

MICRA Paddlefish/Sturgeon Sub-committee Meeting Summary: March 18-20, 2002
West Port Sheraton, St. Louis, Missouri

Overview

Our two and a half day meeting was comprised of:

- 1) an update on shovelnose sturgeon issues from MICRA Chairman Norm Stucky (MO);
- 2) an overview and discussion of the new tagging project database by Jo Grady (USFWS) and Greg Conover (USFWS);
- 3) general housekeeping by Committee Chair Bobby Reed (LA);
- 4) an update on CITES permitting (Marie Maltese, USFWS Office of Scientific Authority), trade (Laura Noguchi, USFWS Office of Management Authority) and law enforcement (Nick Chavez, USFWS Region 3 Law Enforcement) issues by the USFWS (and Art Coppola, USFWS Office of Management Authority);
- 5) a strategic planning exercise facilitated by Scott Hale (OH); and,
- 6) a discussion of developing a uniform system of reporting and recording commercial harvest lead by Bobby Reed and Gerald Mestl (NE).

Monday, March 18

Sturgeon Update: Norm Stucky, MICRA Chairman summarized concerns regarding shovelnose sturgeon commercial harvest. He said the bottom line is that we want to protect the pallid sturgeon. He said that a successful recovery is underway for the pallid, and we want to continue to encourage that. Also, he said that lake sturgeon recovery is underway at least in Missouri. He said we need to review our current state commercial fishery regulations, and may want to consider a quota system for commercial harvest of shovelnose sturgeon. Along those lines he has scheduled a meeting for May 23 in Cape Girardeau, MO among states permitting commercial shovelnose harvest (IL, MO, KY and TN) to discuss potential regulation changes. He requested that the Committee come with a standardized reporting format for reporting paddlefish and sturgeon harvest. He said this will greatly enhance our enforcement ability, and assist with CITES record keeping and permitting issues.

Database: Joanne Grady and Greg Conover presented a summary of the new Access database. Conover said that 2001 tag reading would start in April and May, depending on staffing. He said that 1999 and 2000 data are in the database, but no data summaries are available yet. He said further that if anybody has any "Hardis"??? labels that are not being used, please send them back to him. Grady said that the three page flow chart for data entry/data management from Nate Brennan's thesis has been significantly reduced in size (i.e. one entire page has been eliminated by the new Access program). She said that the past 3-3.5 months has been spent transferring data from the original dBase to Microsoft Access 2000 format. Conover said that Access has actually caught some of the errors in the original database. Grady said she regrets that we tagged hatchery fish with sequential tags because now each individual fish requires a row of data and there's really no that much information that can be garnered from these fish anyway. Conover said also that the new laser etched tags are actually harder to read than the old binary coded wire tags. We have been using these for about the last year and a half, and we can't get binary tags anymore, so we'll just have to use what we can get. Grady said that her ultimate goal is to get biologists to enter their own data into the Access data base. This would eliminate one layer of concern regarding quality control of data entry. She also said that she is still working on getting the jaw tag data into the database. Members gave Grady and Conover a round of applause for the progress they've made in simplifying the data base. Reed said thanks go out to Jim Milligan (USFWS) and Chuck Surprenant (USFWS) for their support of the paddlefish project in allowing Grady and Conover the time to work on the project.

Housekeeping: It was agreed that MICRA needs to visit the Washington Office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to enhance FWS support for the paddlefish project, the new database, and continued assistance of Grady and Conover. We also all need to pull together and reach out to the media for support for the program. We also need to explore funding support from the caviar industry (i.e. secure funds from law suit settlements, seek direct support from the industry, or possibly even seek some form of licensing or tax fee). We also need a progress report and operational map for the future. Finally, we need to change the name of the project from the "MICRA Paddlefish Tagging Project" to the "MICRA Paddlefish Stock Assessment (MPSA)". Also, more tags need to be ordered and we need an assessment of equipment replacement needs.

