



Framework for Aquatic Species at Risk Conservation Discussion Paper

Saskatchewan First Nations Feedback and Insights

Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations (FSIN)
Lands and Resources Secretariat
January 31, 2024



Contents

- Introduction
- Questionnaire Feedback Summaries
- Other Feedback and Insights



Introduction

Over the course of 3 engagements with First Nation Members, the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations (FSIN) collected comments and feedback on the *DFO Framework for Aquatic Species at Risk Conservation Discussion Paper* as part of the Wave 3 Engagement topics. Following a collaborative review of the Feedback Questionnaire, FSIN has compiled the following report to guide DFO as they finalize the Conservation Framework in 2024.





Questionnaire Feedback

Q1a

“Do you have any suggestions for improving these principles?”

Inherent Rights

Include Inherent Rights into language used in Guiding Principle #2 (*“Respect Inherent, Aboriginal and Treaty Rights, incorporate Indigenous perspectives and enhance opportunities for Indigenous leadership”*).

DFO Funding

Accessible funding from DFO is needed to increase capacity at First Nations communities when engaging about fish and fish habitat (FFH) stewardship and to support data sovereignty in collecting their own data. First Nations would use funding to collect data such as monitoring lake levels, water sampling, and live sampling of fish. Funding also required for species at risk in lakes with declining fish species to start establishing baseline data for reference in the future.

Improved Communication Pathways

DFO needs to share with First Nations what DFO has been undertaking for multi-species conservation. Share their studies, data, and information.

There needs to be improved communication pathways between DFO, Water Security Agency and communities. Collaborate on work that is undertaken in all regions for improved outcomes.

Community Example: flooding in 2011 at Fishing Lake – all cabins were lost, and debris and contaminants went into the lake. Loss of perch over the years since then, and cray fish also declined / lost. DFO should inform on what their studies have uncovered - improved communication required. Were the fish safe to consume after the flood? What is DFO’s follow up with communities impacted by events that impact fish and fish habitat?

Q1a

“Do you have any suggestions for improving these principles?”

Continuous Engagement Efforts

Engagement with First Nations should be an ongoing process.

Examples of communication that is appropriate include:

- Providing timely updates on continued or planned fish and fish habitat and aquatic species at risk undertakings by DFO and proponents, including studies, research, and projects;
- Providing reports and other communications and presentations on monitoring of habitats.

Attend to the First Nations and engage with them individually when there are issues within the lakes / waterbodies within their Treaty and traditional territories.

The improvement of the Guiding Principles should be an ongoing and iterative process.

Responsibilities of and Connections to Other Organizations

- The Government of Saskatchewan has a major part in this. Also connects to Saskatchewan First Act.
- Approach Provincial guidelines about permitting bad business
- Approach big industry / big companies about harming the environment – e.g. SaskPower, the mining industry and its major companies, oil and gas producers, and the agriculture industry. Have to look at them to change.

Q1b

“Do you have any suggestions for best practices you would like to see incorporated into these principles?”

To enhance these principles from a First Nations perspective, consider the following:

1. Ensure active participation and collaboration with First Nations in the development and application of multi-species approaches, respecting traditional knowledge and practices.
2. Strengthen the acknowledgment of Indigenous Rights and incorporate traditional ecological knowledge into decision-making processes for improved conservation outcomes.
3. Foster capacity building and leadership opportunities for First Nations within multi-species recovery and conservation actions, emphasizing cultural relevance and sustainability.





Q1b

“Do you have any suggestions for best practices you would like to see incorporated into these principles?”

