

Prince George  
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# Save our sturgeon

**A** new project is being implemented in the Nechako River this winter to help prevent the extinction of the endangered Nechako white sturgeon.

The Nechako White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative is implementing a project that aims to restore the spawning habitat of the species. Research by the Initiative and a technical committee has revealed that sediment at the bottom of the river is likely to be the cause of sturgeon recruitment problems.

In addition, fine sediments that fill in the gaps between the gravel prevent the sturgeon larvae from being able to hide from predators.

This latest project, which has been in planning for a year-and-a-half, aims to place 2,100 cubic metres of clean gravel at two sites on the Nechako River in the Vanderhoof spawning reach, thereby cleaning up the impaired habitat and increasing the chances of survival during the critical early phases of life – during egg incubation and larval hiding and/or rearing phases.

The two gravel bed trials will be located upstream from the Nechako bridge to Murray Creek and close to the south west side of Riverside Park in Vanderhoof.

Fifteen-day-old sturgeon larvae dispersing will indicate the success of the project.

If the project is successful, a long-term large-scale habitat restoration project could be planned which could lead to natural recruitment restoration.

The Nechako white sturgeon is federally listed as endangered under the Species at Risk Act as a result of ongoing recruitment failure since 1967. The number of mature sturgeon at breeding age is estimated to be less than 450, which in turn has led to a huge reduction in the number of juveniles.

The initiative has a two-pronged strategy for the recovery of the species that includes not only habitat restoration for the prevention of recruitment failure, but also the building of a conservation hatchery in Vanderhoof to preserve the remaining genetic variation.

A total of \$1.5 million in funding has been set aside by the government for the building of the hatchery, however it is estimated the construction of the facility will cost close to \$3 million so until the other half of the money is gained, funds will not be released.

It's a question that the leadership hopefuls from both parties should be asked. Will they commit the funds that are necessary to protect this endangered species?