

## **UMRCC Fisheries Technical Section Minutes of the 2006 Fall Meeting**

### **September 19 – 21 Camp Okotipi – Saverton, MO**

The 2006 Fall Fisheries Technical Section meeting was a joint meeting with the Wildlife Technical Section. The agenda on the first afternoon (Sept. 19) included presentations and discussion directed toward the joint members. Fish Section Chair, Dan Dieterman (MN) and Wildlife Section Chair, Tom Beissel (IL) welcomed all in attendance and thanked Travis Moore (MO) for arranging the meeting facilities and meal provisions.

The Vegetation Ad Hoc meeting, led by chair, Joe Lund, was held from 1:00 – 2:00 pm with most of what was discussed presented in the joint meeting. Joe's presentation focused on the Pools 9 and 19 aquatic vegetation surveys done this past summer. Both surveys collected data consistent with LTRM protocols, and in some locations of Pool 9, consistent with UMRCC Veg Ad Hoc sampling protocols. Both surveys were completed in just two days, and represent the 2nd consecutive year these pools have been sampled. Joe Lund will be stepping down as Chair of the Veg Ad Hoc Committee, and as of yet, no one has volunteered to take over. The group thanked Joe for all the work he has done over the past few years as Chair.

Eric Nelson (UMR NW&FR) gave an update on the completed and submitted Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP), which recommended Alternative E as the preferred plan.

Scott Yess (UMRCC Coordinator) provided a Coordinator's report, which included an update about how the transition of duties from Jon Duyvejonck and library materials was progressing. He also handed out an updated Directory of Biologists Along the Upper Mississippi River.

Mike Reed (MDOC) gave a presentation on propagating/purchasing and establishing wetland and aquatic vegetation in small to medium impoundments.

The final agenda item for the joint session of the meeting included an open discussion concerning the, sometimes controversial, topic of "connectivity". This discussion was robust and to the point, and ended when most in attendance agreed that through adaptive management, a connected floodplain was a high priority. Connectivity would be site-specific and represent multiple management objectives, utilizing a range of methods.

Agency reports were given during a portion of the morning session on Sept. 20, and consisted of single topic presentations generally related to current research and field studies.

MNDNR (Kevin Stauffer) presented their findings on a flathead catfish study that looked at coldwater feeding patterns, metabolism, and the potential effects of winter angling. Sonic transmitters were attached to each of 10 flathead catfish, which had been snagged from a known over-wintering location. The transmitters were used to determine homing ability and whether or not displaced fish could find their way back to suitable over-wintering habitat. All tagged fish were subsequently located in adequate over-wintering locations within 48 hours of capture and release.

WIDNR (Pat Short) presented information related to commercial harvest and over exploitation of shovelnose sturgeon populations and the need for a change in regulations from a 25" (TL) minimum length limit to a 27" – 34" (FL) harvest slot during a May 15 – Oct. 15 season, with the remainder of the year closed to commercial harvest.

IADNR (Mike Steuck) presented information related to an on going study documenting Centrarchid movement patterns associated with D.O. levels and flow patterns in backwaters during winter months. The study is also attempting to evaluate the effectiveness of different HREPs and the adaptive management associated with each. (Dan Kirby) Announced the completion and availability of a new report titled "Temporal and Spatial Trends in the Frequency of Occurrence, Length-Frequency Distribution, Length-weight Relationships, and Relative Abundances of Upper Mississippi River Fish". ((Kirk Hanson) reported on the shovelnose sturgeon tagging and exploitation study, and the proposed regulation of a 27" minimum size limit during a May 15 – October 15 open season. (Bernie Schonhoff) presented background information and recent fish data from Huron Island, Pool 18, and justification for a potential HREP.

ILDNR (Dan Sallee) reported that they are currently about half-staffed and about all they are able to do is continue their basic fish monitoring.

MODNR (Travis Moore) reported on a new "Adopt-A-Sturgeon" program, designed for use in schools, that is meant to provide informational material and to raise awareness of sturgeon life history, etc.in the UMR. MO Mussel surveys have shown a collapse of Deer Toe populations in Pools 20 and 22.

COE-St. Louis District (Brian Johnson) reported on a Pallid Sturgeon Report that was recently completed, and ongoing studies that assess the impacts of side-channel dredging, wing-dike notching, and rock mound clusters designed to function like bendway weirs. He has also been very involved in bio-acoustic sampling in tailwaters where fish passage structures are being considered.

COE-Rock Island District (Mark Cornish) reported on budgetary constraints and problems associated with the electrical barrier(s) in the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal.

Mike Steuck reported for Ann Runstrom that the MICRA UMR sub-basin Paddlefish Report/Plan is near completion, and they are looking for states to review the document ASAP.

Mussel Ad Hoc Committee update - Scott Yess reported for Gary Wege that Higgins eye cage propagation in upper pools was very successful in 2006. MN DNR conducted a population estimate of mussels in Pool 5 this year, but analysis has not been completed yet. A request from the Freshwater Mussel Conservation Society (FMCS) for \$1000.00 was forwarded through this committee to the Fish Tech Chair to provide a formal request to the Executive Board. A brief discussion followed, and Scott agreed to ask Gary to provide a very brief explanation of benefits that the UMRCC would gain by sponsoring the FMCS event in spring 2007.

Education Ad Hoc Committee update – Jeff Janvrin reported that a teacher’s workshop was scheduled for Aug. 2007 and that the committee hasn’t been very active, but would be interested in any new ideas.

Publication Ad Hoc Committee – Dan Kirby reported not much going on right now.

NESP Update – Chuck Theiling reported that a new WRDA has not yet been passed, but 10 million dollars was appropriated for continued planning, including nav. project planning mostly on Pools 22 and 25 and ecosystem planning for 18 ecosystem projects. New entrainment studies are utilizing a new trawl and are sampling in multiple pools.

Fish Passage – Mark Cornish reported on the assessments and pre-project monitoring associated with the proposed fish passage structure at LD 22. A field trip to LD 22 provided all attendees the opportunity to witness first hand the location and potential for the fish passage project. Attendees were also able to board the “Bowyer”, a COE vessel, to observe the technologies currently being used to accurately map bathymetry, flow velocities and vectors, substrate types and fish populations in tailwaters of major dams.

CCP – Stepdown Plan for Tournament Regulations. Eric Nelson gave an update of what is contained in the final CCP concerning fishing tournaments within UMR Refuge boundaries and the legal obligations of Refuge staff to regulate such activities. The stated objective is: “By January, 2008, in collaboration with the states and the Corps of Engineers through the UMRCC, develop a plan for dove-tailing Refuge permitting requirements with the respective state-issued permits for all fishing tournaments occurring on the Refuge”. A UMRCC sub-committee was formed in spring 2006 to begin the process necessary to achieve the stated objective, but as of this meeting, no further progress has been made. A group discussion ensued, with a number of issues identified. Eric asked that each state provide him with a summary of their current tournament rules. A conference call between the States and the Refuge is tentatively planned for sometime in January 2007. The goal is to achieve a uniform minimum standard for tournament rules in all states bordering the UMR Refuge.

2006 Drought – Drought conditions throughout much of the upper Midwest during summer 2006 were responsible for very low flows in the much of the UMR. Low flows and above average temperatures combined with extensive dense beds of submerged vegetation produced observed anoxic conditions in some backwaters with associated fish

kills during late July and early August. It was noted that many of the physical and chemical conditions observed in 2006 were similar to those observed during the drought of 1987 and 1988, with the exception of large and persistent algal blooms that occurred in the late 1980's.