



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

1050 N. Highland Street • Suite 200A-N • Arlington, VA 22201
703.842.0740 • 703.842.0741 (fax) • www.asmf.org

Sturgeon Technical Committee Meeting Summary

Conference Call
January 26, 2016

Technical Committee Members: Bill Post (TC Chair), Laura Lee, Lisa Bonacci, Greg Garman, Christine Lipsky, Amanda Higgs, Jeanne-Marie Havrylkoff, Heather Corbett, Mike Bednarski, Elizabeth Miller, Chris Kalinowsky, Ian Park, Mike Loeffler, Greg Murphy, Eric Hilton, Marta Nammack, Ellen Cosby, Dewayne Fox, Tom Savoy

ASMFC Staff: Katie Drew, Kristen Anstead, Max Appelman

Public: Mike Celestino, Kim Damon-Randall

The Sturgeon Technical Committee met via conference call to (1) receive a full briefing from the Stock Assessment Subcommittee (SAS) on progress made with the 2017 benchmark stock assessment, and (2) elect a TC vice-chair.

Laura Lee (SAS Chair) provided an update on behalf of the SAS for each of the bullets presented on the agenda. The TC was asked to hold their questions until after the update. A summary of Laura's update for each part of the assessment is provided below. Follow up tasks are in bold.

- J. Flowers and D. Kazyak SAS Membership: Will Smith, who was previously heading the tagging model for the assessment, left the NC DMF and Jared Flowers was hired in his place. Jared has worked extensively with sturgeon research and other anadromous species in the U.S. and is a qualified and experienced candidate to head the tagging model portion of the assessment. David Kazyak is a post doc with Tim King at the U.S.GS Leetown Science center in West Virginia and has developed a model for estimating census population size of the Hudson River Atlantic Sturgeon population. The SAS hopes to incorporate David's study into the assessment to avoid duplicate efforts. Also, David's experience with genetics data and analysis should prove useful for the SAS.
- Review available data: Most states have updated their biological sturgeon data files on the ASMFC FTP site through 2014, the terminal year of the assessment. However, some available data (age data in particular) has not been provided to the site. **TC members are asked to review state data on the ASMFC FTP site to make sure all available Atlantic Sturgeon data, including age data, is updated through 2014.**
- Review criteria for index standardization: Criteria is fairly straight forward. Given longevity of the species, 15-20 year surveys with statistically sound designs would be ideal, and only ones that catch sturgeon or operate during a time and place in which sturgeon are available to capture. Survey methodology should be consistent throughout the time series. There will likely be flexibility here as SAS members noted that few surveys have been conducted

consistently for 15+ years. Biological data will come from surveys of any length, and this criteria is only for those being used for estimating abundance.

- Update on bycatch estimation: The Bycatch Working Group (BWG) concluded that data for reliable estimates of sturgeon bycatch is limited to the NC gillnet fishery, the SC commercial shad fishery, and the Federal observer data, and therefore bycatch estimates are only being developed/updated for those regions.
- Update on telemetry tagging data and tagging model: Considering that most ongoing sturgeon telemetry research is focused on answering movement-based questions, the Tagging Working Group (TWG) decided to focus on the mortality component of the tagging model and not pursue a spatial/movement component to avoid conflict with those data providers. The TWG finalized the data request letters and data template, and data was due December 1st. Majority of researchers have confirmed with ASMFC Staff that they fully intend to accommodate the request, and about half of the data sets have been received. **ASMFC Staff will follow up with data providers to submit their data as soon as possible.**
- Review other modeling approaches: The SAS intends to explore other modeling approaches (e.g., data poor models) to hopefully develop scientifically sound biological reference points at least at the coastwide- or DPS-level. Other analysis being explored are growth and trend analysis.
- Review draft report outline: The outline currently follows a three volume format; one for a coastwide assessment, one for a DPS-level assessment, and one for a river-specific assessment. The outline essentially follows the ASMFC standard report outline. A lot of the sections already exist in old documents and can be repurposed for this report, mainly introductory, background and habitat sections. **Accordingly, TC members are asked to begin writing background sections of the Stock Assessment Report. ASMFC Staff will work with the SAS Chair to review text requirements for these sections and follow up with the TC with specific instructions in early February.** Note: the outline is still open for discussion. Although the assessment report will primarily be constructed by SAS members, it is still a product of the Technical Committee.
- Update on genetics information and analysis: Differing views and opinions have emerged in the past few months among sturgeon geneticists regarding the appropriateness of the currently established DPS model used for the ESA listing. However, given the circumstances for which this stock assessment was initiated, the SAS will follow the current DPS model and continue to monitor the debate. Additionally, acoustically tagged fish have been identified in the Atlantic Sturgeon Tissue Repository, and a preliminary list of those samples have been sent to Tim King to be genetically analyzed and assigned to a DPS. The genetic assignment data will be used in the telemetry tagging model to develop DPS-specific mortality estimates.

Following the briefing, TC members raised concerns in regards to a river-specific assessment noting that many river systems within the coastwide complex are extremely data limited. It was explained that for this part of the report, statistical analysis will only be conducted for those

rivers with sufficient data to do so, and an overview of available data will be provided for those rivers with insufficient data for analysis.

Lastly, the TC nominated Eric Hilton (VA) as TC Vice-Chair. Eric will follow up with Bill Post (Chair) and ASMFC Staff to assess his availability for the role. **In the meantime, TC members are asked to send in additional Vice-Chair nominations in the event that Eric is unable to serve this role.**