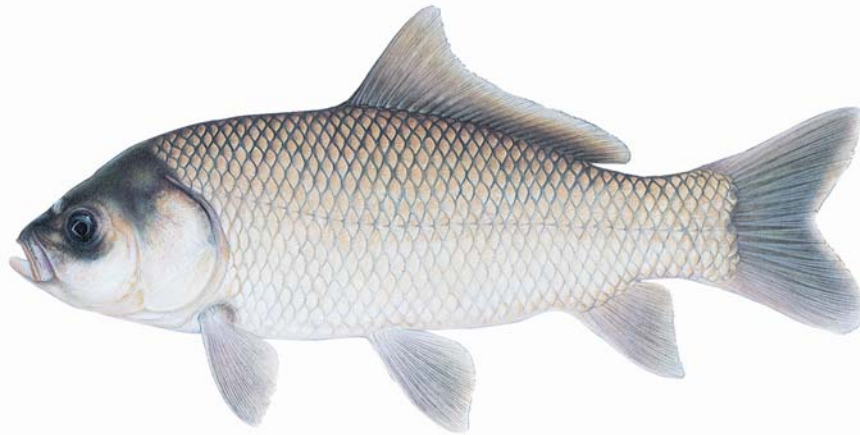




SPECIES AT RISK ACT

CONSULTATION WORKBOOK on the addition of a species to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk



The Bigmouth Buffalo

Saskatchewan-Nelson River Population

November 2009

Aussi disponible en français



Fisheries and Oceans
Canada

Pêches et Océans
Canada

Canada

CONSULTATION WORKBOOK

The Bigmouth Buffalo

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Introduction

Why are we asking for your feedback on the Bigmouth Buffalo?

The purpose of this workbook is to invite all Canadians to share their views on whether the Bigmouth Buffalo's Saskatchewan and Nelson River population should be added as a species of "Special Concern" to the List under the federal *Species at Risk Act* (SARA).

The Workbook summary

This workbook is broken down into three parts.

- Part 1 provides general background information on the federal *Species at Risk Act*, and explains how a species is added to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk, and what happens once that occurs.
- Part 2 provides information about the Bigmouth Buffalo in Canada, and outlines its current "at risk" status.
- Part 3 (detachable) consists of a questionnaire for you to complete and send to the federal government. It is intended to assist you in stating your concerns and advice.

This workbook can also be downloaded by visiting: www.sararegistry.gc.ca

Your view is important to us!

Your view on whether the status of the Bigmouth Buffalo's Saskatchewan-Nelson River population should be added as a species of "special concern" on the SARA List of Wildlife Species at Risk is important to this consultation process. Your opinions will be carefully considered.

Part 1: The *Species at Risk Act*

The *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) became law on June 5, 2003. This federal legislation helps prevent Canada's wildlife species from becoming extinct. The Act sets out how the federal government will decide which species are in greatest need of protection and what it will do to protect those species. It identifies how governments, organizations and individuals can work together to protect plants and animals (including aquatic species), and it establishes penalties for failing to obey the Act.

Plants and animals protected under the Act are included in the SARA "List of Wildlife Species at Risk". This inventory of protected species will be called "the SARA List" in the rest of this consultation workbook.

Who determines if a species is "at risk"?

The federal government will consider adding a species to the SARA List only if the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) considers a species is 'at risk' and recommends legal protection. COSEWIC is a legally recognized group of independent experts who use science and traditional knowledge to determine which species need added protection. These recommendations are formally presented to the federal government.

As part of the recommendations, COSEWIC places the species it considers to be "at risk" into one of five categories:

Extinct - A wildlife species that no longer exists.

Extirpated - A wildlife species that is no longer found in the wild in Canada but may be found elsewhere.

Endangered - A wildlife species that will likely soon become Extirpated or Extinct.

Threatened - A wildlife species likely to become Endangered if nothing is done to help protect it.

Special Concern - A wildlife species that may become Threatened or Endangered if nothing is done to help protect it.

Once the COSEWIC recommendations are received, the federal government Cabinet must decide if it will support, reject or send recommendations back to COSEWIC for further considerations. As part of the Cabinet's consideration process, it must consider the views of Canadians, as well as the economic and social implications of protecting a species under SARA.

What happens once a species or population is added to the SARA List?

The amount of protection that SARA provides depends on its status in the above five "at risk" categories.

It is illegal to kill, harm, harass, possess, collect, buy, sell or trade an Extirpated, Endangered or Threatened species. It is also generally illegal to damage or destroy the places these species live. These prohibitions do not apply to species of Special Concern.