Tuesday, March 19

CITES: Maria Maltese summarized the CITES permit situation. She said quite a number of permits have been received this Spring. Eight were from Arkansas for a total of 5,600 lbs. of paddlefish roe. She said that anything harvested before February 18 was “grandfathered” in, so many permits came in just before that date. She said no permits have been requested for shovelnose sturgeon roe yet this season. One application has been received from a hatchery in Minnesota. She said for this permit Ohio River fish are being spawned and the eggs are being shipped to Minnesota. The person’s name in Minnesota is Bill Hotlz (sp?) and the person’s name in Ohio is David Raler (sp?) of the “River of Life Hatchery”. Bobby Reed said that there is no “true” private aquaculture for paddlefish in the U.S. because of the length of time needed for the species to reach maturity; so all spawn is being taken from wild fish. Maltese said that “Osage Catfisheries” in Missouri holds some adult paddlefish in golf course ponds, but they too have come from the wild. Robb Todd (TN) said that we shouldn’t be shipping U.S. fish to foreign countries because we wouldn’t want them to ship fish here. He said further that we are just beginning to learn about transmission of parasites and diseases. He said it is inappropriate for us to ship potentially diseased fish to China. Maltese said China is “ramping up” for the caviar market and they don’t care about parasites and diseases; they just want to import all the paddlefish and sturgeon that they can get. She said further that there are no laws precluding the import or export of Appendix 2 species, and that is how paddlefish are listed. She said we’re looking for a mechanism now to protect our native stocks and to protect other countries from our diseased stock. She said this fall there is a CITES conference in Chile. Meanwhile, the CITES Animals Committee will meet next month to discuss sturgeon and paddlefish issues. She said the Caspian Sea nations are scheduled to do a stock assessment, but are in denial about the true status of their sturgeon populations. She said they surveyed only 0.016% of the Caspian Sea and declared that sturgeon populations are stable to increasing. Twenty-eight beluga sturgeon were captured and 75% of these were immature. She said they plan to stop the fall harvest and reduce overall harvest by 90%. A stock assessment is scheduled for completion by December 31 with an interjurisdictional Caspian Sea management plan scheduled for completion by June 30. She said there is concern in the U.S. about hybridization based on our forensic data, but the Russians say that the problem is actually with our methods of analysis. She said trade in Iran is tightly controlled, but within the old Russian states it is largely in the hands of the private sector. She encouraged people to visit the CITES Web Site at www.cites.org. She also said she is still working at home and can be reached at (410) 788-5372, FAX (410) 788-5372 or by email at whoopingcranes@comcast.net.

Trade: Laura Noguchi summarized CITES trade data. She said the goal of the 158 member treaty is to ensure that international trade does not effect survival of the species. She said paddlefish were listed in Appendix 2 in 1992, and since being listed about 200 permits have been applied for - about half of these within the last year. She said up until the last two years shipments were for live fry or eyed eggs, but now roe is being shipped for the caviar market. She said the biggest roe exports are coming from Tennessee and Montana.

