

MINUTES
Saskatchewan River Sturgeon Management Board Spring Meeting
February 24, 2009
Prince Albert, SK - DFO Office, 125 – 32nd Street W
9:30am-3:15pm

Attendees:

Vincent Harper – Fisheries & Oceans Canada (DFO), Habitat Section
Marcy Bast – SaskPower
Reggie Walker – Chemawawin Cree Nation
Floyd George – Chemawawin Cree Nation
Fred Hnytka – DFO, Species At Risk (SAR) Section (guest)
Barry Corbett – Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR) (guest)
Lennard Morin – Cumberland House Fisherman's Coop (Chair)
Robert McAuley – Village of Cumberland House
Joe Fiddler – Metis Association- Cumberland House
Ron Campbell – Manitoba Water Stewardship – Fisheries Branch
Grant McVittie – Manitoba Water Stewardship – Fisheries Branch
Mike Pollock – Saskatchewan Watershed Authority
Shelley Matkowski – Manitoba Hydro (Co-chair)
Murray Koob – Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment
Rob Wallace (science advisor) – Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment

1. Opening Prayer - Lennard

2. Introductions

3. Review Agenda – added Barry Corbett, OMNR sturgeon management planning.

4. Review of Action Items from minutes of meeting on November 19, 2008

Action Item Completed – Lennard spoke to the Ministry of First Nations and Metis Relations to see who could represent them on the board. They indicated that currently they will not be active in the sturgeon board, but may return at a future date.

Action Item Completed – Rob contacted DFO regarding the Recovery Potential Assessment (RPA) process. He provided a presentation (attached) regarding possible means for the board to determine recovery targets for Saskatchewan River population between EB Campbell Dam and Cedar Lake. Three potential sources of information for targets: Saskatchewan and Manitoba historical harvest and index fishing data; Great Lakes workshop on lake sturgeon recovery, 2000; DFO Recovery Potential Assessment, 2008 (currently being revised by DFO).

Shelley spoke to North/South Consultants regarding further work on a recovery target for SRSMB. However since DFO expects to finalize the RPA's in the next few weeks the

Board would be best to wait for that information before proceeding further with our discussion of recovery targets.

Fred Hnytka added detail regarding the DFO RPAs as follows: RPAs for Designatable Units (DU) 1 to 7 are being finalized right now; target date is March 31, 2009. This will include DU2, Saskatchewan River. They are looking at changing some criteria, e.g. going from 99% confidence to something lower & more realistic. This could lower the estimate of adult females required to spawn each year from 1188 to 250. RPAs are not the final word on recovery targets; rather they are DFO Science advice, based on the best available information, to the DFO Species At Risk (SAR) staff. They are based on hypothetical situations, such as rivers with no barriers. DFO SAR staff must take the Science advice and apply it to actual situations, e.g. where there are habitat barriers, to figure out what recovery targets should be for each DU. Consensus from stakeholders and managers has been that the approach used for modeling the RPA for lake sturgeon is good.

Peter Young has been working on how to input traditional knowledge (TK) from Opaskwayak Cree Nation (OCN) elders to the board's discussion of recovery targets.

Action Item: OCN did not apply to the Aboriginal Fund for Species At Risk (AFSAR). Ron has indicated to Peter that Manitoba Water Stewardship (MWS) could fund initial work on TK project concept development. Ron will continue to work with Peter on this.

Discussion regarding difficulty of filling out these funding applications. Fred indicated that DFO is happy to assist with filling in applications. Unfortunately they commonly receive incomplete applications which get rejected.

In the past Lennard has applied to Northern Lights Development Corporation for funding, but has not received anything. Vincent suggested there is also funding available from DFO's Aboriginal Inland Habitat Program.

Action Item Completed – Shelley forwarded presentation on SARA review of sturgeon to Board following the last meeting.

Action Item Completed – Vince has hosted us at his DFO office.

5. Record of Decisions from November 19, 2008 meeting. – Circulated and signed by members who attended that meeting.

6. Membership Updates - Discussion around how many representatives to have from each community and how best to ensure all local groups are represented. SaskPower can fund travel costs of four representatives from Cumberland House.

Management Plan states that each member organization is responsible for its own costs. MWS has been helping out OCN with travel costs to get them started at the board, but

can't take on much more. It has become apparent that representatives don't attend from some organizations because they don't have funding to cover travel costs.

Action Item: Shelley will investigate whether or not Manitoba Hydro might be able to assist with funding travel costs of some representatives from Manitoba communities.

Decision: Maximum number of representatives from each community will be four. Each community will determine which local groups will be represented by these four individuals and who they will be.

Decision: Chemawawin First Nation will have official representation on SRSMB in future.

