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## **Nechako White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative Spawning Bed Research Project**

**Vanderhoof British Columbia April 25, 2011**

The Nechako White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative (NWSRI) is implementing a white sturgeon spawning habitat research project during the spring of 2011. The project will begin in the next two weeks and is expected to provide important information about this endangered fish.

Community Working Group Chair, Brian Frenkel, stated that “The goal of this research project is to understand the details of recruitment failure. We believe that sedimentation is playing a key part in the lack of survival of the eggs and larvae and placing clean gravel and rock is expected to shelter eggs and larvae from harm. A positive result will allow the recovery team to develop options for long term restoration that could increase juvenile numbers substantially.” Initial findings revealed that recruitment failure for Nechako Sturgeon likely occurs very early in life during the egg incubation and/or larval hiding phases. Sturgeon eggs sink to the river bottom and are sheltered from predators in spaces between gravel and rocks. Accumulation of silt and sand in the spawning areas can cover the sticky eggs and translate into poor survival. Fine sediments also fill in spaces within the gravel reducing hiding spaces, potentially exposing larvae to predators.

The project includes placing 2,100 m<sup>3</sup> of a clean gravel and rock mixture in the deepest part of the river at two sites in the Vanderhoof sturgeon spawning area. The gravel will be placed using a barge and excavator. The work is expected to be completed by May 14, 2011. Sturgeon spawn in this area between the end of May and early June, the detection of 15-day-old dispersing sturgeon larvae will be the key indicator of success.

After the gravel beds have been constructed and sturgeon spawning takes place the NWSRI-Technical Working Group will conduct biological monitoring over two months which involves: adult capture, tagging and egg collection, radio telemetry, spawn monitoring, monitoring of egg and larval incubation, monitoring production of larvae (0 and 15 day olds). Monitoring how fast the sediment accumulates in the new gravel and gravel movement as well as flow and temperature will also be done.

“This is one of the most exciting research projects the Nechako Sturgeon Recovery Initiative has done to date, with potential benefits to endangered sturgeon worldwide and we are excited to be moving a project like this one forward in Vanderhoof” Frenkel stated.

The number of mature sturgeon of breeding age is currently estimated to be less than 350. Nechako white sturgeon are federally listed as Endangered under Schedule One of the *Species at Risk Act* due to ongoing recruitment failure, which has led to a extremely low

number of juveniles. The Nechako White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative has a two-pronged strategy for recovery that concurrently seeks to use hatchery production to preserve the remaining genetic variation, and research to determine and mitigate the causes of recruitment failure. Both components of this strategy are critical to achieve the goal of restoring a naturally self-sustaining population. Investment in Nechako sturgeon recovery in the short term offers one of the best chances for the successful recovery of this endangered population.

## Background

The Community Working Group works together with the Technical Working Group to implement and communicate the Nechako White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative. For further background information please visit [www.nechakowhitesturgeon.org](http://www.nechakowhitesturgeon.org) or contact.

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