Law Enforcement: Nicholas Chavez summarized the situation with law enforcement. He said there are 230 agents in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to cover the entire country and all of its territories. He said forensics plays a major role in the identification of roe species. He said the enforcement problem is with the illegal take and mislabeling of paddlefish roe as sturgeon caviar. He said that the laws vary from state to state, and if there is an inconsistent or weak state law that is where poachers go to “launder” their roe. He said state and federal cooperation is required. Tom Stepanavage said we need to identify where these state weaknesses are so we can fix them. Gerald Mestl agreed that this is important. Chavez said the problem is that a company may be licensed in 20 states, so fish taken in Indiana, for example, may be marketed in Missouri. He said he didn’t have all the information on weak laws with him, but that he would get it for MICRA. He said further that under the Lacey Act a violation of state law must be proven to invoke the Act’s interstate commerce provisions. He said a fisherman may get \$300 for the sale of his roe to a retailer who, in turn, will get \$1,300 (a \$1,000 profit) if the caviar is sold as domestic, but will get \$2,400 (a \$2,100 profit) if he mislabels it and sells it as counterfeit Russian caviar. So this is a very lucrative business, and the temptation for criminal violation is significant. He said, in general, the profit from caviar sales is \$7/oz for domestic, \$5/oz for imported and \$17/oz for mislabeled domestic sold as Russian caviar. Maltese said we need universal “cradle to grave” labeling for paddlefish and sturgeon roe. She said that the European Union is not going to accept unlabeled caviar. She said that federal agencies can’t tell the states what to do, but they will do what they can to help the states control harvest. Chavez discussed some of the cases that have been made, and members agreed that we need to investigate where these funds go. Perhaps some can be funneled back to groups like MICRA for paddlefish and sturgeon conservation. Todd said that Phil Bettoli at Tennessee Technological University is just beginning a \$160,000 survey of Tennessee River paddlefish using USGS funding.

Planning Session

Parking Lot (non-planning items that need to be addressed)

1. Shovelnose sturgeon issues (Cape Girardo meeting...next MICRA meeting?)
2. Paddlefish literature review (available, Gerald Mestl will distribute to Sub-committee)

Sub-basin Management Strategies (see EXCEL spreadsheet, "Management by Sub-basin")

Review of the 1993 Strategic Plan (see MS Word file, "1993 Strategic Plan Review")

1. 7 goals
2. 13 objectives
3. 40 tasks
4. 14 tasks "completed, or ongoing"
5. 12 tasks "attempted, or ongoing"
6. 14 tasks "not attempted"

Mission Statement Development

Who (do we primarily produce a product for)?

1. MICRA Executive Committee

What are the products that they need or want?

1. Information
2. Recommendations

How do we do it?

1. Coordination
2. Communication
3. Assessment
4. Research

2002 Mission Statement

Provide MICRA with information and recommendations to conserve and manage paddlefish through inter-jurisdictional coordination, communication, assessment, and research.

SWOT Analysis

Internal Environment

- Paddlefish/Sturgeon Sub-committee
1. State agency representatives
 2. Federal agency representatives

External Environment includes the following entities...

1. MICRA
2. 28 State natural resource agencies
3. the publics these agencies serve
4. international community

Internal Environment: Strengths

1. diverse perspectives
2. agency support
3. basin-wide participation
4. shared values

- 5 collective knowledge/experience
- 6 unique inter-jurisdictional approach
- 7 dedicated work force
- 8 database creation/utility
- 9 strength in numbers
- 10 influence on decision makers
- 11 "brand-name" recognition of MICRA
- 12 pooled resources (knowledge, experience, personnel, equipment, funds)
- 13 creative funding mechanism
- 14 bulk purchasing power
- 15 communication network
- 16 ability to educate public
- 17 disseminate information (scientific)

Internal Environment: Weaknesses

- 1 separate agencies
- 2 continuity of leadership
- 3 "changing bodies" (personnel)
- 4 no model
- 5 no authority
- 6 narrowness of expertise
- 7 unwillingness to action
- 8 incomplete knowledge of rivers
- 9 meetings not well planned (reference to domination of content by tagging project)
- 10 state priorities
- 11 state definitions of priorities
- 12 no operational plan
- 13 did not use plan (1993 strategic plan) to measure or direct
- 14 lack of products
- 15 amount of involvement

External Environment: Opportunities

Most of the items in the external environment were identified as both opportunities and threats. Unique items which were only opportunities are bolded in the list below.

