

Final ISAP Response to Pre-AM Workshop Webinars (9/27/2024)

June 25, 2024 (Pallid sturgeon)

July 11, 2024 (Piping plover)

Webinars

- The pre-workshop webinars provided useful overviews of the 2023 Adaptive Management Compliance Report (AMCR) and included updates of population status and trend, management actions, and monitoring results for the birds and fish.
- The June 25 webinar that focused on pallid sturgeon provided a thorough introduction to topics that were subsequently covered in more depth in the AM Workshop.
- The July 11 webinar provided the only update on the bird program and the components of the AMCR related to piping plovers. Plovers were not discussed at the AM Workshop.

Fish: Fort Peck Test Flow

- ISAP was impressed with the test release and associated monitoring of pallid sturgeon movement in response to the release from Fort Peck.
- ISAP was encouraged to see that potential Human Considerations (HC) impacts were monitored and adjustments were made to the release to minimize any impacts.
- We believe HC impact monitoring is important for building trust with stakeholders and is also an important part of adaptive management.
- Analysis of the test flow results can help determine how to maximize biological efficacy of controlled releases while planning for and minimizing HC impacts.

Fish: Interception and Rearing Complexes (IRCs)

- At the time of the webinars, ISAP recommended that a brief analysis of the need for IRCs within an AM framework be implemented to provide a basis for continued IRC discussion at the AM Workshop.
- Based on the AM workshop, IRCs no longer appear as a viable adaptive management action.

Fish: Population Monitoring and Modeling

- The pallid population modeling presented in the pre-workshop webinars focused mainly on work presented previously to the ISAP.
- At the time of the webinar, the ISAP recommended that additional details of the population models be developed and distributed to the ISAP for review.
- ISAP recommends that further model development/refinement be put on hold until better population monitoring data become available.

Fish: Propagation and Augmentation

- No comments

Fish: Intake Bypass and Yellowstone River

- ISAP considers the Intake bypass a demonstrated success in removing physical barriers to pallid sturgeon movement in the Yellowstone River

Fish: Gavins Point Flow Study

No comments

Fish: Spawning Habitat Construction/Study

No comments

Birds: Flow Management to Reduce Nest Inundation

- It was encouraging to learn that adult piping plover counts were the highest since counts began in 1993 and that most targets for success were met in 2023.
- However, the lower fledge rates in 2023 emphasize the vulnerability of the plovers to flow releases and reservoir water level variation that result from ongoing USACE system management.
- While it is good that the bird staff had weekly calls to coordinate with water management staff, it is disconcerting that this coordination did not result in changes in reservoir levels or flow releases to reduce subsequent nest inundation, particularly downstream of Gavins Point Dam.

Birds: ESH Construction and Augmentation Forecasts

- Forecasts of available Emergent Sandbar Habitat (ESH) acreage suggest that new construction or augmentation of ESH might not be needed during the next several years, particularly not in the southern areas of Missouri River plover management.

Birds: Population Monitoring and Modeling

- ISAP recognizes that the development of the plover population model is ongoing and details of the revised model are under development.
- ISAP requests that communication concerning the plover population model development be improved by providing details of the model updating, parameterization, and testing to the ISAP.

Birds: Vegetation Management and River Habitat Study

- While ongoing vegetation management appears effective at helping to maintain areas of ESH (or extending the “lifespan” of ESH) for plover nesting, it will be very useful to have the full findings of the vegetation management effectiveness study to justify ongoing and future vegetation management.
- The River Habitat Study, initiated with USGS in 2024, will also be valuable for determining the characteristics of ESH that provide quality nesting habitat for plovers.
- The River Habitat Study could perhaps generate more accurate estimates of effective ESH habitat availability.

Birds: Predation Management & Nest Caging Study

No comments

Concluding Thoughts

- ISAP recognizes that Tribes continue to have no direct influence on the AM process for either the Fish or Bird science teams. Tribal concerns remain limited to discussions of mitigation of cultural resources due to erosion and issues related to the trust obligations of USACE recognizing sovereign individual and collective treaty rights over the resources of the Missouri River.
- ISAP believes funding for select ISAP members to participate in HC webinars and HC/Fish webinars is important given the dominant role that HC members play in influencing the extent and timing of several management actions.
- ISAP would benefit by being informed of presentations made by the USACE and consultants to HC members and discussions among HC members to better understand the interactions between MRRIC and the USACE/USFWS
- ISAP members have expertise to contribute to discussions of potential HC impacts from management actions