4. Promote inclusive and culturally sensitive engagement strategies that recognize the diversity of First Nation perspectives and values in conservation efforts. Emphasize the importance of ongoing dialogue, information sharing and partnership-building with First Nations, recognizing their unique roles as stewards of the land and water. This will help to ensure that traditional land and sacred sites are identified and not disturbed.
5. Consider incorporating mechanisms for free, prior, and informed consent, and establish transparent information-sharing platforms that respect First Nation protocols and governance structures. Encourage the development of joint monitoring and evaluation plans, ensuring the incorporation of First Nation indicators for success.
6. Need to consider monitoring aquatic invasive species (AIS) – including flowering rush, which outcompetes native aquatic plants and decreases fish habitat. Also zebra and quagga mussels, currently in MB and US.

These suggestions aim to enhance the inclusivity, effectiveness, and cultural relevance of the guiding principles from a First Nations perspective.



Q2

“Are there other criteria that you would recommend to help identify situations in which multi-species approaches should be used?”

1. Community Involvement and Holistic Approaches: To support improved conservation and a more holistic approach when considering multiple species, generate community interest and participation, ensuring that First Nations are engaged in decision-making processes related to the conservation of species. DFO should be monitoring changes and also approaching First Nation people about the changes they are observing in their communities in an inclusive way, across all lakes and geographies in Saskatchewan.
2. Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) and Cultural Significance: Prioritize multi-species approaches when there is alignment with TEK, leveraging First Nation knowledge systems to enhance conservation strategies and practices across multiple species. Apply multi-species approaches when species hold cultural significance within First Nations, recognizing the interconnectedness of species with traditional practices and values.

Q2

“Are there other criteria that you would recommend to help identify situations in which multi-species approaches should be used?”



Saskatoon Wave 3 Engagement
January 24 & 25, 2024

3. Ecosystem Resilience: Consider multi-species approaches to enhance the overall resilience of ecosystems, recognizing the importance of interconnected relationships between species for the sustainability of ecosystems.

4. Inter-Generational Sustainability: Opt for multi-species approaches when the conservation measures contribute to the long-term sustainability of ecosystems, aligning with First Nation principles of inter-generational responsibility.

These additional criteria emphasize the cultural, traditional, and community-oriented aspects that are integral to a holistic approach to conservation from a First Nations perspective.



Q3

“Are there additional factors you would like to see considered in identifying opportunities to apply multi-species approaches?”

1. Cultural Impact Assessments: Evaluate the potential cultural impacts on First Nations, including the impact on traditional practices, knowledge systems, and the relationship between species and cultural heritage.
2. Community Well-being: Assess the impact on the well-being of First Nations, ensuring that multi-species approaches contribute positively to the socio-economic aspects of local communities.
3. Consideration of Other Species: Should be examining all aquatic species in a waterbody, not just the ones at risk. Consideration should also be given to species identified as at-risk by First Nation communities (not just those identified by the government). How does restocking factor into multi-species approaches?
4. Access to Funding: Ensure adequate and accessible funding is available to support meaningful engagement and collaboration regarding the development and application of multi-species approaches.

Q3

“Are there additional factors you would like to see considered in identifying opportunities to apply multi-species approaches?”



5. Respect for Traditional Territories: Ensure that multi-species approaches align with the protection and stewardship of traditional territories, acknowledging the interconnectedness of species with ancestral lands.

6. Information Sharing and Capacity Building: Share information, data with all parties (including municipalities) and communities, including specific operational information such as how DFO keeps track of SAR in all lakes in SK. Evaluate the potential for capacity building with First Nations, fostering skills development and meaningful participation in conservation efforts.

Including these factors will contribute to a more comprehensive and culturally sensitive approach to developing and applying multi-species approaches, aligning with the values and priorities of First Nations.



Q4

“These general implementation steps have been developed to help plan and apply multi-species approaches. Are there any changes to these steps that you would recommend?”