Action Item: Manitoba Water Stewardship will work with communities in Manitoba over the next few months to try to ensure they identify representatives who will come to Board meetings.

Cumberland House representatives will be: Lennard Morin representing Cumberland House Fishermen's Coop, Robert McAuley representing the Village of Cumberland House, Joe Fiddler representing the Metis Nation, Ray Dussion representing the Cumberland House First Nation.

7. 2009 Activity Plans and Budgets

a) Saskatchewan Environment (SE) – Anticipate \$15,000.00 toward index fishing program as usual. May start earlier than historically, as in 2008. As in 2008 there will be no egg collection, so that there will be a gap in stocking, and consequently a possible gap in size of young fish being caught that would indicate effectiveness of the stocking program. Cumberland House fishermen are providing feedback that they are now catching a lot more 1-2 pound sturgeon in their nets than before stocking began. Manitoba fishermen are also reporting a lot more small sturgeon.

b) SaskPower – As last year will have \$20,000.00 to put toward activities of Board: \$11,000.00 will go toward index fishing if it goes ahead, \$2,000.00 for meeting travel. Some funding will go toward signage for river banks in places like Cumberland House.

Action Item: Marcy will discuss with Manitoba Hydro the possibility of using some funding to contract an assistant for the Board's activities.

Discussion regarding need to investigate other parts of the river in Saskatchewan that are not routinely included in index fishing, to determine occurrence and abundance of sturgeon in those areas.

Action Item: Marcy will discuss with Murray whether there are particular areas where special fishing effort should be funded to investigate places not normally fished in regular index fishing program.

c) Saskatchewan Watershed Authority – Finishing up last year’s project report. Gearing up for this summer on the North, South and mainstem Saskatchewan River down to Tobin Lake to get an idea of how flow modification affects growth and condition of sturgeon. Will tag 60 sturgeon with radio tags to be tracked over the next 5 years to determine movements. Will collect genetic samples to determine genetic characteristics and whether there are genetic bottle necks due to things such as dams.

Action Item: Mike will email 2008 report to Shelley for distribution to Board members.

d) Manitoba Water Stewardship – Will continue to monitor populations between Saskatchewan border and Cedar Lake by index fishing as in previous years. Will explore areas closer to Cedar Lake with assistance from Chemawawin & Moose Lake. Will be pursuing participation on SRSMB from Moose Lake. Will fund OCN’s TK project concept development. Need to standardize methods for investigations to assess stocked sturgeon in MB & SK. If spawn will be collected by the Board in future there may be an opportunity for MB Fisheries Branch to collect some because two spawning locations have been identified near The Pas where eggs could be collected.

Discussion regarding past Board decision to target egg collection outside the recovery area (Tobin Lake to date) and not disrupt natural reproduction in the recovery area.

e) Manitoba Hydro – Focus for 2009 will be on development and production of educational materials. Will try to use preliminary material developed by MWS to produce a transportable display (cost estimate \$7,000.00). Posters and pamphlets recently produced by Nelson River Sturgeon Board were passed around. SRSMB has not updated our posters and pamphlets for about five years, so Shelley will have someone do this and print new copies to be available to Board members to raise SRSMB profile and awareness about sturgeon in communities. Can also contribute funding for signage being developed by SaskPower for river banks in communities

f) DFO Habitat– Report of Aquatic Effects Assessment study below EB Campbell Dam (done by DFO Science) has been finalized and will be presented to DFO Habitat later this week. Recommendations regarding flow regime will come from that. Continue to work with SWA and SE on issue of minimum flow and operations at the dam and fishway on the Torch River at outlet of Candle Lake. Issues committee with SaskPower and provincial ministries has been focusing efforts at EB Campbell Dam over the past year. Recently contracted North/South consultants to do studies on issues related to the dam, e.g. stranding, habitat in Tobin Lake, water quality, etc.

g) Cumberland House – Discussion regarding duty to consult with First Nations and Metis regarding things such as mineral exploration and projects that could infringe upon rights such as fishing. Consultation is not just a letter or a community meeting. Saskatchewan government is drafting policy on duty to consult. Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations has reviewed drafts to date.

Action Item: SaskPower and Manitoba Hydro representatives will determine whether the corporations have a duty to consult when water flow regulation may infringe upon First Nations and Metis fishing rights.

Discussion regarding possibility of going into places like Sturgeon Lake to investigate whether there are any sturgeon there. This will depend on available funding for index fishing. See previous action item on this issue.

Discussion regarding different index fishing techniques in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. There are pros and cons related to both.

Cumberland House will continue to participate in SE index fishing in 2009 as in previous years. Will also apply to Northern Lights Development Corporation again for additional funding to extend index fishing period.

