

Saskatchewan River



Sturgeon
Management
Board

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Sturgeon Management Board



Saskatchewan River Sturgeon

What is the SRSMB?

It is a group of stakeholders working together with communities to prevent further decline of the Saskatchewan River lake sturgeon population and to develop and coordinate a recovery plan.

Who makes up the SRSMB?

It is made up of representatives from the following organizations:

- Cumberland House Cree Nation
- Cumberland House Fishermen's Co-op
- Fisheries and Oceans Canada
- Manitoba Hydro
- Manitoba Water Stewardship, Fisheries Branch
- Opaskwayak Commercial Fishermen's Co-op Association
- Saskatchewan Northern Affairs
- SaskPower
- Saskatchewan Watershed Authority

Role

To advise on sturgeon management (to the governments of Canada, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and First Nations) for the Saskatchewan River between E.B. Campbell and Grand Rapids dam.

The board may make recommendations on the following matters:

- Provincial harvest levels (sport, commercial, and domestic)
- Aboriginal domestic harvest
- Population monitoring
- Habitat assessment and enhancement
- Fish culture activities
- Community education
- Water management with respect to sturgeon requirements
- Research

Management Board (SRSMB)

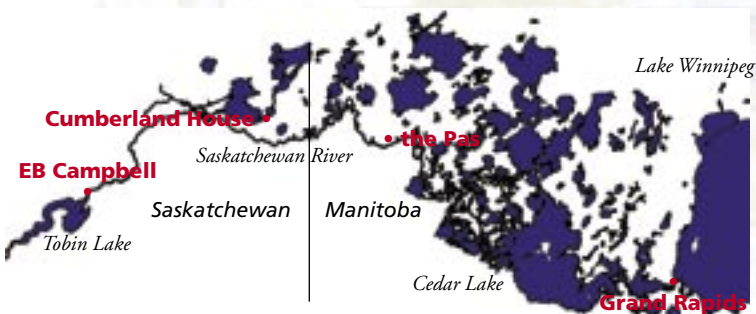
Decisions

All board decisions are made by consensus between all members.

Howard McKenzie



Joe Fiddler



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Lake Sturgeon

Lake sturgeon is a fish species with origins dating back over 100 million years.

It is the largest freshwater fish in Canada, reaching lengths of over 2 m and weights in excess of 100 kg.

Life History

Sturgeon possess a number of life history characteristics that make them unique:

- Longevity – they can live to over 100 years.
- Maturity – females do not reach sexual maturity until 20-25 years of age and males mature at 15 years of age.
- Spawning frequency – while most fish spawn every year after reaching sexual maturity, individual female sturgeon only reproduce once every 4-7 years and males once every 2-3 years. Sturgeon spawn very sporadically which also contributes to the dwindling populations.

Lake sturgeon have been an important component of aboriginal culture and diet for centuries.

The unique life history traits of lake sturgeon are problematic in the face of exploitation and habitat change.



Because reproduction of individual sturgeon is so infrequent it takes decades if not centuries for populations to rebound from over-exploitation and habitat impacts. Sturgeon also have specific habitat requirements that must be met for successful reproduction to occur.



Like elsewhere in North America, the number of sturgeon in the Saskatchewan River has been decreasing over the past century and is now at a dangerously low level.

The Saskatchewan River Sturgeon Management Board is working to reverse the trend of decreasing sturgeon abundance in the Saskatchewan River and has designed a ten-year Management Plan to help facilitate recovery of the stock.

Saskatchewan River

Lake sturgeon have always been an important resource for people living along the lower Saskatchewan River.

Sturgeon not only provide a traditional food source, but also supported a commercial fishery for over 85 years. Over harvesting and habitat changes (resulting from municipal and industrial water use, irrigation and hydroelectric development) have caused a drastic reduction in sturgeon populations in the lower Saskatchewan River during the latter half of the 20th century.