1. Access to Funding: DFO needs to clearly outline funding opportunities associated with these steps for communities to apply to. If no funding exists, DFO should create specific funding pockets for continuous engagement and process improvement to enhance relationships with First Nations people around fish and fish habitat stewardship.
2. Information Sharing and Gathering: Sharing of information is very important, with First Nation leadership, front line workers, and governments. Enhance the information gathering phase by adopting a holistic approach that integrates both Western scientific knowledge and Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) to ensure a comprehensive understanding of ecological and socioeconomic factors.
3. Continuous Feedback on Lessons Learned and Process Improvement: DFO should seek community feedback on a continuous basis on lessons learned and ways to continually improve upon their processes and undertakings. This also requires funding to engage First Nations to seek this information.
4. Inclusion of First Nation Perspectives: How will First Nation information and perspectives be integrated into steps 1 to 4?



Q4

“These general implementation steps have been developed to help plan and apply multi-species approaches. Are there any changes to these steps that you would recommend?”

5. First Nation-Led Identification of Stewardship Opportunities: Prioritize First Nation-led identification of opportunities for fish habitat stewardship with respect to aquatic species at risk, ensuring that First Nations actively participate in recognizing and defining opportunities based on their traditional knowledge and values.

6. Culturally Relevant Defining of Objectives: Incorporate culturally relevant objectives aligned with First Nation perspectives, acknowledging the interconnected relationship between species, cultural practices, and the well-being of First Nations.

7. Community-Centric Planning, Evaluation and Adaptation: Ensure the evaluation and adaptation process is community-centric, involving meaningful engagement with First Nations to assess the effectiveness of the approach and make adjustments in accordance with traditional practices and knowledge.



Q4

“These general implementation steps have been developed to help plan and apply multi-species approaches. Are there any changes to these steps that you would recommend?”

8. Cultural Indicators and Monitoring: Develop cultural indicators alongside ecological indicators, incorporating First Nation perspectives into monitoring plans to reflect the holistic nature of multi-species approaches from both scientific and traditional standpoints.

9. Strengthening Collaborative Networks: Emphasize the development and strengthening of First Nation collaborative networks, fostering partnerships with external partners while prioritizing the autonomy and leadership of First Nations in conservation efforts.

10. Capacity Building with First Nation Best Practices: Integrate capacity-building initiatives that focus on First Nation best practices, empowering communities with the skills and knowledge needed for effective participation in multi-species approaches.

Q5

“Are there any other comments you would like to provide?”

From a First Nations perspective, it is essential to emphasize the following considerations:

1. First Nation Leadership and Collaboration: Ensure active and meaningful engagement of First Nations in shaping and implementing the Framework, recognizing the importance of First Nation leadership and collaboration in conservation efforts.
2. Incorporating Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK): Highlight the significance of incorporating TEK in developing tools to understand the effectiveness of multi-species approaches, recognizing First Nation knowledge as a valuable source of information.
3. Cultural Sensitivity in Proactive Actions: Encourage proactive actions that not only support the needs of multiple species but also respect and align with First Nation cultural practices, fostering a holistic approach to conservation.

