

Saskatchewan River Sturgeon Management Board

November 16, 2004

Prince Albert, SK

Board members in attendance:

Ron Campbell (co-chair) – Manitoba Water Stewardship (roncampbel@gov.mb.ca)
Marcy Bast – SaskPower (mbast@saskpower.com, replacing Erin Flory)
Shelley Matkowski – Manitoba Hydro (smatkowski@hydro.mb.ca, replacing Roy Bukowsky)
Murray Koob – Sask Environment (mkoob@serm.gov.sk.ca, replacing Lyle Wallin)
Vincent Harper – Fisheries & Oceans (harperv@dfo-mpo.gc.ca)
Franklin Carriere – Saskatchewan Northern Affairs (fcarriere@sna.gov.sk.ca)

Advisors / observers:

Rob Wallace – Sask Environment (rwallace@serm.gov.sk.ca)
Naomi Carriere – c/o SaskPower (nbc132@mail.usask.ca)

1. Opening prayer – Franklin Carriere.
2. Introductions – Several new reps introduced themselves. Robert McGillvary is back at work at OCN but was unavailable, and John Carriere was at camp and unable to travel from Cumberland House.
3. Minutes from March 2004 were given verbally and accepted.
4. The agenda was accepted, with minor changes in the order of several items.
5. Three new reps were welcomed.
6. Previous action items were reviewed and 2004 activities were outlined. Items that need action are bulleted:
 - New reps should send letters of authorization from their agency or community to Ron.
 - Terms of reference – Marcy has been with SaskPower only a week and will have to check on the work done by Erin Flory before she left on leave-of-absence. Ron noted that co-chairs consist of a community member and a non-community member, and John Carriere's term expires in spring 2005.

Educational video – Marcy reports that Debbie Nielsen needs more details from the Board, especially the intended audience. SaskPower has a complex process for in-house production or can fund another group once the project is outlined (see minutes from March 2004). The 5 major themes in the ten-year plan should be covered in any video. Murray noted that SE experience was that videos about fish projects had short life-spans after initial showings.

The use of existing posters and brochures were discussed. Posters have been displayed in the Cumberland House / The Pas region, with some still available. Brochures have been distributed widely but good numbers remain. Brochures require some editing before any re-printing, such as

missing groups (like SE and OCN Resources), changes in contact personnel, and perhaps content.

Naomi noted that programs like habitat stewardship and species-at-risk (for piping plovers and burrowing owls) have good examples of communication, such as games for students to play. Marcy noted that Cows and Fish had similar good ideas.

- Education – Marcy, Shelley, and others will ask for advice from communication experts in their agencies.

Manitoba index netting – Ron reported that the program was very similar to 2003: same 4 fishers, same areas, fishing with 5.5 to 12-inch nets, same season June 1 to 15. Catches were better than usual: 112 sturgeon including 4 recaptured fish (1 died and no recaps from SK tagging). Catches were high in 5.5” mesh but only 2 fish in 12” mesh. Sizes ranged from 1 to 23 kg, and from 44 to 147 cm (see handout). Ron noted that twice as many fish were caught in 2004 as other years (29 to 48 fish up to 2003), primarily due to efforts by one fisher.

Saskatchewan index fishing – Rob gave a slide show of 1994 to 2004 results for both SK and MB: SK sturgeon are notably larger than MB fish (average 110 cm & 11 kg compared to 83 cm & 5 kg) because spawning occurs in SK and young fish drift downstream into MB. SK catches have declined by half since 1999, to only 137 in 2004. Rob explained that estimates should be more reliable for medium/large sturgeon (over 18 pounds) since smaller ones are tricky to catch. Estimates based on combined SK & MB tagging have changed as data are added each year: the population abundance averaged 1,297 for 1995-2000 data, about 1,316 for 1995-2001, and now 1,042 for 1995-2004. Abundance may be declining or stable, but not increasing. Annual survival rates have been 89 to 93 %, as expected for sturgeon. Lyle Wallin and Rob had put a cap on catches from some SK areas in 2004 (with some success) and had project workers fish one upstream site, but Rob wants catches from more of the population range.

- SK fishing – Rob will review details of mark-recapture estimates further. If necessary, Murray and Rob will consider more changes in seasons, areas, and payments.

Saskatchewan spawning 2004 – Murray showed slides of activities at Nipawin in June, involving 7 people from SE and Cumberland House. Catches of 46 sturgeon included 16 females (up to 69 pounds). There were some changes from 2003: fewer fish were held over and were tethered rather than penned; eggs were checked for readiness (by excision, boiling, and microscopic exam of the nucleus); a new VetBond glue was used on sutures and worked well; several blood samples were tested for hormone levels (similar to recent studies of white sturgeon). SE had checked eggs in 1999 and 2000, and then skipped this step in 2003 and got eggs from only 2 of 4 females. In 2004, Ovaprim injections worked on all 3 females, but 2 of them spawned their eggs overnight into the river. Most of 200,000+ eggs remaining did poorly at Fort Qu’Appelle hatchery, with a small lot of 25,000 eggs providing most of the fry. In July, a problem with gas-bubbles in ground-water killed about 2,500 fry. In September, about 4,500 fingerlings were stocked below EBCampbell and near Cumberland House. Questions about eggs revealed that some years have good hatch (like 1999) and some very poor (like 2000 and 2004), which Manitoba has also observed. Questions about marking showed that tetracycline and other

chemicals have not worked for SK fry, although several methods work for SK & MB fingerlings (like coded-wire tags or implanted elastomers).