The *Species at Risk Act* is a federal piece of legislation. The responsible ministers are the Minister of the Environment, who is responsible for animals and plants found on federal lands, and the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, who is responsible aquatic animals. Under special circumstances, the Ministers may make exceptions to the above prohibitions. For example, a responsible minister can issue a permit that would allow a qualified scientist to carry out a research project that would likely benefit a listed species, but may require the collection of specimens, or a physical relocation from its current habitat. Exceptions can only be made if the minister is assured that the survival or recovery of the species will not be jeopardized.

Public Consultation

When deciding whether to add a species to the SARA List, the federal government must consider potential social and economic benefits and costs. It must also consider the potential consequences of *not* adding the species. To do this, government representatives meet with various organizations and members of the public who have a direct interest in the species or who wish to provide comments. This may include landowners, aboriginal groups, land users, wildlife management boards, non-government environmental organizations and industry. This consultation workbook provides another option to allow Canadians to provide their views to government.

Following the consultation period, the government carefully considers all comments it receives. Following this final consideration, the government must

decide whether to add the species to the SARA List. Its decision is published in the Canada Gazette, Part II and on the SARA Public Registry.

Recovery strategies and management plans

If a wildlife species is added to the SARA List as an **Extirpated**, **Endangered** or **Threatened** species, the federal government must prepare a strategy for its recovery. The *recovery strategy* outlines known threats to the species, identifies the habitat it needs to survive, and highlights gaps in knowledge. It also sets a goal for the species' recovery.

A recovery strategy must be completed within one year of a species being listed as Endangered, and within two years if it is Threatened or Extirpated.

If a wildlife species is considered **Special Concern**, the federal government must prepare a *management plan* within three years of the species being added to the SARA List. The management plan identifies conservation measures aimed at protecting the species and its habitat.

The recovery strategies and management plans are prepared in cooperation with directly affected groups, including wildlife management boards, Aboriginal organizations and provincial or territorial governments responsible for managing the species. Using public notices, letters and meetings, every effort is made towards consulting individuals, organizations and communities who may be directly affected by these strategies and plans.

When complete, the recovery strategy or management plan is posted on the online SARA Public Registry website, which provides information and documents about species at risk in Canada. Once posted, the public has 60 days to let the federal government hear its views. The government then has 30 days to consider any comments received, make any changes to the proposed recovery strategy or management plan, and post a final copy in the Public Registry.

Action Plans

After the final posting of the recovery strategy, one or more Action Plans are prepared. Action Plans identify ways to reduce threats to the species and protect its critical habitat, as well as other activities to be undertaken to support the recovery strategy. Action plans are prepared in cooperation with directly affected groups, including wildlife management boards, Aboriginal organizations and provincial or territorial governments responsible for managing the species. Using public notices, letters and meetings, every effort is made towards consulting individuals, organizations and communities who may be directly affected by these plans.

When the proposed action plan is completed, it is posted on the Public Registry for 60 days to allow the federal government to hear views of Canadians. After the 60 days, the government has 30 days to consider any comments received, make any changes to the action plan and post a final copy in the Public Registry.

For more information

Visit the SARA Public Registry (<http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca>) for more information on the *Species at Risk Act* and the various species that receive federal protection.

Additional information can be found on the Fisheries and Oceans Canada Species at Risk website (www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/species-especes/) and on the website of the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) (www.cosewic.gc.ca).

Part 2: The Bigmouth Buffalo

This section is based on excerpts from:

COSEWIC 2009 assessment and status report on the Bigmouth Buffalo *Ictiobus cyprinellus*, Great Lakes - Upper St. Lawrence populations and Saskatchewan-Nelson River populations, in Canada. Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. Ottawa. vii + 40 pp (www.sararegistry.gc.ca/status/status_e.cfm).

Current COSEWIC designation

This species was considered a single unit and designated by COSEWIC as "*Special Concern*" in April 1989. It was split into two populations in April 2008: the Great Lakes-Upper St. Lawrence population; and the Saskatchewan-Nelson River population.

Great Lakes-Upper St. Lawrence population
2008: Designated by COSEWIC as "*Not at Risk*".

Saskatchewan-Nelson River population
2009: Designated by COSEWIC as "*Special Concern*".

Current SARA Listing status

The Bigmouth Buffalo's Saskatchewan-Nelson River population is not currently included on the SARA List of Wildlife Species at Risk.

As a result of COSEWIC's assessment of the Bigmouth Buffalo's Saskatchewan-Nelson River population in 2009, the Government of Canada is presently considering whether to add this species to the SARA List of Wildlife Species at Risk as a species of "Special Concern".

Species description

A large freshwater fish, the Bigmouth Buffalo (*Ictiobus cyprinellus*) is a member of the sucker family, Catostomidae. It is one of 18 (possibly 19) sucker species found in Canada.

The body is large, deep, and laterally compressed. The mouth, as suggested by its name, is larger than those of most fish. Bigmouth Buffalo can be distinguished from most other suckers by its long, curved dorsal fin. Colour can

vary with the level of mixing in the water: from a pale and yellow colour in turbid waters, to an olive-blue in very clear waters.

