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September 28, 2005

The partners of the Prince Albert Model Forest including Parks Canada, Saskatchewan Environment, and the Saskatchewan Research Council, along with Environment Canada and the University of Saskatchewan are working together to study lake trout populations on Crean Lake in Prince Albert National Park. Using a variety of techniques, researchers are gathering information about fish sizes, population numbers, habitat use, egg survival and genetic diversity with the hope of aiding in restoration of this important indicator of ecosystem health.

Crean Lake, formerly Big Trout Lake, is one of the largest lakes in Canada's national parks. Exploitation of lake trout in this region predates park establishment in 1927. Crean was heavily fished commercially for nearly a decade in the 1920s with smaller fisheries operating until 1945. Recreational angling has occurred since park establishment with limits declining over time. In 1990, Crean was closed to lake trout angling, however the population remains low.

Preliminary echo-sounding data from 2004 indicated that mature female lake trout (>70 cm/28") might number less than 1000 individuals within the deeper zones of Crean Lake. This fall, data from more intensive echo-sounding surveys were gathered and will be compared with netting results. Tissue samples from live-captured lake trout at Crean Lake will be used to compare the genetic diversity of this population to those from Kingsmere, Wassegam, and other regional lakes.

A habitat assessment of known spawning reefs is also being conducted to describe the physical structure of the reef complexes and to determine the presence of potential egg predators. In order to study the hatching success of lake trout eggs on these reefs, eggs are being placed in incubator trays anchored in the lake over the winter and will be picked up in spring. With the help of volunteer divers from Prince Albert, large egg incubator mats used to protect lake trout eggs from predation on Lake Michigan are being piloted at Crean over the coming winter.

A Crean Lake Trout Working Group composed of cottagers, cabin owners, anglers, naturalists, and other interested Canadians are participating in the monitoring and restoration activities. Together with the researchers, many are involved in this concerted effort to restore an important species to its place as the dominant predator in the Crean Lake ecosystem.

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