Manitoba juveniles – Ron fished for 2 weeks in October 2004: 3 sites where commercial fishers catch small sturgeon in fall and 3 where adult sturgeon were caught in June. Gear was 2 to 5-inch mesh nets and ‘minnow traps’. Catches comprised 138 fish, mostly walleye & sauger & white suckers. The one sturgeon caught was 28 cm long and 0.1 kg. Habitat data was collected for each site, which can be added to a similar study in 2000 by North/South consultants. Ron recommended that limited funds would be better used for other purposes, such as education of resource users. There was some discussion of juvenile surveys: Shelley reported that some surveys work (such as the lower Nelson) and use acoustic tags to track stocked sturgeon; stocking success could be checked at 4 sites in MB known to have juveniles (based on 3 different studies) since marked sturgeon will be 5 to 6 years old in 2005; Rob commented that areas with juvenile habitat might be predictable from models of river flows & depths.

Schools program – Naomi presented the slide-show which she designed for Grade 4 while working for SaskPower. Topics included the range of sturgeon in Saskatchewan, their life history, terms for body parts (like “whiskers”), communication by vision and chemical cues, reproduction and feeding, index fishing by communities, and trends in Sask River sturgeon. Board members were pleased with the show, but Naomi would like any comments that would improve it. Marcy noted that SaskPower has funding for school aquariums to over-winter fish. Manitoba Hydro produced an instruction book for schools some years ago that everyone uses. Murray noted that SE staff who ran the school program are gone and no one picks up sturgeon to return them to the river. Shelley noted that Manitoba returns all sturgeon to the original river.

SaskPower communication – This topic has been covered earlier today.

Manitoba hatchery 2004 – Shelley reported on their camp at the Landing River near Nelson River. Two females were held in tanks and then tethered until water temperatures were suitable, but fertilized eggs did not hatch (presumably due to stress of holding). Staff moved to the Weir River downstream on the Nelson and caught 1 mature female and several males. About 80% of these eggs hatched to provide 4,000 fry in early July, about a month later than usual. Grand Rapids hatchery cannot heat water so fingerlings were only 1/2 the usual size by September. About 1,200 fingerlings went into the Jenpeg facility and 100 went into school aquariums. Jenpeg displayed sturgeon for public tours and 400 students before releasing the fish in October.

Keewatin Community College (KCC) – Shelley talked about the proposal for student involvement in small-scale rearing with live food. KCC has no room for this and suitable sites are some distance, so students may have to visit Grand Rapids to get experience. Manitoba Hydro’s 5-year funding for Grand Rapids expires in March 2005. Projects by KCC and related work by Steve Peake depend on a renewal of funding.

Species at risk – Shelley reported that the federal COSEWIC review of lake sturgeon will be delayed past May 2005. If the recommended status of western populations as “threatened” is eventually approved, there are implications for fishing & habitat and a legal requirement for a Recovery Plan.

- Shelley will ask a suitable federal representative to describe the species-at-risk process and implications to the next Board meeting in spring 2005.

Habitat assessment – Vincent Harper described several activities below EBCampbell power-station by DFO and SaskPower, with some input from SE. A study of “instream flow needs” for 6 km downstream has begun and will be modeled by Dr. Bill Franzin and Rick Courtney of DFO. An interim requirement for a minimum of 75 cms discharge has been implemented. Discussions about re-working the rocks at the EBCampbell tailrace to reduce stranding of fish are underway.

7. and 8. Budgets and Activities for 2005 were discussed (see next page). A number of reps requested that the budget shows that annual approval is required for projects, even established ones.

9. Other topics – Rob showed a copy of a magazine article on the egg collection and hatching operations in Saskatchewan in 2003, complete with pictures of Howard McKenzie & Lennard Morin (project workers at Cumberland House), Murray Koob, Naomi Carriere, and others. He will get copies of “Prairies North” (Fall 2004) for the people in the article.

10. Next meeting scheduled for The Pas on April 5, 2005.

11. Closing prayer – Franklin Carriere.

Minutes by Rob Wallace, December 2004

Table 1: SRSMB funding available for 2005. **Bolded** funding is committed at this time, but may change. All budgets require approval each year.

Agency	Carry-over from 2004	Budget available for 2005	Comments
MB Hydro	\$ 10,000.	\$ 20,000.	Carry-over in MB ConsFund
SaskPower		\$ 20,000.	Schools & education
MB Conservation	\$ 3,000?	\$ 11,000.	MB spring index fishing
SK Environment		\$ 15,000.	SK spring index fishing
SK Northern Affairs		\$ 10,000.	SK fall index fishing (under review)
SK FWDFund		\$ 29,000.	SK eggs & hatchery
DFO		\$ 0.	In-kind only
Total Available	\$ 13,000.	\$ 105,000.	
Total Committed	\$ 3,000?	\$ 40,000.	

Table 2: SRSMB activities for 2005 and Board ranking for importance. **Bolded** funding is committed at this time, but may change. All budgets require approval each year.

Rank	Activity	Budget Needed	Source	Comments
1	MB Index Fishery (spring)	\$ 11,000.	MB ConsFund	Budget not known until June.
1	SK Index Fishery (spring)	\$ 15,000.	SK Env	Budget known by April.
1	SK Index Fishery (fall)	\$ 10,000.	SK N.Affairs	Requires proposal to SNA.
2	SK sturgeon in schools	\$ 7,000.	SaskPower	Requires fingerlings.
2	SK eggs & hatchery	\$ 29,000.	SK FWDFund	Requires proposal; budget known by April.
3	Education in communities.	\$ 13,000.	SaskPower	Proposal needs discussions with communities.
4	Community expenses	\$ 2,000.	SaskPower and MB Hydro	Budget divided according to community.
...	Feeding and marking trials by KCC	\$ 20,000.	MB Hydro	Funding of Grand Rapids hatchery is under review.
	Total budget	\$ 107,000.		