

# WHITE STURGEON RECOVERY

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White sturgeon (*Acipenser transmontanus*) are long-lived freshwater fish that grow slowly and take up to 20 years to mature. For this reason, they are vulnerable to overfishing and environmental degradation.

In 2003, the white sturgeon was designated as an endangered species (see [www.cosewic.gc.ca](http://www.cosewic.gc.ca)). In 2006, four of the six populations found in British Columbia—the Kootenay, Columbia, Nechako, and Upper-Fraser—were listed under the federal *Species at Risk Act*, also known as SARA (see [www.sararegistry.gc.ca](http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca)). As a result, fishing these populations is no longer permitted.

The remaining two populations—the Middle-Fraser and Lower-Fraser—were not listed under SARA. While a managed catch-and-release fishery continues on these two populations, they are still considered to be at risk due to poaching, incidental catch, habitat loss, habitat degradation, and poor growth.

## RECOVERY EFFORTS

Federal and provincial agencies are working to protect white sturgeon. A conservation plan for all three Fraser populations (Lower-, Middle-, and Upper-Fraser) was recently completed (see [frasersturgeon.com](http://frasersturgeon.com)). In addition, the Nechako, Columbia, and Kootenay populations have been the subject of extensive recovery efforts to prevent their extirpation (see [www.uppercolumbiasturgeon.org](http://www.uppercolumbiasturgeon.org) and [www.nechakowhitesturgeon.org](http://www.nechakowhitesturgeon.org)). For the Nechako, Columbia and Kootenay populations, declining numbers have made conservation-based fish culture and stocking necessary.

A recovery strategy is also being developed that will identify the recovery needs for the species as a whole.



Hatchery juvenile white sturgeon - a key component of recovery efforts.  
Freshwater Fisheries Society of BC

## THE CATCH-AND-RELEASE FISHERY

The world class white sturgeon catch-and-release fisheries on the Fraser River and its tributaries are only permitted downstream of the mouth of Williams Lake River. The ministry is closely monitoring these fisheries as a consequence of their increasing popularity over the past decade. To fund the monitoring of sturgeon populations and fisheries a White Sturgeon Conservation Licence (WSCL) was implemented in 2008.

Anglers taking part in these catch-and-release fisheries are required to carry a valid WSCL in addition to the basic provincial freshwater licence.

To ensure the welfare of these magnificent fish, anglers must take extra care when handling and releasing white sturgeon. Best-handling practices are posted online at [www.env.gov.bc.ca/fw/fish/ethics](http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/fw/fish/ethics).

## PROPOSED INITIATIVES

A bait ban continues to be under consideration for all, or part, of the portion of the Fraser River that is currently closed to white sturgeon fishing, upstream of the mouth of Williams Lake River. This would help protect the Upper-Fraser population by reducing the chance of sturgeon being caught by anglers fishing for other species.

The ministry is also looking closely at catch and effort data for the Lower Fraser River fishery, downstream of Yale, to determine if seasonal and/or area-restrictions are warranted to protect holding or spawning sturgeon and to ensure population recovery.



Catch-and-release sturgeon fishing on the (Lower and Middle) Fraser requires careful handling of all fish caught.

Bent Rods Guiding and Fishing

The Ministry would appreciate input on these proposals. Please submit comments to:

White Sturgeon Regulations  
Ministry of Environment  
Fish & Wildlife Branch  
PO Box 9363, STN PROV GOVT  
Victoria, B.C. V8W 9M2