



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
FISH AND WILDLIFE ENHANCEMENT
1500 EAST CAPITOL AVENUE
BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA 58501



MAR 11 1994

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Mr. James D. Davies
Area Manager
Western Area Power Administration
2525 4th Ave. North
Billings, Montana 59101

Dear Mr. Davies:

Over a period of the last 6 months, the newly formed Montana/North Dakota Pallid Sturgeon Work Group, which is a coalition of multiple Federal and State agencies, and the power industry, collaborated with the Pallid Sturgeon Recovery Team to identify priority research and management needs for the pallid sturgeon in Montana and North Dakota. (The Pallid Sturgeon Recovery Plan recommends the formation of regional work groups to address regional recovery needs.) Thirty-one priority needs were identified at a December 1993 meeting in Billings, Montana. In the time between the December meeting and the group's most recent meeting on March 2, 1994, in Bozeman, Montana, the 31 needs and tasks were prioritized by pallid sturgeon researchers and managers who responded to a questionnaire survey.

Concurrently, proposals for addressing many of the 31 priority needs that are not now being addressed by ongoing research, were prepared by fishery researchers and managers and submitted to Mr. Mark Dryer of my staff, who serves as Recovery Team Leader for the pallid sturgeon. Twenty-one proposals were submitted to Mr. Dryer. After further prioritization and consolidation of this list of 21 proposals, 12 research/management proposals were developed or selected that would address the highest priority research/management needs for the pallid sturgeon in Montana and North Dakota, as determined by the Montana/North Dakota Pallid Sturgeon Work Group. The study objectives to meet these proposals and their anticipated costs are listed as follows in priority order.

1. Document morphological development and reveal diagnostic characters of hatchery-reared pallid sturgeon larval stages from adults of the Missouri and/or Yellowstone River that will be useful for identification of samples collected from the wild. \$6,000.
2. Monitor relationships between sturgeon distribution/abundance information; and river reach, discharge, habitat type and physical characteristics of the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers by standardized sampling. Relationships of other aquatic species, including forage fish, will also be investigated in relation to habitat and flow variation. \$42,800.

3. Identify and characterize sturgeon spawning habitat by intensively sampling for spawning adults at a suspected spawning area on the Yellowstone River near the Highway 200 bridge. \$8,000.
4. Locate and characterize pallid sturgeon spawning locations on the Missouri River below Ft. Peck Dam, through use of telemetry and netting. \$24,800.
5. Describe post-hatch larval drift of sturgeon in the Missouri River below Ft. Peck Dam. (Post-hatch larval drift studies are underway and funded on the Yellowstone River). \$36,300.
6. Conduct a population estimate of pallid sturgeon in areas of the Yellowstone River confluence and upper Lake Sakakawea. \$9,400.
7. Develop an assay methodology for detection of sex and reproductive state without surgical biopsy. This is important for the hatchery program. \$6,800.
8. Investigate distribution of juvenile and YOY sturgeon in both the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers. Effort will be concentrated in slow and backwater areas and be related to flow. Areas of use will be characterized. \$21,800.
9. Quantify and compare the diet and food selection of shovelnose sturgeon across discharge levels and seasons at a regulated and unregulated side. \$123,600.
10. Determine separated backwaters that could be reconnected to the main channel for restoration of habitats important to forage fish. \$9,500.
11. Determine sturgeon passage over Intake Diversion Dam. \$22,500.
12. Continue outreach efforts and incidental catch information studies at Intake and Fred Robinson Bridge. \$5,600.

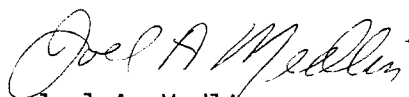
Our next step in this process is to secure funding for as many of the 12 priority needs as possible. Mr. Dryer met with members of your staff attending the Bozeman meeting and discussed multi-agency interest in funding priority needs. By this letter, I am requesting that your agency fund the studies to meet objective numbers 4, 5, and 6, this fiscal year. The accumulated dollar cost for these needs amounts to \$70,500. The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (Department) is interested in conducting these studies, if funded. I am working with the Bureau of Reclamation and within my agency to fund objective numbers 1-3, 7, 8, and 12. The Army Corps of Engineers has already contracted with Montana State University to address objective number 9, above Ft. Peck reservoir.

The 1994 field season is quickly approaching. Please notify me, and Mr. Chris Hunter of the Montana Department of Fish Wildlife and Parks of your capability and commitment to fund the above recommended tasks, as soon as possible, so

that the Department can hire field crews and obtain equipment for the fast approaching field season. I suggest that your agency work directly with the Department on wording of the Scope of Work to satisfy your agency's administrative and biological needs. We would be happy to review the biological aspects of a draft scope.

I appreciate your agency's willingness to consider these proposals and look forward to continued participation in funding and conducting actions to recover the pallid sturgeon and the altered aquatic community of the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joel A. Medlin".

Joel A. Medlin
Field Supervisor
Ecological Services
North Dakota Field Office