- 1 politics
- 2 economy
- 3 **USACE**
- 4 harvest
- 5 habitat
- 6 aquaculture
- 7 water quality
- 8 international government stability
- 9 genetics
- 10 federal agencies
- 11 commercial habitat alterations
- 12 public awareness
- 13 caviar industry: supply and demand
- 14 university research
- 15 law enforcement

- 16 budget/funding
- 17 sport and commercial fishing
- 18 media
- 19 chamber of commerce and tourism**
- 20 endangered species act
- 21 trust species
- 22 tribal jurisdiction
- 23 values
- 24 public access
- 25 technology
- 26 personnel turnover
- 27 land stewardship

External Environment: Threats

Most of the items in the external environment were identified as both opportunities and threats. Unique items which were only threats are bolded in the list below.

- 1 politics
- 2 economy
- 3 USACE
- 4 harvest
- 5 exotics**
- 6 habitat
- 7 aquaculture
- 8 water quality
- 9 international government stability
- 10 genetics
- 11 lock and dam structures**
- 12 land stewardship
- 13 public reservoir ranching**
- 14 jurisdictional management**
- 15 federal agencies
- 16 commercial habitat alterations
- 17 public awareness
- 18 caviar industry: supply and demand
- 19 MICRA Sub-committee participation (this is an internal environment item that slipped by us)
- 20 university research
- 21 law enforcement
- 22 budget/funding
- 23 sport and commercial fishing
- 24 media
- 25 black market**
- 26 endangered species act
- 27 trust species
- 28 tribal jurisdiction
- 29 values
- 30 public access
- 31 technology
- 32 personnel turnover

First Cut at Plan Development

Goal: Manage and conserve paddlefish to ensure sustainable use.

Objectives

1. Communication. Annually facilitate communication and coordination among entities responsible for paddlefish management in the MRB. (?)
2. Biological Assessment/Monitoring.
3. Complete sub-basin status document by the end of 2003.
4. Identify management units by the end of 2004.
5. Develop a standardized long-term basin-wide monitoring program for paddlefish by the end of 2005.
6. Partnerships.
7. Identify and develop relationships with non-MICRA groups to provide funding for paddlefish activities by 2007.
8. Coordinate with non-MICRA groups to enhance paddlefish habitat on public, private, and tribal lands by 2007.
9. Inter-jurisdictional Coordination.
10. Have a full-time database manager by 2003.
11. Have a MICRA lobbyist in D.C. by end of 2004.
12. Continue development of a basin-wide network of individuals and organizations with paddlefish interests and meet twice annually to coordinate paddlefish management and disseminate information through 2007.
13. Create a sub-committee to assist the chair and coordinator in preparing annual progress reports and will be comprised of one member from each sub-basin beginning 2003.
14. Market (trade).
15. Develop a market monitoring and reporting program by December 2003.
16. Create an annual market report for the annual MICRA meeting.
17. Sub-committee annually assess, reports, and makes recommendations to MICRA pertaining to the market.
18. Aquaculture.
19. Develop an aquaculture monitoring and reporting program by December 2003.
20. Create an annual aquaculture report for the annual MICRA meeting.
21. Sub-committee annually assess, reports, and makes recommendations to MICRA pertaining to aquaculture.

Development of Sub-basin Reports

Sub-basins met to discuss report development and timelines. The Ohio River Sub-basin report may serve as a guide for developing some of these reports.

Sub-basin Delineation for Report Development*

1. Lower Mississippi (TX, KY, TN, AR, MS, MO, LA, OK)
2. Upper Mississippi (MO, IL, IA, WI, MN)
3. Missouri (SD, NE, IA, KS, MO, ND, MT)
4. Gulf (TX, LA, AL, MS)
5. Ohio (NY, PA, WV, OH, IN, IL, KY, TN, AL, GA, NC)

* includes sub-basin watershed states, but not all states listed are members of MICRA, have paddlefish populations, or participate in the Paddlefish/Sturgeon Sub-committee

Reporting Commercial Harvest and Trade Information (Gerald Mestl and Bobby Reed)

Bobby lead a discussion on the information that would be important for a developing a "reporting of harvest and sale" database, and Robb Todd volunteered to incorporate the necessary variables in ACCESS database tables.

