

Saskatchewan River Sturgeon Management Board
November 24, 2005 at Nipawin, SK

Board members in attendance:

Ron Campbell (co-chair) - Manitoba Water Stewardship
John Carriere (co-chair) - Cumberland House
Marcy Bast - SaskPower
Vincent Harper - Fisheries & Oceans
Murray Koob - Sask Environment
Shelley Matkowski - Manitoba Hydro
Allen Young - Sask Watershed Authority (new member, replacing Dwayne Rowlett)
Lennard Morin - Cumberland House Fishermen's Co-operative (new member)
Franklin Carriere - SK Northern Affairs (alternate today for Dennis Strom)

Advisors / observers:

Andries Blouw - Fisheries & Oceans (blouwa@dfo-mpo.gc.ca)
Fred Hnytko - Fisheries & Oceans (hnytkaf@dfo-mpo.gc.ca)
Rob Wallace - Sask Environment

1. Opening prayer by Lennard Morin.

2. Introductions: Members & observers introduced themselves.

3. Minutes from April 2005 meeting in The Pas were distributed and corrected: Budgets on page 4 (i) \$11,000 for index fishing was from Manitoba Water Stewardship (not Manitoba Hydro), and (ii) Feeding trials received \$20,000 from Manitoba Hydro.

DECISION: A 'Record of Decisions' of each meeting will be recorded and held by a co-chair for signing by members before or at the following meeting.

4. The agenda was accepted, after the addition of Gary Jamieson to explain the process of SaskPower compensation payments.

5. Membership: New reps were introduced and provided letters from their group or agency. There was a brief discussion about the number of members for each community, and the need for reps from Opaskwayak community.

DECISION: The Board accepted new members Lennard Morin for Cumberland House Commercial Fishermen's Coop and Al Young for Sask Watershed Authority.

6. Minutes of the April 2005 meeting were accepted by consensus.

7. Species at risk update by Andries: DFO Central & Arctic includes ON, MB, SK, AB and NT and NU; there are about 12 fish species under review, including sturgeon;

— Lake Sturgeon: initial assessment in May 2005 was ‘Endangered’ in western Canada; Minister’s decision could be a year or so later; work in ON has been done by Conservation Authorities & First Nations, and work in MB & AB by DFO staff & students.

Fred and Andries outlined several possible funds for SARA work:

- 1) IRF (Interdepartmental Funding Program?): for federal departments except DFO, Environment Canada, or Parks Canada; covers federal lands and fish habitat and SARA surveys;
- 2) HSP (Habitat Stewardship Program): for protection of habitat, mitigation of impacts, recovery; needs partner with matching funds or in-kind work; DFO works with Environment Canada on proposals; rules are different in MB/SK/AB than ON; recent deadline was extended to Nov 27th;
- 3) ESRF (Endangered Species Recovery Fund): for high-priority needs, including practical and applied research; available to NGOs and run by World Wildlife Fund;
- 4) AHIP (Aboriginal Habitat Inland Program?): provides framework for training aboriginal people (technicians, biologists, etc);
- 5) CBI (Capacity Building Initiative): training for aboriginal people for data management, species diversity, etc; scientific studies and ATK (aboriginal traditional knowledge) must be put together in the SARA process;

Members had several comments & questions about these programs. Members should ask Fred or Andries for details.

ACTION: Andries will obtain & send out a spreadsheet of programs for information.

Fred announced a workshop for Jan/Feb 2006 in Winnipeg and will invite a few reps from western provinces & agencies & stakeholders (such as SRSMB) to attend. John said that 3 reps of MB fishermen (Moose Lake, The Pas, & Cormorant Lake) are willing to work with CHCF on sturgeon issues.

Fred expects COSEWIC will finalize its assessment in April 2006, and then the federal Minister’s response by August 2006.

8. EBCampbell study: Vincent described several projects in the spillway & below the dam:

- 1) Spill at EBCampbell dam in 2005 included recovery of live sturgeon from pools by crew of John Carriere for SaskPower. About 23 sturgeon were caught and released downstream, some with previous index-fishing tags & others with new tags added. Debbie Nielsen passed this data along to Rob Wallace for the fall 2005 analysis.

2) Instream-flow needs (IFN) study is looking at the effects of several flow rates on fish habitat for 6 or more fish species. DFO researchers Bill Franzin, Doug Watkinson, etc were in the field both spring & summer of 2005. DFO held a workshop in P.A. earlier in November with community reps & provincial biologists to look at habitat suitability curves. John & Marcy discussed the possibility of 'resculpturing' the river bed for better suitability.

