



WCS Canada and Moose Cree First Nation Partnership for Youth Engagement in Conservation Science

Interim Report from WCS Canada

February 24, 2022

Thank you very much to the Ontario Wildlife Foundation (OWF) for supporting the WCS Canada and Moose Cree First Nation youth program. Due to COVID-19, we have not spent any of the OWF funds to date, but we have been active with our research program, maintaining relationships with the Elders Advisory Group and with youth centres, and planning for youth programming in the summer of 2022. We anticipate spending all funds by the end of August 2022. In this interim report, we will outline our activities to date, and anticipated plans.



WCS Canada scientist Connie O'Connor in the process of releasing a lake sturgeon that was measured and sampled on the Mattagami River in fall 2021.

During the fall, the WCS Canada and Moose Cree First Nation team completed our planned fieldwork, but opted not to include youth participants due to the high rates of COVID-19 in northern Ontario communities. As noted in the application, the specific timing of our plans were dependent on COVID-19 health considerations and community restrictions. Unfortunately, this past Fall and winter have seen high COVID-19 cases in northern Ontario. Therefore, we chose to delay including youth until the summer of 2022, when we anticipate that COVID-19 cases and hospitalization will decline, and in-person activities and gatherings will be safe and feasible.

We were able to do one virtual activity during the fall, when we did a Facebook live event with Earth Rangers. A WCS Canada scientist and a Moose Cree youth who participated in our spring 2021 programming did a virtual meet-and-greet, talking about the threats to lake sturgeon as a species-at-risk, how our lake sturgeon research program is addressing some of these threats, and the importance of including youth.



Screenshot of the Earth Rangers Facebook Live Event, showing Moose Cree youth and Water Protector Rachel Corston (right) and WCS Canada scientist Claire Farrell (left).

In Fall 2021, we were also successful in obtaining funding from Fisheries and Oceans Canada for our work (which was noted as pending in our application), and so we are financially secure for research activities for 2022, and grateful that we have funding from OWF to include youth in these activities.

We met with the Elders Advisory Group virtually in December 2021, and presented an update of our activities and results. We also outlined our plans for fieldwork and youth activities in 2022. The Elders Advisory Group was very supportive of these plans. Therefore, with their support, we are planning a comprehensive field season between April to June 2022, which will include capturing and sampling lake sturgeon, as well as maintaining our receiver array. Our plan is to include 2-4 youth from Moose Factory and Kapuskasing in this fieldwork. Additionally, we are also planning additional, dedicated youth outreach events in late August and early September 2022, in both Moose Factory and Kapuskasing. We will hold weekend on-the-land activities for a larger group of youth, bringing in a variety of scientists and knowledge holders to share useful techniques and skills with the youth, such as traditional ways of making sturgeon nets, sampling fish and water, and identifying benthic invertebrates. We have contacted the youth centres in Kapuskasing and Moose Factory, and they are supportive of these activities, and will provide in-kind support (equipment) and will work with us to contact youth and coordinate these activities.

We have also developed a website to make it easier for youth to connect with us. It seems like virtual activities will continue to be a popular part of youth activities, even as in-person activities are able to resume, and so this website will be a useful tool to keep youth to date, and let them know about future opportunities.

Thank you, OWF, for your support of our work, and we look forward to sharing our final report with you in September 2022.