



Cedar Lake Fishery

A Journey of Shared Management

Cedar Lake is located in West-Central Manitoba, about 460 kms northwest of Winnipeg. This 1,350 km² lake receives inflow from the Saskatchewan River, which originates in the Rocky Mountains, and discharges through the Grand Rapids Hydro-electric Generating Station located on the eastern edge of the lake. The Grand Rapids Generating Station raised the level of the lake when it began operation and regulates both the lake level and lake outflow to the present day.

The Beginning of the Commercial Fishery

The Cedar Lake Commercial Fishery was established in the winter of 1931-32 and has been an important source of community employment for the past 90 years. The first summer fishery occurred in 1937-38. More than 80 fishers from the community of Chemawawin participated in the early fishery.

In 1964, residents were moved from the community of Chemawawin on the west side of the lake to a newly constructed village near Easterville on the southeast shore of the lake. The move was necessitated by the rising water levels produced by the construction of the Grand Rapids Generating Station.

Over time, commercial fishing seasons were developed for both winter and summer. The commercial catch includes Walleye, Lake Whitefish, Goldeye and Northern Pike.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Cedar Lake Commercial Fishery is Manitoba's fourth largest commercial fishery, generating between \$600 K and \$1 M in annual landed value. The fishery includes 40 commercial net fishing licences and 10 retirement licences.



Shared Management

Shared management of the Cedar Lake Commercial Fishery began in 1996 when the Napanee Bay Fishers Association, now known as Cedar Lake Fisheries Inc., and Chemawawin Cree Nation approached the Manitoba government regarding the need for changes to the management of the fishery to ensure the long-term health of the fish stocks.

Quotas were developed cooperatively between the fishers' association and the Manitoba government. At the request of the fishers, the lake quota was divided into individual quota entitlements in 2005, but the lake-wide limit for Walleye continued to be managed with a 'lake tolerance.' The current quota system still reflects, in part, the changes that were implemented in the early years of fishery restructuring.

Quote from Chemawawin Cree Nation:

“After the collapse of the cedar lake fishery in 1996, Chemawawin Cree Nation has come a long way in terms of the development of an economic viable and a sustainable fishery on Cedar Lake. We have to be proud of what can be accomplished by partnering with industry and government. We wish to thank those involved including industry, both levels of government and the individual fisherman for their understanding and support. Without any of them, this would have not been possible.” said Chief Clarence Easter of Chemawawin Cree Nation.

Voluntary Commercial Fishery Closure

A significant milestone in the collaborative management of the Cedar Lake Commercial Fishery occurred when the commercial fishers implemented a voluntary commercial fishing closure in 1998-1999 and 1999-2000 to allow the fish stocks to rebuild. After the initial two-year closure, the fishers, with Chemawawin Cree Nation support, decided to extend the closure for an additional three years to the end of 2002-2003 for the sake of the fishery. This self-imposed sacrifice helped fish stocks rebuild to the point that a high-yielding sustainable and managed harvest was achievable.

Community Revitalization Plan

When the fishery re-opened in 2003, fish stocks had improved and a new quota management system was built. It was anticipated that the rationalization of the fishery into more economical business units would enhance conservation by reducing the need for fishers to chase fish to meet reasonable income expectations.

The Revitalization Plan included:

- rationalizing and restructuring the fishery by reducing the number of licensed commercial fishers from 81 to 41 to establish more viable fishing operations
- generating productive “bridging” employment for the 41 “returning” fishers on local projects to facilitate economic and social development and renew community infrastructure
- providing “new career” training and employment for the 40 fishers who left the fishery

The Revitalization Plan was funded by various levels of government including the Manitoba and federal governments.

Adaptive and Science-Based Management

Effective management of Manitoba’s fisheries requires adequate and consistent fish stock assessment data and a collaborative process that includes all resource users that have an interest in maintaining the long-term sustainability of the fishery.