9. Compensation by Gary Jamieson: This program compensates for impacts of 'abnormal fluctuations' on fishermen and trappers. It was set up in 1982 and changed in 1995, and covers commercial fishing and index fishing by crews with permits. River flows were naturally high in 2005 on both Churchill River and Sask River so SaskPower and SWA were forced to respond with spills. Community reps such as Lennard noted that lots of fishers quit applying since the program was too restrictive recently, yet the problems and dangers for people continue. Gary said about 1/2 of applications are approved, and lack of maintenance sometimes causes rejection.

10. MB index fishing by Ron: work ran June 1 to 15, in four sections from border to Cedar Lake, crews were paid salary & for fuel & nets & sideline, then Ron & staff tagged daily. Problems with dirty water from high flows forced crews to move nets more in 2005.

11. SK index fishing by Lennard: started June 15 and ended August 15; 7 crews fished of 15 signed up; used 10" and 12" nets & hooks; fished from Torch River to border; payments higher than 2004 so season was shorter; high water caused higher catches in some areas and lots more small sturgeon (35 to 50 cm long, maybe from Tobin Lake or stocking since 1999); floods also caused loss of nets and smelly water and more dead sturgeon in 2005; no fishing during 11 days of flood itself. Recaptured fish included one yellow T-bar # 3638 that SK used in 1984 according to Rob. John said index fishers were unhappy with \$5/pound and high costs of gas & nets and low returns for their effort; he asked SE director Hugh Hunt for more funds but no answer yet.

Analysis of SK & MB abundance by Rob; catches in 2005 were higher than most years, total of 381 sturgeon; funding by MWS, SaskPower, SNA, and SE; catches for 1994 to 2005 show sturgeon are longer and heavier in SK than MB (average 40 inches & 24 pounds versus 33 inches & 11 pounds); results up to 2000 & 2001 showed an average abundance of 1,300 medium & large sturgeon (over 18 pounds); now recent results up to 2004 & 2005 show about 1,000 of this size; Rob said there is no sign of increasing numbers over time and noted that Walt Lysack (MB Fisheries) was convinced a few years ago that there is a decline; mortality is about 89 to 93% per year which is moderately high for sturgeon.

ACTION: Dwayne asked if SK fish were larger due to larger nets & hooks ... Rob will check.

Lennard saw about 30 or more sturgeon under 5 pounds in 2005; Rob's data shows about 15 of them (about 5% of 300 caught) but he did not actually see the fish; Shelley noted that consultants on the Nelson River saw lots of small sturgeon during high water so maybe they move more.

John noted (i) one study showed that ages of tagged sturgeon under-estimated their true growth, with finrays off 30% or so, and (ii) ages of Pallid Sturgeon from hatchery showed only 28% were right, and 2nd or 3rd reader agreed only 25% of ages; he has copies of these articles.

John said that black-fly control in Sask River should stop since they were food for sturgeon. Now the Torch River is being treated and Choiceland area has been sprayed. Murray explained that Ag & Food plans to spray North Sask River using B-T-i for 30 km downstream of P.A. SE approved this plan and anyone with questions should ask Murray or Vincent.

12. SK eggs by Murray: 3rd year at Nipawin dam, chosen so that eggs are coming from outside the problem area; SaskPower called him when water temperatures hit 14C on June 7; Lennard & Howard McKenize fished 5 days then Greg Mitchell (Fish Culture Station) and crew showed up; catch was 40 sturgeon (17 females and 23 males); 3 females were held over, checked for egg readiness, and injected with Ovaprim June 10 to 15th: 1st female wrapped up in tether and lost most eggs; then high water in river caused problems for camp and dropped temps about 5C; 2nd female escaped from tether; and 3rd female gave eggs but Greg judged them “poor” and did not hatch at all.

Murray reviewed some of the troubles with eggs: silt at Grand Rapids killed all fry in 2000; bad water at FCS killed 95% of fry in 2003; no eggs hatched in 2005. Plans for 2006 are to start earlier and go later. Another problem is fry cannot be marked reliably according to Rob; many fingerlings have been marked but all methods have problems so far. Murray notes that spawning females cannot be seen in deep, silty water and need surgery to check on their eggs. John says elders report spawning in Amisk, Wolf River, Sturgeon, “Waterfalls Lake”, and Namew; Franklin agreed to go out with any crew.

— MB eggs by Shelley: Nelson River only 2 females and not ready so no eggs in 2005; Nelson Board plans to try again in 2006.

13. Other 2006 activities:

— Ten Year Plan by Shelley: plan has 2 goals due by 2007 (1) stabilize population, and (2) set population targets. Shelley handed out 6 copies of the 2002 plan to new reps.

Members discussed this report, but most new reps were unfamiliar with it. The report was the result of North/South consultants working with reps and writing up Board goals & objectives in December 2002.

DECISION: Everyone should plan to review SRSMB progress to date, especially these 2 items.

