

PADDFISH/STURGEON SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

November 27-28, 2001

St. Louis, Missouri

The MICRA paddlefish/sturgeon subcommittee met at the Sheraton Westport Hotel on November 27th and 28th, 2001 in St. Louis, MO. Sub-committee Chairman Kim Graham (MDOC) convened the meeting at 8:00 AM. Twenty-eight persons attended including sub-committee members from ten states, personnel from FWS, Law Enforcement Branch; FWS, Office of Scientific Authority; FWS, Fisheries Assistance; and the USGS. A copy of the attendance list is attached.

After a round of introductions, Chairman Graham began with the traditional paddlefish/sturgeon state updates of MICRA activities from those representatives in attendance. Ten states reported on their field tagging activities related to the MICRA paddlefish study or the rearing, tagging and stocking of paddlefish fingerlings within the basin. Representatives from the states of Iowa and South Dakota were unable to attend but sent along summary reports of those agencies activities with paddlefish or sturgeon. However one state, Arkansas, is proposing new commercial regulations and strategies to deal with the exploitation of paddlefish. Representative Jeff Quinn reported his agencies proposal in a power point presentation to the group. The proposed new regulations would prohibit non resident fisherman take, increase license fees, require mandatory reporting for buyers, increase fines for violations, and impose minimum length limits (32" EFL) on paddlefish. Bill Reeves (TN) reported on a major caviar sting operation unfolding in the southeast US involving at least one Tennessee Company. The ensuing group discussion indicated that legal and illegal exploitation of paddlefish and sturgeon for roe is a very important issue among state and federal agencies.

Marie Maltese, with the Office of Scientific Authority (FWS) in Washington brought the group up to speed on export permits dealing with paddlefish and sturgeon products. Ms. Maltese reported that she is very strict in the permitting process, asks lots of questions, and errs on the side of the species where necessary. During 2001, she noted that some 22 applications were withdrawn or abandoned because they asked for additional information or documentation. Ms. Maltese also noted that while paddlefish were listed as an Appendix II species in 1992, only one or two applications for export were received annually until 1998 when the entire taxonomic group came under CITES authority! The Office of Scientific Authority will be soliciting information to update paddlefish/sturgeon species status for significant trade review documents. Chuck Surprenant and Joanne Grady (FWS) reported on the revision of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural resources (IUCN) Red List category for the shovelnose sturgeon in the US. Joanne, Chuck and Marie, are receiving additional information on the IUCN revision thru Dec. 7th, so if you have any pertinent data or comments get them in soon!

Mr. Derek Hildreth, University of Missouri, St. Louis made an excellent presentation entitled the "Effects of coded wire tags on the electro sensing capabilities of juvenile paddlefish". While paddlefish have the capabilities to detect and avoid various metals in

their environment, the small CWT's implanted in the tip of the rostrum appear to have little or no effect on their feeding activities. Chris O'Bara (WV) representing the Ohio River Fisheries Management Team, presented a paddlefish Sub-Basin report and sub-basin challenge. Using MICRA data, ORFMT data, and individual state data, the team reported that Ohio River paddlefish populations have been experiencing total annual mortality rates ranging from 47 – 68% during 1995-2001, indicative of a population exposed to extensive harvest. Additionally, Chris reported that length frequencies were truncated, indicating over-exploitation of adult stocks. The ORFMT report recommends establishment of full participation of all sub-basin states in cooperative management of paddlefish as well as implementation of the outlined 2002-2010 strategic plan. The ORFMT also noted some difficulties with data extraction (that of their particular interest anyway) from the MICRA database. Group discussion indicated more time was needed on the subject of a mandatory uniform standard reporting procedure for commercial harvest of paddlefish stocks within the basin. Time would be set aside the following day to continue this discussion.

Jo Grady and Greg Conover reported on the paddlefish project data 1995-2001. They are putting together a CD-ROM of data to be available at the spring meeting. A five-year MICRA paddlefish report will be forthcoming in the summer of 2002? Funding for the paddlefish project (data mgmt., tag reading & cataloging, equipment) continue to be a problem. Individual states appear to be picking up the tab more each year. The group agreed there needs to be a general assessment of the project (particularly data management and data needs) at the spring meeting (paddlefish study and sub-com strategic plan).

Group discussion the second day centered on a need for mandatory uniform harvest reporting for all basin states allowing sport and commercial harvest of flesh and roe. Harvest (exploitation) rates in those states allowing sport and commercial harvests are seen as vital to the conservation and sustainability of paddlefish and sturgeon stocks in the US. While the exact exploitation rates which would allow sustainability of paddlefish populations is unclear, there are numerous case histories of exploitation available in the literature. One idea coming out of the discussion was the development of a real time data exchange (website) of harvest rates for information sharing between states. Such information exchange and standardized reporting of data would be invaluable to fisheries managers and law enforcement and are included in tasks that have been identified under "Goals and Objectives 2 and 3 of the MICRA Strategic Plan for cooperative management of paddlefish and sturgeon in the MS river basin (1993). Further discussion focused on strategic direction and purpose of the paddlefish/sturgeon subcom as a whole. Considerable change in paddlefish populations and management strategies have occurred since the formation of the subcom and there are concerns as to whether the role of the subcom and its' Strategic Plan is meeting the needs of the state partners and the resources they manage. Scott Hale (OH) volunteered to lead the group through a facilitated planning session called a SWOT analysis to revise the aging strategic plan. There was also consensus on the need to review the tagging protocol/data collection of the paddlefish tagging project at our next meeting. We agreed that at least a full day or two at the next meeting would be devoted to revisiting the subcom's strategic direction and

paddlefish project tagging protocol. Review of current tagging protocol is critical to the projects successful completion which will extend through FY 2004. The strategic plan is now about 10 years old and definitely needs a thorough revision by the MICRA subcom membership.

