

## Upper Columbia White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative

*...Helping hands for ancients of the deep*



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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### **Budding Biologists helping Kids to Release White Sturgeon**

CASTLEGAR – Over 330 students from around the West Kootenay descended on Castlegar on Wednesday, May 4<sup>th</sup> to release 6,000 juvenile white sturgeon. This annual event is organized by the Upper Columbia White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative, a coalition of Canadian and American stakeholders, to save this critically imperilled species.

What made the day extra special, however, was the opportunity for a group of older students to mentor and guide the elementary school students during the release. Over forty Grade 11 students were on hand from the Biology Class at Stanley Humphries Secondary school in Castlegar, handling everything from traffic control to informing their younger counterparts about the life history of the sturgeon.

“It’s been a great opportunity to be able to teach kids about endangered species,” says 17 year-old Jeremy Poster. “I think it is a good idea to learn about the sturgeon because if we let all the sturgeon die there won’t be any for future generations.”

“Having the young biologists to help out was fantastic,” said Gary Birch, Environmental and Social Issues Manager for BC Hydro, a member of the Recovery Group of the UCWSRI. “We had nearly twice as many school children attend this year compared to last and, with the help of the older students, this means many more children were able to develop a special connection to this amazing fish.”

Participating schools at the release, which was held below Hugh Keenleyside Dam, were from Castlegar, Trail, Robson, Blewett, Warfield, Harrop and Kaslo.

Every released fish has a ‘PIT’ (Passive Integrated Transponder) tag, about the size of a grain of rice, implanted in it. Each tag has a unique number that can be obtained by passing a scanner over the fish, allowing biologists to track its progress throughout its lifetime. The students are provided with the number of the fish they are releasing and can find information about their fish, if it has been relocated by biologists, by logging on to [www.uppercolumbiasturgeon.org](http://www.uppercolumbiasturgeon.org).

Prior to release, the year-old upper Columbia River white sturgeon were raised at the Kootenay Sturgeon Hatchery near Cranbrook with funding provided by the Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program. This year a total of about 12000 sturgeon were raised there and released at two sites on the Columbia River: Castlegar and Beaver Creek near Trail.

Available population estimates for upper Columbia River white sturgeon have ranged between 900 and 1400 wild fish in the Canadian portion of the basin and 1500 to 2000 fish from the Canada-U.S. border to the Grand Coulee Dam in the U.S. Almost all of these fish are greater

than 30 years old, suggesting a lack of reproductive success leading to a population of aging fish with relatively few young to replace the old. The sturgeon is North America's largest and longest living freshwater fish.

“The sturgeon family has survived for 175 million years,” says Bill Duncan, biologist with Teck Cominco, with the Action Planning Group of the UCWSRI. “It would be a huge blow to lose them at this stage. This is why it is critical that we rebuild dwindling stocks and educate our young stewards of the land. These fish live for over 100 years so it won't be you or I determining their survival but the young children here today.”

The cause for the decline of the sturgeon is not fully understood, but contributing factors are thought to include human development, construction of hydro-electric dams and loss of habitat.

The UCWSRI is comprised of a collaboration of partners including First Nations, government, industry, environmental groups and other stakeholders. This group has been working hard since 2000 to prevent the extinction of the white sturgeon and to build healthy populations.

The white sturgeon recovery initiative is multi-pronged and includes the release of hatchery-raised fish, public education and awareness, research and habitat enhancement.

Funding and assistance for this event was provided by BC Hydro, Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program (CBFWCP), Teck Cominco, Celgar Pulp Company, Columbia Basin Trust, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Columbia Kootenay Fisheries Renewal Partnership, Golder and Associates, Freshwater Fisheries Society of BC, Selkirk College, Ecosense, West Kootenay Naturalists, and Stanley Humphries High School.

For more information on the UCWSRI go to [www.uppercolumbiasturgeon.org](http://www.uppercolumbiasturgeon.org).

### **Who is Involved:**

Province of British Columbia  
BC Hydro  
Fisheries and Oceans Canada  
Habitat Conservation Trust Fund  
Freshwater Fisheries Society of British Columbia  
The Government of Canada's Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk  
Endangered Species Recovery Fund  
Columbia Basin Trust  
Spokane Tribe of Indians  
Canadian Columbia Inter-tribal Fisheries Commission  
Bonneville Power Administration  
US Fish and Wildlife Service  
Columbia Power Corporation  
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife  
Colville Confederated Tribes

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Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program  
Celgar Pulp Company  
Teck Cominco Metals (Trail Operations)  
Salmo Watershed Streamkeepers Society  
Selkirk College  
West Kootenay Naturalists  
Golder and Associates  
Lake Roosevelt Forum  
Revelstoke Rod and Gun Club  
Castlegar and District Wildlife Association  
Columbia Kootenay Fisheries Renewal Partnership  
USGS Western Fisheries Research Center

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