



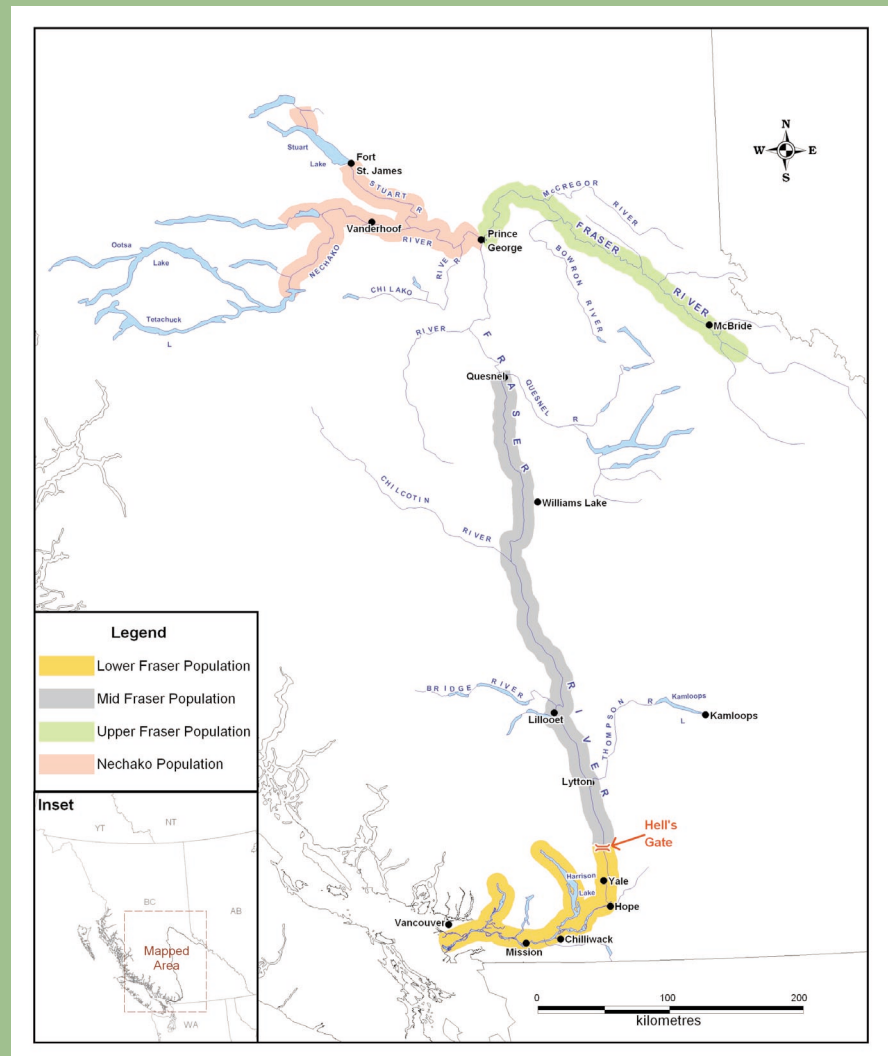
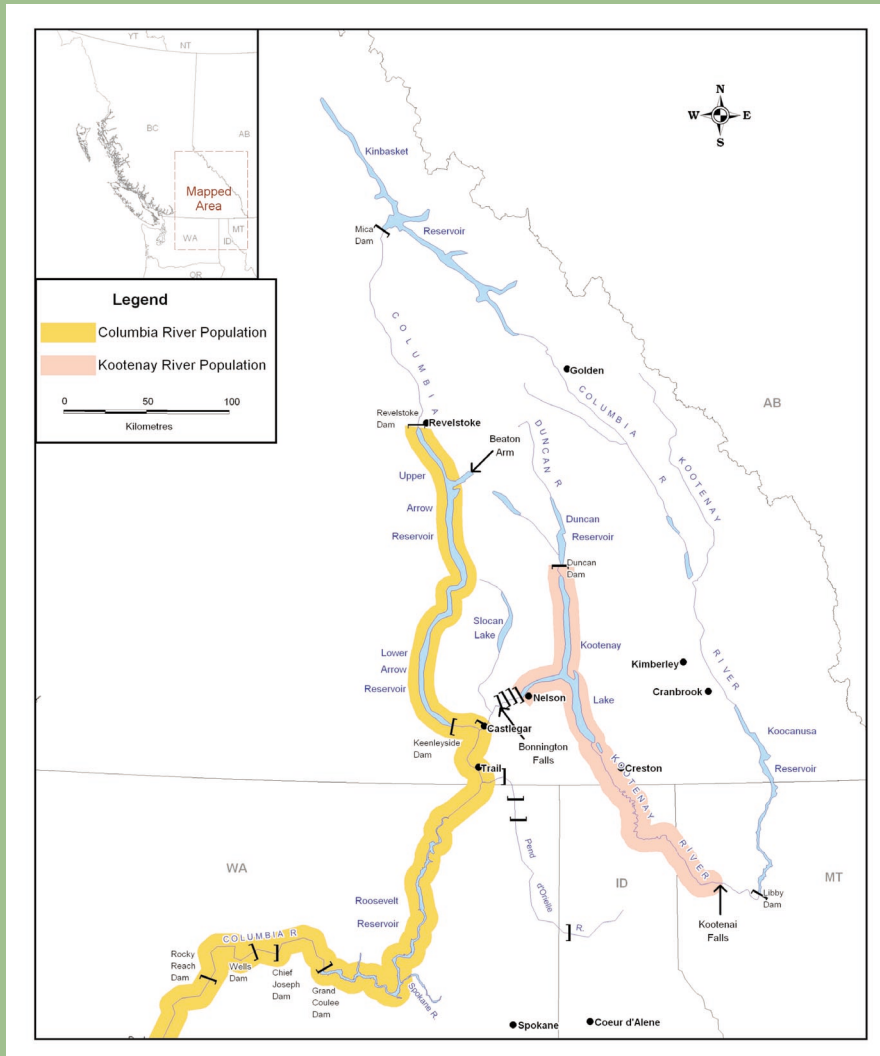
white sturgeon