The Bigmouth Buffalo can attain a maximum length of 914 mm and can weigh as much as 36 kg.

Its lifespan is estimated to be more than 20 years.



Figure 1. Image of the Bigmouth Buffalo (© 2009 Eric Engbretson/ Critterzone.com)

Where are Bigmouth Buffalo Found found?

The Bigmouth Buffalo is found in the deeper pools of medium- to large-sized rivers, and in slower waters. Areas it frequents include ox-bows, bayous and flood plain lakes, sloughs, shallow lakes and impoundment areas. (Becker 1983; Pfeleger 1975; Trautman 1981).

The Bigmouth Buffalo prefers warm, turbid, nutrient-rich waters. It is usually found in schools near the middle of the water column or near the bottom (Pfleiger 1975; Trautman 1981). It also appears to have a high tolerance for low oxygen levels (Gould and Irwin 1962) and mild salinity levels (Minckley et al. 1970).

Spring flooding is an important factor in successful reproduction, as it triggers spawning activity and provides access to spawning areas with thick vegetation, such as marshes and backwaters (Johnson 1963). The eggs become attached to the vegetation and hatch about two weeks later (Becker 1983).

The distribution of the Bigmouth Buffalo is limited to central areas of North America, where it is found in the Mississippi drainage from the Gulf of Mexico northward to Minnesota and North Dakota, including the Missouri and Ohio rivers. In the Great Lakes basin, it has been reported in Lake Erie,

Lake St. Clair, the Bay of Quinte, Hamilton Harbour and in several rivers, including the Grand, the Sydenham, the Thames, the Welland, and the Ausable.

Within the Hudson Bay basin, the Bigmouth Buffalo has been reported in the Red and Assiniboine rivers, as well as the south basin of Lake Winnipeg and Lake Manitoba (likely entering through the Assiniboine River floodway). This species is relatively abundant in the Qu'Appelle Lakes in Saskatchewan and has been reported in the North Saskatchewan River at Prince Albert.

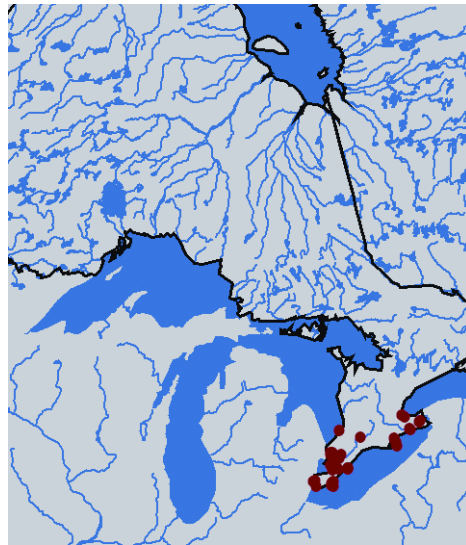


Figure 2. Distribution of the Bigmouth Buffalo, Great Lakes-Upper St. Lawrence population.

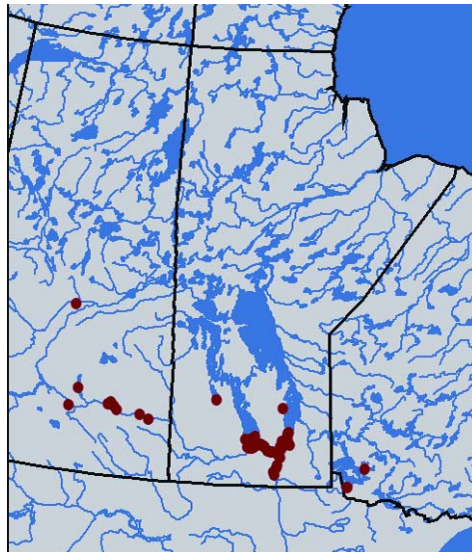


Figure 3. Distribution of the Bigmouth Buffalo, Saskatchewan-Nelson River population.

How many Bigmouth Buffalo exist?

No studies on the population size of the Bigmouth Buffalo in Canada have been conducted, so it is difficult to determine numbers and population trends. However, based on the existing limited information, it appears that the population size is low.

Threats to the Bigmouth Buffalo

Loss of habitat, along with the reduced quality of, and access to, spawning habitat due to water management practises (particularly the regulation of water levels and channelization) are likely to be the most important factors for the reduced population size of Bigmouth Buffalo in the Qu'Appelle River basin. Bigmouth Buffalo eggs do not hatch, or hatch less successfully in areas where waters are too turbid, which is the results of high levels of sand, silt and materials entering the river or lake. Commercial fishing may have also added to the reduction in populations in the past.

What will happen if the Bigmouth Buffalo is added as a species of "Special Concern" to the SARA List?