Howard McKenzie, Joe Fidler, Greig Mitchell

Monitoring

The Saskatchewan River Sturgeon Management Board has undertaken an index fishing program since 1996 to monitor the number of sturgeon in the Saskatchewan River.

The program has been conducted by former commercial fishermen in both Saskatchewan and Manitoba. The number of tagged and recaptured sturgeon provides an estimate of the sturgeon population in the river.

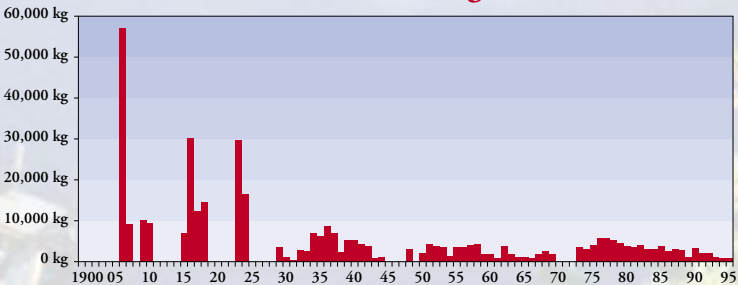
Recent data suggests that the population may only be approximately 1300 fish that are 8 kg or more in weight. A recent study of the domestic harvest indicates that a significant number of sturgeon are still being harvested from the river.



It is clear that the population is dangerously low and needs attention.

The SRSMB has developed a Ten-year Management Plan for recovery of the lake sturgeon population in the Saskatchewan River. Monitoring of the adult sturgeon population, the domestic harvest, and abundance of young sturgeon are key components of the Management Plan.

Saskatchewan River Commercial Lake Sturgeon Harvest



Ten-Year Management Plan

Ten-Year Management Plan

The SRSMB has developed a Ten-Year Management Plan for addressing the decline of lake sturgeon stocks in the lower Saskatchewan River.

Components of the Plan include:

Monitoring:

- **Adult Population** – fishing to mark and recapture fish to estimate sturgeon numbers.
- **Domestic harvest**
 - to determine unnatural mortality rates.
- **Number of young fish**
 - to determine reproductive success.

Stocking:

The Board is establishing a program to raise young sturgeon in small local hatcheries and release them into the Saskatchewan River.

Increase Survival:

The Board is encouraging domestic fishermen to harvest sustainably and is examining ways of reducing illegal harvests.

Habitat Assessment and Enhancement:

The Board plans to assess habitat suitability and look at ways to enhance habitat for sturgeon production.

Education and Communication:

The Board wants to inform local stakeholders of their efforts, foster interest in lake sturgeon, and encourage voluntary harvest reductions.

The Ultimate Goal:

To have a self-sustaining lake sturgeon population in the Saskatchewan River that will meet the needs of local aboriginal people into the future.



Stocking Sturgeon



A component of the Saskatchewan River Sturgeon Management Board (SRSMB) Ten-Year Management Plan is to supplement the existing population by stocking.

Hatchery Approach

The SRSMB has been collecting eggs from mature female sturgeon in the Saskatchewan River during spring spawning. The sturgeon are raised in the Grand Rapids and Fort Qu'Appelle hatcheries and school aquaria before being released into the Saskatchewan River in the fall.

