STATE OF THE WATERSHED REPORT

ICELANDIC RIVER AND WASHOW BAY CREEK WATERSHEDS

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OVERVIEW

Very little fisheries data (species, utilization, habitat etc.) exist on these two watersheds, especially more recent data. The East Interlake Conservation District (EICD) recently received funding from the Fisheries Enhancement Initiative to hire an environmental consulting firm to conduct a watershed assessment of both the Icelandic River and Washow Bay Creek. The resulting report (winter 2007) will provide up to date data on fish species, seasonal habitat utilization and distribution as well as riparian and instream habitat conditions. The report will also identify existing and potential threats to water quality in the watersheds, with a list of projects to mitigate them. This report will provide the most up to date fisheries data available as well as serve the EICD with a recipe of sorts to deal with a host of habitat degradation and water quality issues.
Current available data gathered on fish species is provided. More than 20 species of fish have been collected in the watersheds over the years. This list may seem comprehensive but for the most part they are seasonal distribution patterns with the more tolerant species (eg.central mudminnow) thriving as year round residents in marginal fisheries overwintering habitat.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Both watersheds seem to offer quality spring habitat, however, due to historic channelization of a large portion of the watersheds, spring flows are shorter in duration depending on seasonal precipitation. Historically, spawning runs of walleye from Lake Winnipeg were known to exist on both the Icelandic River and Washow Bay Creek. Present utilization of Lake Winnipeg fish species in these systems will be determined in the on-going watershed inventory.

ISSUES/AREAS OF CONCERN

A considerable portion of the watersheds have been converted into constructed drains, including sections of the mainstem Icelandic River and Washow Bay Creek . The channelization of rivers, creeks and streams degardes the ability of the waterway to conduct its' natural hydrologic processes which in turn develop natural pools and riffles beneficial to fish. The removal of riparian vegetation through this process and other anthropogenic activities is another concern. Naturally vegetated stream banks are important for maintaining the ecological integrity of waterways. Barriers to fish

movement exist in both watersheds as well, but seemingly more on the Icelandic River. Barriers often block fish spawning migrations to traditional quality spawning habitat as well as disrupt natural stream flows, sediment transport and thermal regimes. Two major barriers identified on the Icelandic River are the weir in the Town of Arborg and a water control structure a few miles upstream. The EICD has commissioned an engineering firm to mitigate the Town of Arborg weir fish barrier concerns. The future watershed assessment report by the EICD will provide more detailed information on the above concerns.

DATA GAPS/FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Fish movement/migration data, utilization by Lake Winnipeg fish stocks, overall watershed health, fish distribution and habitat quality assessment, riparian conditions and overwintering habitat availability. Many of these gaps will be filled with the resultant consultants report.

MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

The commissioning of the Icelandic River and Washow Bay Creek Watershed Assessment Projects is the best first step. This report will provide current baseline data information on fish and fish habitat, as well as, address problems in the watersheds, and potential solutions for mitigation.

FISH SPECIES CAPTURED IN THE WASHOW BAY CREEK AND ICELANDIC RIVER WATERSHEDS

DATA FROM FIHCS AND INTERLAKE REGION FILES

SPECIES

Brook stickleback
Northern pike
White sucker
Quillback sucker
Common carp
Central mudminnow
Johnny darter
Iowa darter
Fathead minnow
Black crappie
Blacknose shiner
Brown bullhead
Black bullhead
Burbot
Finescale dace
Blacknose dace
Northern redbelly dace
Longnose dace
Walleye
Yellow perch
Rock bass