The Board needs a repository for reports, minutes, website, etc to maintain its plans, goals, and progress and show interested groups and agencies. Manitoba Hydro and SaskPower will fund it. John noted that some research / reports from communities (such as work by Ann Acco) might not be known. Andries noted that the 10-year plan needs to be shortened for public viewing.

DECISION: Everyone should send lists, contact names, etc for Sask River reports, minutes, posters, etc to Shelley. She & Marcy & Andries will get started on a website.

— Conservation Funding by Ron: this MB committee asked for a prognosis from the SRSMB: what is progress? plans for future?

Shelley noted that most funding is for short-term projects, but SRSMB and index fishing is long-term so maybe other funding is needed.

ACTION: Franklin Carriere agreed that SNA is also concerned about long-term funding and needs a letter to their Minister from Lennard or John to support continued funding.

— ‘Sturgeon in Schools’ by Marcy: There are no sturgeon fingerlings for SK schools in 2006. Some schools were not interested in 2005 so only Saskatoon schools were included; maybe northern schools do not see this as high priority. SaskPower has funds but too few staff to run it.

John noted that there was only 1 student at the end in some schools. Al noted it was hard to get teachers to sign up but it worked if there was a “science package” of information and only 2 trips (delivery & release). Shelley noted MB Hydro has a tank & display for schools. Rob noted SE had looked into 2 concerns (effects of stocking on genetics and diseases) but found no answers.

— Portable display by Ron: plan is for display at trade-shows, schools, etc; basic cost will be about \$6,000. Members had questions on storage, ease of handling, benefits of one large board or several small ones, etc. Ron & Shelley & Marcy wanted the display to cover only the SRSMB.

DECISION: Ron and MWS staff will do a display for SRSMB, after circulating its content to Board members for review, and Manitoba Hydro and SaskPower will fund it.

14. Budgets in 2005 and 2006:

1) Manitoba Hydro by Shelley: little was spent in 2005, only feeding & marking trials by Steve Peake and feed for Whiteshell Hatchery sturgeon; Grand Rapids Hatchery will be funded in 2006, including projects and visits by Resource Management students of ‘University College of the North’; funding is available for a display and website development done before March 31st;

2) SaskPower by Marcy: spent \$7,000 in 2005 on ‘Sturgeon in Schools’ and \$5,000 on index fishing; \$15,000 is available for 2006.

3) SWA by Dwayne and Al: funding in 2005 was only for their Board rep to travel for meetings; Al spent a minor amount on ‘Sturgeon in Schools’ in SK for 2005; Al recently applied for 2006 funding by federal Habitat Stewardship Program (about \$40,000 requested?) and by SK FWDF (for a 2+ year project on the Torch River).

4) SE by Murray: spent \$15,000 on index fishing in 2005; plans for \$15,000 for same in 2006 but unconfirmed until budgets are out; FWDF had \$29,000 for eggs but most was not spent since students & feed were not needed.

5) DFO by Vincent: most funding in 2005 was for separate habitat projects by researchers; Fred noted funds for SARA should be available in 2006, maybe some for SRSMB; Andries noted aboriginal communications & involvement are part of SARA process.

Rob noted that habitat assessment is part of ten-year plan so DFO studies should be recognized; Marcy & Vincent both want results of studies before any public discussion.

6) SNA by Franklin: funded index fishing by Cumberland House people in 2005; John or Lennard will request funding for 2006; Fred noted INAC would also fund index fishing.

7) MWS by Ron: spent \$12,000 on index fishing in 2005 and \$4,000 remains in this fund; expects \$12,000 or so for 2006 but not confirmed yet.

— Dwayne suggested that Board apply for funds from SARA, HSP, etc programs; Andries agreed that SRSMB should be rated 'high'; Shelley noted that projects need staff to administer funds and progress reports, and AI will check if SWA staff can assist; Fred noted DFO hires consultants to run workshops, take minutes, etc.

15. Other issues:

- Ron is done his term, and will be replaced by Grant McVittie (MWS The Pas);
- OCN rep: John says Robert McGillivray is available and willing;
- OCFC rep could be Irwin Constant.

DECISION: Ron and John will ask OCN and OCFC to confirm their reps for next meeting.

DECISION: Vincent nominated Marcy as co-chair, Dwayne seconded, & agreed by consensus.

DECISION: Revisions of 'Terms of Reference' from Marcy & Shelley & Murray were accepted and approved. Members will sign the final version at next meeting.

16. Next meeting will be 2006 March 15 in Prince Albert (McIntosh Mall, Room 3.1)

17. Closing Prayer by Lennard.

18. Adjourned at 4:30 pm.

Notes by Rob Wallace, 2006 March 14