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Marking a significant milestone between Cree Nation Government and Fisheries and Oceans Canada through the signing of a conservation agreement for Lake Sturgeon populations in Eeyou Istchee, Northern Quebec

June 27, 2023

Québec, Quebec

Fisheries and Oceans Canada

The Cree Nation Government (CNG) and Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) are pleased to announce the signing of a Conservation Agreement pursuant to section 11 of the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). After several months of close collaboration and constructive discussions, the parties have successfully negotiated this agreement for the conservation of Lake Sturgeon (southern Hudson Bay - James Bay populations), a species of special concern under SARA.

This agreement is the first of its kind in Quebec and marks a significant milestone of meaningful collaboration between DFO and the CNG and a key step towards greater partnership between the Government of Canada and Indigenous Peoples for the protection of species at risk.

Lake Sturgeon is a culturally significant species highly valued by the people of the Cree Nation of Eeyou Istchee. The *James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement* (JBNQA, signed in 1975), Canada's first modern treaty, protects and guarantees the rights of Cree people as beneficiaries of the JBNQA, including the exclusive use of wildlife resources such as the Lake Sturgeon.

The Conservation Agreement establishes a Nation-to-Nation collaborative framework for developing a threat management plan for Lake Sturgeon in the JBNQA territory by recognizing the essential role and leadership of the Cree Nation for the successful conservation of this species.

This agreement will allow DFO to deliver a SARA-compliant threat management plan for the Southern Hudson Bay–James Bay Lake Sturgeon populations in the territory of the JBNQA, developed in partnership with Cree Nation and with the significant involvement of the communities and knowledge holders.

This work will aim to address threats to the species and its habitat to prevent the species from becoming threatened or endangered. This includes developing conservation measures that focus on:

- surveys and monitoring;
- management and coordination;
- research;
- habitat protection, restoration and enhancement; and
- outreach and communication.

Since the signing of the agreement, a working group comprised of CNG, Cree Trappers' Association (CTA), and DFO members has been formed to develop the Lake Sturgeon threat management plan for Eeyou Istchee. As part of this process, the CNG and CTA have conducted interviews with seventy-six (76) community members from nine (9) Cree communities. Following these interviews, workshops were completed with community members to validate the information that will serve to guide and frame a Lake Sturgeon threat management plan adapted to the Eeyou Istchee territory and JBNQA context.

Quotes

“Since time immemorial, the dedication of the Cree Nation to safeguard and conserve the Eeyou Istchee Territory and its diverse inhabitants has remained steadfast. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans shares in this commitment to take strong actions to halt the decline of aquatic species at risk and assist in their recovery. This historic agreement is an example of Nation-to-Nation relationships in addressing threats to biodiversity in the context of reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. We look forward to working with the Cree Nation in the development of this plan.”

The Honourable Joyce Murray, Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard

“The signing of this Conservation Agreement is a great achievement that I am very pleased with. It demonstrates a will to appreciate and recognize that Indigenous nations have inherent right to fully participate in the governance of their territory including the conservation of wildlife and its habitats, which we depend on for our culture, identity and well-being. As we have emphasized in the Conservation Agreement, the Cree Nation has inherent and legislative responsibilities to protect our land and wildlife through our own distinctive traditional practices, systems, laws, values and knowledge, as well as through our various agreements and treaties. This agreement will ensure that the Cree Nation is fully and significantly involved in every step of the development of this Lake Sturgeon management plan in Eeyou Istchee.”

Mandy Gull-Masty, Grand Chief, Grand Council of the Crees of Eeyou Istchee/Cree Nation Government

"As President of the Cree Trappers' Association, I welcome the signing of the Conservation Agreement for Lake Sturgeon in Eeyou Istchee. The Lake Sturgeon is a significant species for our people and communities as our cultural practices and livelihoods are closely tied to the fish. It is our responsibility to protect and conserve this species for future generations to come and we welcome the collaborative framework to identify conservation actions needed to ensure the survival of the Lake Sturgeon in Eeyou Istchee."

Arden Visitor, President, Regional Cree Trappers' Association

Quick Facts

- Section 11 of the *Species at Risk Act* enables a federal Minister to “enter into an conservation agreement with any government in Canada, organization, or person to benefit a species at risk or enhance its survival in the wild.” Such an effort includes the development of management plans for species of special concern such as the Lake Sturgeon.
- The Cree of eastern James Bay call the Lake Sturgeon Nameu (ᓇᓴᓄ) or Nimaau (ᓄᓴᓄ).
- The Lake Sturgeon is one of five species of sturgeon found in Canada. It is one of the largest freshwater fish in Canada.

Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee) and Cree Nation Government

The Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee) represents the approximately 20,000 Crees of Eeyou Istchee. The Cree Nation Government exercises governmental and administrative functions on behalf of the Cree Nation. Both have identical membership, board of directors, governing structures and are managed and operated as one. For more information: <https://www.cngov.ca/>

Associated links

- [Species profile of the Lake Sturgeon, Southern Hudson Bay–James Bay populations](#)
- [Agreement for the Conservation of the Lake Sturgeon, Southern Hudson Bay-James Bay populations](#)

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For more information:

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Conservation Agreement Committee for Lake Sturgeon. *From left to right : Tina Petawabano (CNG), Me Léo Parent-Sirois (CNG), Marc Dunn (CNG), Alexandra Valentin (DFO), Maya Longpré Croteau (CNG), Charlotte Heller (DFO), Emily Sinave (CNG), Simon Blanchette (DFO), Alain Guitard (DFO), Julie Châteauvert (DFO), Thomas Stevens (CTA). Absent on the photo : Nadia Saganash (CNG), Cameron McLean (CNG), Isaac Voyageur (CNG)*



Interview with community members in Eastmain