Today, the Cedar Lake Commercial Fishery is managed cooperatively using an adaptive and science-based management approach. This means that the fishery’s management, including the quota system, is adjusted on an annual basis depending on current stock status. Based on the 2020 data, which indicated high relative weight, high abundance, and low mortality rates of Walleye in Cedar Lake, the lake tolerance was adjusted from 211,000 kg in 2020-21 to 232,100 kg in 2021-22 under this adaptive management regime.

In contrast, the department and fishers agreed to a maximum tolerance of 45,000 kg of Lake Whitefish annually. In the 2020-21 fishing year, the Lake Whitefish lake tolerance was set at 40,500 kg under the adaptive management regime.



Annual Collaborative Monitoring of Fish Stocks

Monitoring the fishery through annual fish stock assessments is an integral component of proper science-based management of the Cedar Lake Commercial Fishery. Cedar Lake commercial fishers play an important role by helping to collect biological data, as part of the department's annual stock monitoring programs. The provincially- and federally-funded Collaborative Stock Monitoring Program engages community fishers in the monitoring and management of the fisheries in which they participate. This vital fisheries data is important to inform the ongoing management of the fishery.

Current Stock Status

The Walleye population is healthy, with high relative weight, high abundance, and sustainable mortality rates. The Northern Pike stock is also doing well, with annual fishing mortality below the fishing mortality at maximum sustainable yield. The department and fishers are collecting further information on the stock status of Lake Whitefish as a major by-catch species. These stocks will continue to be monitored going forward. Management changes will be implemented as needed.

Based on 2020 data, the Lake Sturgeon population in the Saskatchewan River below the E.B. Campbell dam, which is connected to the Cedar Lake Commercial Fishery, has increased from an estimated low of 272 fish in 2002 to nearly 14,000 fish in 2020. A conservation closure prohibits anglers and commercial fishers from targeting and retaining Lake Sturgeon.



Eco-Certification Assessment Underway

More recently, Cedar Lake Fisheries Inc. and Chemawawin Cree Nation initiated a process to have the Cedar Lake Fishery considered for Marine Stewardship Council Sustainable Fishery Certification. The certification process assesses the management of the fishery against an internationally recognized sustainable fisheries standard.

This process considers three main principles:

- sustainable fish stocks
- minimizing environmental impact
- effective fisheries management

Achieving certification provides independent third-party evidence of the sustainability of the fishery for the benefit of the people who depend on Cedar Lake. It also competitively positions Cedar Lake fish products in fish markets.

The eco-certification assessment is set to conclude in early 2022.

Excerpt from the November 21, 2020 News Release:

“The Manitoba government is pleased to contribute financial and in-kind support to implement an external, third-party review of the Cedar Lake Fishery and its Management Plan as progress toward our mandate of eco-certification of our largest commercial fisheries across Manitoba,” said former Manitoba Agriculture and Resource Development Minister, Blaine Pedersen.

A Partnership for Success

Strong and enduring relationships between the Cedar Lake Fisheries Inc., Chemawawin First Nation, the federal government and the Manitoba government over the past 25 years has resulted in achieving a productive, sustainable and economically viable Cedar Lake Commercial Fishery.

Cooperation, collaboration and capacity development are critical to informed decision-making, meaningful engagement, and effective management. This would not have been possible without the leadership and foresight of Chemawawin First Nation and Cedar Lake commercial fishers.

The conservation and stewardship of fisheries and aquatic resources, their habitats, and ecosystems have always been a resource management priority for Chemawawin First Nation and Cedar Lake Fisheries Inc..

Quote from Cedar Lake Fisheries Inc.:

“Cedar Lake Fisheries Inc. is very proud of our commercial fishers and partners for taking important steps to ensure the long-term sustainability of our fishery,” said Floyd George, President of Cedar Lake Fisheries Inc..

For more information on the Cedar Lake fishery , please visit www.manitobafisheries.com.

Available in alternative format upon request.

Please contact fish@gov.mb.ca to inquire.