be reviewed, analyzed and summarized in a report by North/South Consultants with funding provided by SaskPower and Manitoba Hydro. Up to this point annual data analysis was done separately by each provincial fisheries management agency and due to differences in fishing methodology the assessments from each province are difficult to directly compare. Rob Wallace has checked the Saskatchewan data and, where possible, corrected any errors prior to sending it to North/South.

Action: Ron to send Manitoba index fishing data to Pat Nelson of North/South Consultants for analysis.

7. Ten-Year Management Plan

Discussion centered around how to proceed in drafting a new ten-year management plan. Consensus was to hold one or two facilitated workshops this winter and start by determining the goals and objectives of the SRSMB. It was decided that Don MacDonell of North/South Consultants, who drafted the first ten-year plan, would be a good facilitator since he is familiar with lake sturgeon, the SRSMB and the Saskatchewan River.

8. Report on Species At Risk Act (SARA) review

Shelley reported that the federal review for listing lake sturgeon in the Saskatchewan River as endangered is ongoing. Fisheries & Oceans Canada's SARA group in Winnipeg has completed a recovery potential assessment, public consultations, socio-economic assessment and a regulatory impact analysis, but has not yet sent their recommendation package to Ottawa. It is unclear when

the recommendation will be sent, but once it is sent the process in Ottawa will take at least a year, perhaps two. So, a listing decision is not anticipated until 2015 at the earliest.

Since the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) is due to re-assess lake sturgeon in 2016 it is possible that a listing decision will be deferred until after the re-assessment.

9. Co-chairs

The two-year terms of the current SRSMB co-chairs (Marilynn Kullman – MB non-community co chair; Leonard Morin – SK community chair) are at an end. As determined by the SRSMB terms of reference, for the next two years the co-chairs should be a MB community member and a SK non-community (government or industry) member. Marcy volunteered to be the SK non-community co-chair and was gladly accepted. The board members requested that Diane ask Mary Head of OCN whether she would be willing to be the MB community co-chair.

Action: Diane to ask Mary Head whether she would be a co-chair of the SRSMB until fall of 2015.

10. Next meetings

As discussed in agenda item 7, the next meeting of the SRSMB will be specifically to work on drafting the Ten-year Plan. It will be held at the Kikiwak Inn, in The Pas on January 28, 2014 from 9:00am to 4:00 pm.

Action: Ron will book a room for the meeting at the Kikiwak Inn, in The Pas on January 28, 2013.

If necessary, a second meeting will be held to finish drafting the Ten-year Plan in Prince Albert on February 25, 2014.

Action: Marcy will ask Ron Hlasny of Saskatchewan Environment whether the meeting could be held at their office in Prince Albert.

Action: Marcy will let Don MacDonell know the dates and locations of the two meetings.

11. Closing Prayer -Ray

Summary of Action Items:

- Marcy will speak to Chris Dunn, Fisheries Manager with Saskatchewan Environment to determine whether they have identified a staff member in charge of Species At Risk who might participate in the SRSMB.
- Marcy will contact Chris Dunn of Saskatchewan Environment to determine whether they have identified who will have responsibility for Species At Risk.

- Shelley will post the Manitoba Lake Sturgeon Management Strategy (2012) and, once it is signed, the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Sturgeon between Manitoba Hydro and Manitoba Conservation and Water Stewardship to the SRSMB web site.
- Marcy will speak to Chris Dunn to determine whether the Fort Qu'Appelle hatchery is a potential site for egg incubation and sturgeon rearing in future.
- Once the MOU is signed and the implementation committee has been established Shelley and Ron will propose the Saskatchewan River spawning investigations and index fishing be funded under the MOU in 2014.
- Ron to send Manitoba index fishing data to Pat Nelson of North/South Consultants for analysis.
- Diane to ask Mary Head whether she would be a co-chair of the SRSMB until fall of 2015.
- Ron will book a room for the meeting at the Kikiwak Inn, in The Pas on January 28, 2013.
- Marcy will ask Ron Hlasny of Saskatchewan Environment whether the meeting could be held at their office in Prince Albert.
- Marcy will let Don MacDonell know the dates and locations of the two meetings.