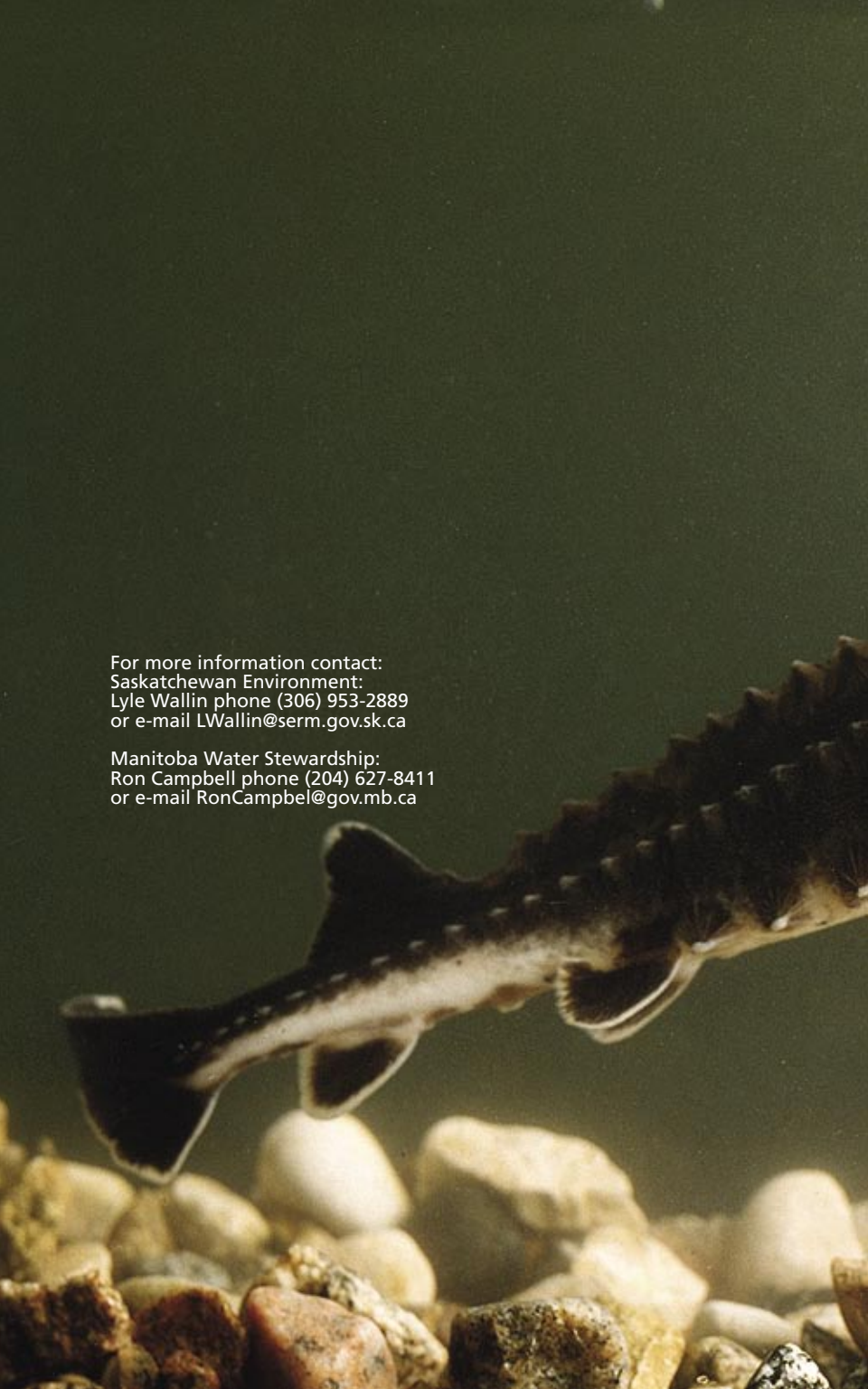
Young sturgeon primarily feed on a variety of aquatic insects. Sturgeon are very particular about dried or frozen food. Therefore, suitable hatchery food can be very costly and as a result hatchery-reared sturgeon are expensive.

Stocking Sturgeon Locally

The SRSMB is starting a pilot project to raise sturgeon on locally collected black fly larvae which are plentiful in the region. This will significantly reduce the cost of rearing sturgeon and establish community based stocking programs.

The SRSMB anticipates that stocking will contribute to re-establishing the current Saskatchewan River lake sturgeon population to a level where it will become self-sustaining and meet the needs of local aboriginal people into the future.





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