MICRA chairman Norm Stucky provided the group with an update of the association, particularly a new spirit of cooperation that appears to be happening within the FWS. A thirty person task force will be developing a strategic fisheries plan for the FWS. Norm indicated that we will have new opportunities for cooperation and funding to keep MICRA alive and well. They are working to provide MICRA with a full time executive director to handle the logistics of the association.

Pallid sturgeon recovery Team Leader Steve Krentz provided a recovery update while the FWS and COE reported on MO and MS river biological opinions. Jo Grady (FWS) passed out copies of the final MICRA Pallid Sturgeon Report to the group. A very good job for the amount of \$ funded by MICRA. The states and cooperating entities obviously kicked in \$ as well. The study found less pallid sturgeon than was found 20 years ago. The ratio of pallids to shovelnose sturgeon dropped from 1 in 398 (collected by Carlson et al. 1985) to 1 in 647 in the current study. While pallids appear to be declining, the incidence of hybridization appears to be increasing from 1 in 365 in the late 1970's to 1 in 235 in the 1990's. There is considerable concern that there is over-exploitation of shovelnose sturgeon and that increased incidental take of pallid sturgeon is occurring.

Kim Graham turned the chairman duties over to incoming chair Bobby Reed (LA). Kim served MICRA and the subcommittee for 10 years and was presented a meritorious service award for his work. Kim and his experience with paddlefish and sturgeon will be missed, but he promised to stay involved and may attend some meetings of his own accord. Good luck Kim!

The first task of the incoming chair was to appoint a committee to establish protocol for uniform standardized commercial and sport harvest reporting and dissemination of data, based on group consensus. **The seven states with commercial harvests plus two or three with sport harvests** will be working with the Office of Scientific Authority and law enforcement personnel to compile a list of reporting requirements and hammer out a standardized reporting system for MICRA states. The requirements need to carry law enforcement teeth that would make the system work by suspending fishing privileges, requiring export papers for roe/flesh from individual states, etc... that can be taken back to MICRA and the individual states for consideration. The sub-com will ask for MICRA's blessing and direction on this critical issue at the parent committee meeting in Des Moines, IA on December 10th. Chairman Reed will summarize our fall 2001 meeting and present to MICRA an urgent need for a standardized, uniform reporting system of commercial and sport paddlefish harvest. We are at a crossroad with paddlefish and sturgeon in this country and mandatory uniform standardized harvest reporting is necessary for conservation and management of these resources.

ACTION ITEMS/TASKS

At present I have the following people on the task force to develop uniform standardized harvest reporting guidelines for MICRA states to implement regarding the sport and commercial harvest of paddlefish (did I leave anyone off and what did we decide to do with shovelnose sturgeon?):

Arkansas – Jeff Quinn
Illinois – Butch Atwood, Rob Maher
Kentucky – Doug Henley
Missouri – Vince Travnicek, Craig Gemming
Nebraska – Gerald Mestl
Tennessee – Robb Todd
Ohio – Scott Hale
West Virginia – Chris O’Bara
USFWS (CITES) – Marie Maltese
Law Enforcement

FACT brochure outlining CITES and the importance of harvest info/cooperation to help better manage the resource:

Sub-com and Marie Maltese

Additional Notes

The sub-com has found someone willing to provide a list server free of charge to the group in order to disseminate our committee’s information (more on this later). The next meeting was set for March 18-20, 2002 in St. Louis, again at the Westport Sheraton Hotel.

******* MICRA Committee Update (Des Moines, IA December 10th)**

You may recall from our discussions, there was group consensus on an immediate need for mandatory, standardized reporting of all commercial paddlefish harvest within the Mississippi River Basin. I took our message to the MICRA committee and they unanimously agreed it was necessary to have commercial harvest data in order to make sound management decisions. They further agreed that the sub-com was the appropriate vehicle to handle such a concerted effort. I concurred, thanked them for their support and said we would begin steps to make it happen. To implement such a system will take hard work from all concerned but I believe the MICRA states are up to the task.

The sub-committee owes many thanks to Doug Nygren of Kansas (chairman elect of MICRA). Doug has offered his agencies game and fish website to house commercial and sport fish landing data for real time data exchange by the group, law enforcement folks, and CITES permitting representatives. He is proposing that the individual states’ harvest

data be entered over the web on a standardized form and housed at the Kansas Game and Fish Website! The website entry form will be developed by the same task force charged with uniform harvest reporting of data.