8. Barry Corbett – Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources – Barry is on a one-year special assignment to develop a sturgeon management plan or strategy for the province of Ontario. Will look at harvesting and habitat, current management across the province, information collection methods, where changes might be made, etc. This is because of the new high priority in Ontario for renewable energy including hydroelectric development, as well as the new Species at Risk Act in Ontario and the review of lake sturgeon for listing under the Species At Risk Act (Canada). Trying to learn from other jurisdictions to see what they are doing, therefore visiting SRSMB. Studying SRSMB and Nelson River Sturgeon Board to see if similar boards may be appropriate in some parts of Ontario. Appreciate opportunity to visit SRSMB.

9. Nelson River Sturgeon Board (NRSB) 2009 Activities update - Shelley – The NRSB is planning on conducting spawn collection at the confluence of Landing River and Nelson River as usual. Will also conduct reconnaissance camp looking for spawners further upstream on the Nelson River at Bladder Rapids. Funding was accessed from Habitat Stewardship Program (HSP) and Aboriginal Funds for Species At Risk (AFSAR) again and will be used for educational programs in communities as well as some field research. Have hired someone from one of the communities to coordinate this.

A well water quality problem (high levels of carbon dioxide) at Grand Rapids Hatchery this winter resulted in damage to gills of the young sturgeon at the hatchery. These were a subset of the fish produced from eggs collected at the Winnipeg River and the Landing River in 2008. More than half the 2008 sturgeon have died and they expect to lose almost all of them because of the irreversible damage. This is unfortunate because less than 500 of the Landing River eggs sent to the hatchery by NRSB hatched in 2008 due to high temperatures during transport. The loss of the Winnipeg River fish is not as significant since over 20,000 fingerlings were produced from the Winnipeg River eggs in 2008. Most were stocked out in fall as part of research studies on the Winnipeg River, or stock enhancement on the Assiniboine River; only 1,000 were kept at the hatchery, specifically to test the overwinter rearing system. Work is currently underway to determine how best to upgrade the well water treatment system to alleviate the problem.

10. Fred Hnytka - update on review of lake sturgeon for listing under the Species At Risk Act (SARA) – A consultation workbook was issued a year ago to find out who should be consulted on listing of lake sturgeon under SARA. This was followed up through direct calling to First Nations and other stakeholders to find out whether they responded, and if not then why not. Now have a list of those to be consulted across Canada and are contacting individual communities and speaking to chiefs and councils, fishers, etc. This is currently being done in Ontario and will continue westward. Don't know when the Governor in Council (Federal cabinet) will make the decision on whether to list lake sturgeon under SARA.

DFO SAR is looking at starting to develop a SARA Recovery Strategy because it would be useful to clarify possible implications for stakeholders. Would like to have it completed before the listing decision. Fred has been involved in development of an Alberta recovery strategy for lake sturgeon under the Provincial species at risk legislation. He would like to assimilate the Alberta recovery strategy into a Canada-wide recovery strategy. If lake sturgeon is listed under SARA there is a one year deadline for developing a recovery strategy, which is not enough time, so it is good to start before the listing decision. DFO wants to start initial discussions on recovery planning with SRSMB and some First Nations regarding DU2 (Saskatchewan River). They want to do the same for the Nelson River populations. Both before end of March, if possible.

There are three possible SARA listing decision outcomes:

1. list the species under SARA as recommended by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) (endangered for Saskatchewan River lake sturgeon);
2. don't list the species (must provide reasons), and
3. send the status assessment back to COSEWIC for further work (more work is needed).

Number 3 is not likely. Could be that the decision will be number 2, not to list, as was done with white sturgeon on the lower Fraser River because socio-economic impacts would be too great and recovery actions were already under way. DFO can still do recovery planning if species are not listed.

Timelines are uncertain; listing decision date is unknown. Recovery planning was held up earlier by the need to develop Recovery Potential Assessments. Those will be done soon. Need to also do socio-economic assessment for the Regulatory Impact Analysis Statement. Andreas Blouw is working on consultations for DFO.

Listing will not necessarily mean significantly more funding will be available. Programs such as Habitat Stewardship Program and Aboriginal Funds for Species At Risk are already accessible because sturgeon has been assessed as endangered by COSEWIC. SRSMB members could get assistance from DFO in filling out applications for these funds.

Saskatchewan River recovery strategy will need to include all jurisdictions, from Alberta through to Manitoba. There could be different components under that strategy such as the Alberta recovery strategy currently being drafted and perhaps an SRSMB recovery component as well.

11. Next meeting will be Wednesday, November 18th, 2009 in The Pas, MB.

Shelley's term as co-chair will end after the next meeting. According to our TOR the replacement should be from government or industry in Saskatchewan. Would those Board members please consider whether they would be willing to take a turn as co-chair.

12. Closing prayer - Rob

13. Adjourned at 3:15