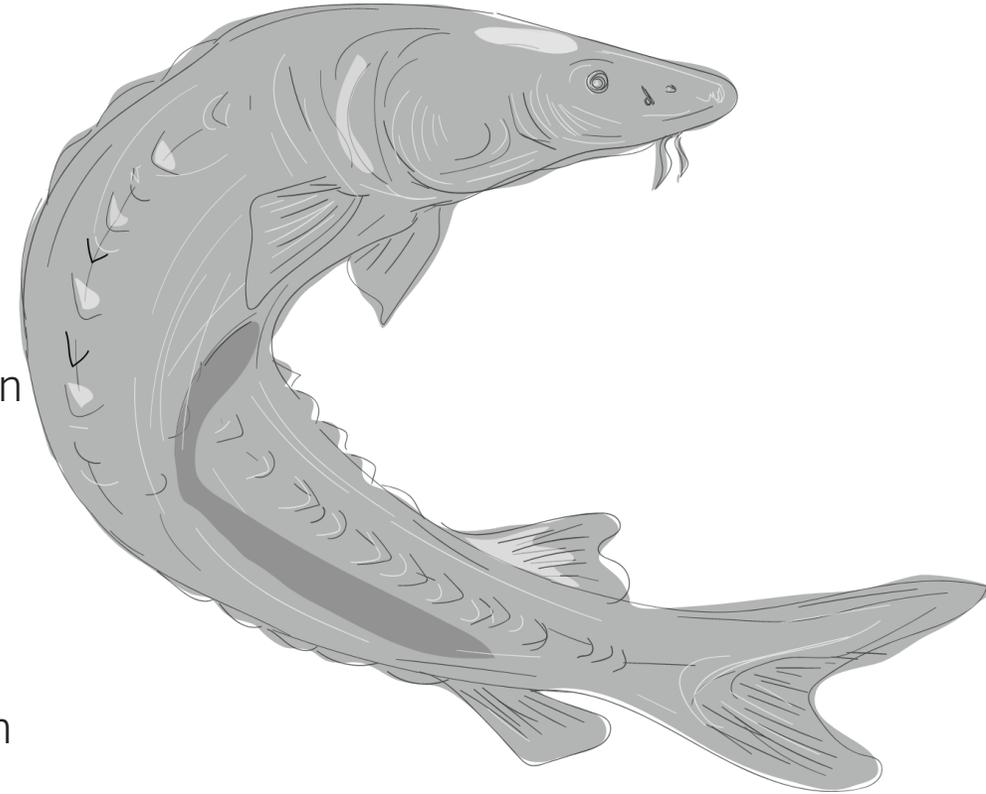
Q5

“Are there any other comments you would like to provide?”

4. Recognition of Unlisted Species: Acknowledge the importance of considering and addressing the needs of species not yet listed under Schedule 1 of SARA, recognizing that First Nations often have unique insights into the status and vulnerabilities of various species.

5. Interconnectedness with Other Initiatives: Emphasize the interconnectedness of First Nation-led initiatives with broader conservation efforts, promoting collaboration and coordination to collectively achieve common objectives related to aquatic species at risk.

6. Consistent and Inclusive Communication: Ensure transparent and inclusive communication channels with First Nations, maintaining good connections with existing initiatives through open dialogue and information sharing.





Other Feedback and Insights

Other Feedback & Insights

Specific questions and comments regarding Saskatchewan First Nation community observations:

- Fort Qu'Appelle has a lot of carp – outcompeting Bigmouth Buffalo species (similar anatomy and preferred habitat)
- Perch used to be in abundance at Fishing Lake – haven't seen perch in years. Ministry of Environment restocked lake in the past, but not sure what they stocked it with.
- No communication between government and First Nations. Need better communication – both feds and the province
- Fishing Lake experienced a couple of floods – many cabins were lost, many contaminants entered the lake, then they lost pickerel in the lake
- Lakes need to be restocked
- Concerns about crayfish
- Funding applications need to be user-friendly – what good is the funding program, if there is difficulty applying for the funding
- Who does the groundwork to identify if waterbodies have species at risk?
- Need data to prove that contamination killed off fish where that is a concern

Other Feedback & Insights

Specific questions and comments regarding Saskatchewan First Nation community observations:

- Issues with fish net placement by government agencies that do their fish counts / monitoring – they put them back exactly where it was last time (by GPS) – at Big Sandy this was an issue. They should move them to where the fish move. They do the testing in July – it's shallow then, so fish have already moved. Walleye do not move – netting needs fish to move, and so of course you won't catch them. If they would do it in September, they would catch the actual population of what's in the water. They determine things and make decisions on this netting information.
 - Need to incorporate IK into these activities.
- Limits are set based on this info the government collects, so it can really impact things if they make poor decisions based on poor data collected.
- Need more oversight of recreational fishing / angling – no control on angling in terms of what they catch.
- Need buffer zones from agricultural run-off to protect waterways
- Lack of awareness around Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) – who are they, what is their mandate?