Once legally listed under SARA as "Special Concern", the federal government is required to prepare a Management Plan within three years of the listing date.

The Management Plan will include conservation measures that could apply to more than just the species of concern, and will require the cooperation and feedback of other levels of government, wildlife management boards, Aboriginal organizations, and other persons and organizations likely able to assist on the plan's development and implementation.

Part 3: Let Us Know What You Think

The following questionnaire invites you to reflect on the implications of adding the Saskatchewan-Nelson River population of the Bigmouth Buffalo as a species of “Special Concern” to the SARA List.

Your answers and comments will tell us what you think about the protection and recovery of this unique species, and especially about the possible effects of the decision to change its status on the SARA List.

If you wish to keep the other sections of this workbook, please feel free to detach them and return only the questionnaire.

Return the completed questionnaire or your comments by mail, fax or E-mail to the following address:

SARA Coordinator
Fisheries and Oceans Canada
501 University Crescent
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3T 2N6

Email: fwisar@dfo-mpo.gc.ca
Fax: 204 983-5192
Telephone: 204 984-0599
Toll-free: 1-866-538-1609

Alternately, you can provide your views by visiting the Public Registry (www.sararegistry.gc.ca) and posting your comments.

Please submit your comments by January 15, 2010

Questionnaire on the Bigmouth Buffalo

1. In what capacity are you completing this questionnaire?

- ☐ Individual
- ☐ Individual, member of an aboriginal people, please specify (optional):

- ☐ Representative of an organization or company (please specify):

- ☐ Other (please specify):

2. Your name (optional): _____

3. Where do you live (if individual)? / Or, what territory does your organization or company cover?

- ☐ Manitoba
- ☐ Saskatchewan
- ☐ Other - please identify _____

4. Which sectors do you represent? Check all that apply.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal Affairs | <input type="checkbox"/> Mines, Oil and Gas - exploration, exploitation, transportation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture, Forestry | <input type="checkbox"/> Non-profit Organization - environmental, sustainable development |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> Non-profit Organization - economic, social and community development |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Construction | <input type="checkbox"/> Service Sector - public administration, health and social welfare |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial Fishing | <input type="checkbox"/> Service Sector - tourism, culture |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hunting, Fishing and Trapping | <input type="checkbox"/> Service Sector - transportation and communications |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hydroelectric or Wind Energy - exploration, production, transportation | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): |

5. How familiar are you with the *Species at Risk Act*?

- ☐ I am not familiar with the Act
- ☐ I know this Act well
- ☐ I have heard about this Act in the media
- ☐ I have gathered some information on this Act (pamphlets, websites, consultation workbooks, etc.)
- ☐ I have participated in information sessions or public consultations relating to this Act
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

6. a) Do you think the Government of Canada should add the Bigmouth Buffalo (Saskatchewan-Nelson-River population) to the SARA *List of Wildlife Species at Risk*?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Undecided

b) If you have answered "Yes" or "No", please indicate the reasons for your answer. If you have answered "Undecided", please indicate why. If possible, please provide information or advice which you believe may assist in making this decision.

7. Based on your understanding of the *Species at Risk Act*,

a) Do you believe that your activities could be affected if the Bigmouth Buffalo (Saskatchewan-Nelson River population) was added as a “Special Concern”?

☐ Positive Effect ☐ Negative Effect ☐ No Effect ☐ Not Sure

b) Please describe how your activities would be negatively or positively impacted.

8. Which of these options best reflect your agreement or disagreement with the following statements concerning the Bigmouth Buffalo:

The Bigmouth Buffalo	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Indifferent	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	No opinion
They are of social, cultural and traditional importance in my community (<i>e.g.</i> for ceremonial purposes)						
They are, or have been, an important subsistence food source						
They have economic value (<i>e.g.</i> commerce, hunting)						
They create job opportunities (<i>e.g.</i> tourism) in the local economy						
They play an important role in maintaining a healthy freshwater ecosystem						
They are an important to our Canadian heritage						
They will be a valuable resource for future generations						
I value them, though I have never seen them						
Other (please specify):						

9. Do you have any other comments concerning the legal listing of the Bigmouth Buffalo (Saskatchewan-Nelson River) population) to the SARA List of Wildlife Species at Risk? (include additional sheets, if necessary)

The following questions are optional

10. Has this workbook helped you?

a) Understand how the listing process works under SARA?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Undecided

b) Understand the important issues concerning the Bigmouth Buffalo?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Undecided

c) Find an effective way to communicate your views on the Bigmouth Buffalo?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Undecided

11. What changes or additions can we make to the workbook to make it easier to understand and more user-friendly?

THANK YOU!

Please submit your comments on the Bigmouth Buffalo by mail, fax or e-mail to:

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Fisheries and Oceans Canada
501 University Crescent
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3T 2N6

Email: fwisar@dfo-mpo.gc.ca
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