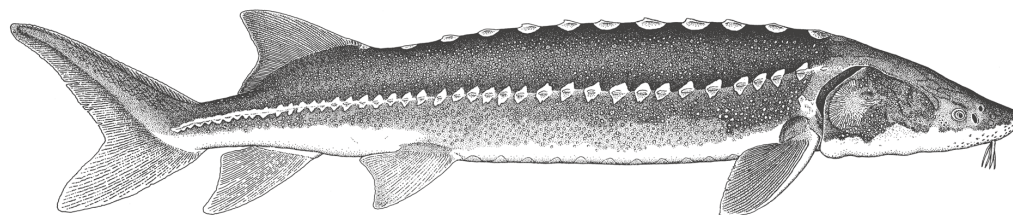
Species at Risk



white sturgeon

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A Part of B.C.'s Heritage

White sturgeon (*Acipenser transmontanus*) is the largest freshwater fish species in Canada. Their armour-plated, torpedo-shaped bodies can exceed six metres in length and weigh up to 635 kilograms. Individuals can live to be more than 100 years of age, and this unique species has persisted relatively unchanged for millions of years.

These fish are an important part of British Columbia's natural heritage, residing primarily in the Fraser and Columbia river watersheds. Within those systems, six distinct populations of white sturgeon occur in the lower, middle and upper Fraser River, Nechako River, Columbia River and Kootenay River.

At Risk

Over the past century, white sturgeon populations have been adversely affected by over-fishing, construction of hydroelectric dams, diking and drainage projects, dwindling food resources, and declining water quality as human populations and activities intensify.

Population declines have occurred in many parts of the Canadian range, particularly in the lower Fraser, Nechako, Columbia and Kootenay rivers. In the Columbia, Kootenay and Nechako the cause of decline is failed reproduction, thought to be associated with dams and river regulation. In the lower Fraser, the decline is primarily related to historic harvest and habitat loss. In the middle and upper Fraser, naturally small populations are thought to be limited by food and habitat availability.

Some important measures have been implemented in the Province of British Columbia since the 1990s to address the decline of white sturgeon and promote its recovery. Beginning in 1994, commercial

and sport harvests of sturgeon were closed and First Nations people voluntarily stopped their sustenance harvests. This important step allowed more fish to survive and reproduce and helped to slow the decline of some stocks. Valuable community outreach and stewardship has emerged from the efforts and commitment of public groups such as the Fraser River Sturgeon Conservation Society. Focused conservation and recovery efforts involving government, First Nations, industry, and others were initiated for all populations beginning in the late 1990s.

Conserving White Sturgeon

Although these existing measures have helped white sturgeon, more needs to be done. In November 2003, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) determined that white sturgeon populations in Canada should be considered an endangered species. In August 2006, the Government of Canada added white sturgeon populations from the Kootenay, Nechako, Upper Columbia, and Upper Fraser rivers to Schedule 1, the list of species protected under the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). White sturgeon populations in the Lower and Middle sections of the Fraser River were not added to the list.

Listing under SARA provides for protection of individuals of the species and their critical habitats. All white sturgeon populations, whether listed or not listed, will continue to be carefully managed under SARA and the *Fisheries Act*. Addressing the threats to white sturgeon is not without significant challenges, especially in some portions of the species' range. However, government will continue to work with stakeholders to ensure that threats to the survival of this species are adequately addressed.

Aquatic Species at Risk



SARA also requires that recovery planning be undertaken for listed species, and a comprehensive recovery strategy is in development for all of these populations. This planning process is based on the existing recovery initiatives for each of the populations. The recovery goal for white sturgeon is to ensure the long-term viability of naturally-reproducing populations within the species' natural range, and to restore opportunities for beneficial use, if and when feasible. To achieve this goal, a series of objectives and general strategies have been identified, including specific recovery measures, research, and ongoing monitoring.

Stakeholders will continue to be engaged in conservation and rebuilding efforts for white sturgeon, and their ongoing commitment is needed to secure a future for these fish. It is important that the public gain awareness of the plight of this species, and practice good stewardship to promote its protection and recovery.

Specific contributions the public can make include:

Report it

Report illegal sturgeon fishing to DFO's Observe, Record, Report line

at 1-800-465-4336

Prevent pollution

Avoid polluting streams, lakes and rivers with garbage, fuel, pesticides or other contaminants. Remember that much of what you pour into your drains will ultimately make it to river systems.

Keep sturgeon safe

Returning a caught fish to the water quickly is critical to its survival.

Volunteer

This may include participating on committees, attending meetings, assisting at educational outreach events, distributing outreach materials or just simply telling a neighbour or a friend about white sturgeon.

Participate in community consultations

Get involved in Community Working Groups for various recovery initiatives: www.uppercolumbiasturgeon.org/ and <http://nechakowhitesturgeon.org/sturgeon/>