The following process was outlined by Gerald:

- 1.0 Identify information and products with sub-committee, law enforcement, industry, and CITES.
 - 1.1 Design database (Who?...Rob Todd will put together MS ACCESS tables).
 - 1.2 Host database (who? Where? Access?)
 - 1.3 Data entry and validation (How?...remote, each state, central location, host agency...possibly USGS in Columbia, MO)
- 2.1 Design report from 1.1.
- 2.2 Print and copy report.
- 2.3 Distribute report.
- 3.1 Sub-committee should discuss report at meeting.
- 3.2 Sub-committee members should collect information on disease and genetics and forward to the coordinator and chair.
- 3.3 Distribute disease and genetic information to Sub-committee along with meeting agenda.
- 3.4 Discuss disease and genetics topics at annual meeting.
- 3.5 Forward recommendations of the Sub-committee to MICRA.

Attendance (some or all of meeting):

Bobby Reed (LA, Chair)	Jeff Quinn (AR)	Cliff Stone (SD)
Gerald Mestl (NE)	Ann Runstrom (USFWS, WI)	Brent Bristo (USFWS, OK)
John Pitlo (IA)	Jerry Rasmussen (USFWS, IA)	Robb Todd (TN)
Chris O'Bara (WV)	Scott Hale (OH)	Rob Maher (IL)
Butch Atwood (IL)	Tom Stefanavage (IN)	Les Frankland (IL)
Doug Henley (KY)	Greg Conover (USFWS, IL)	Joanne Grady (USFWS, MO)
Brent Gordon (OK)	Vince Travnichek (MO)	Chuck Surprenant (USFWS, IL)
Marie Maltese (USFWS, D.C.)	Art Coppola (USFWS, D.C.)	Laura Noguchi (USFWS, D.C.)
Nick Chavez (USFWS, Reg. 3)	Christina Moody (USFWS, D.C.)	

1993 Strategic Plan: Goals and Objectives Checklist (C=completed, A=attempted, NA=not attempted)

Goal	Objective	Task	Progress			Comments? What has changed? What have we learned?
			C	A	NA	
1						
	1.1					
		1.1.1	X			
		1.1.2	X			
		1.1.3			X	Funding Problems
2						
	2.1					
		2.1.1	X			
		2.1.2	X			Ongoing
		2.1.3	X			Suspended
	2.2					
		2.2.1			X	
		2.2.2			X	
		2.2.3			X	
	2.3					
		2.3.1		X		
		2.3.2	X			Ongoing
		2.3.3	X			Ongoing
		2.3.4		X		1998 Conference
3						
	3.1					
		3.1.1	X			
		3.1.2	X			
		3.1.3	X			
	3.2					
		3.2.1			X	
		3.2.2			X	
4						
	4.1					Not Done
		4.1.1			X	
	4.2					
		4.2.1			X	
		2.2.2	X			Tagging Study, Ongoing
		4.2.3		X		Ongoing

1993 Strategic Plan: Goals and Objectives Checklist (C=completed, A=attempted, NA=not attempted)

Goal	Objective	Task	Progress			Comments? What has changed? What have we learned?
			C	A	NA	
5						
	5.1					
		5.1.1		X		Too Broad
		5.1.2			X	
		5.1.3			X	
		5.1.4			X	
	5.2					
		5.2.1		X		
		5.2.2			X	
		5.2.3			X	
		5.3.4		X		
		5.2.5		X		
6						
	6.1					
		6.1.1	X			
		6.1.2		X		Ongoing
		6.1.3		X		
	6.2					
		6.2.1			X	
		6.2.2		X		
		6.2.3		X		Ongoing
		6.2.4		X		
7						
	7.2					
		7.2.1	X			Ongoing
		7.2.2	X			Ongoing