

# NECHAKO WHITE STURGEON IN STUART LAKE

## Prehistoric Fish



Dwelling in the waters of the Nechako Watershed is a survivor from the age of the dinosaurs – White Sturgeon (*Acipenser transmontanus*). This magnificent animal is the largest freshwater fish in Canada, and has existed relatively unchanged for millions of years.

Dakelh Elders tell the story of when the river flowed backwards - when the Stuart River flowed north instead of south into the Nechako River as it does today. It is likely that White Sturgeon arrived to the Nechako Watershed from the Upper Columbia River system when the two were connected over

10,000 years ago after the last ice-age.

Research to date indicates the Upper Fraser Designation Unit (DU) of White Sturgeon (Upper Fraser, Middle Fraser and Nechako River populations) is genetically distinct from other populations of White Sturgeon.

We know today that the White Sturgeon in the Nechako Watershed inhabit lakes such as Stuart Lake, and that adults congregate to spawn in the Nechako River at Vanderhoof.

Researchers continue their work to determine the bottlenecks to survival, life history patterns, and habitat needs of Nechako River White Sturgeon.



## Sturgeon FACTS!

- they live to 100 years old and can grow over 3 m in length
- the 'heterocercal' shaped tail (larger top than bottom) tells us they are strong swimmers
- their flat head and 4 barbels mean they are primarily bottom feeders
- they have a cartilaginous skeleton
- they do not have scales, but rows of scutes (armour) that are used for protection

• **Over 100 years ago** Hudson Bay Company records from the 1880's state catches of multiple sturgeon from Stuart Lake, most of which were 3 m long.

• **In the 1990's** it became illegal for anyone to catch and/or keep Nechako White Sturgeon.

• **Today**, if a sturgeon is caught or encountered, either during the First Nation Food, Social and Ceremonial salmon fishery or by recreational fishers, there are programs in place that provide information on how to safely release a sturgeon back into the water and report the encounter.

• **If you see a sturgeon contact [info@nechakowhitesturgeon.org](mailto:info@nechakowhitesturgeon.org).** Reporting helps researchers understand the population, and supports recovery.

[nechakowhitesturgeon.org](http://nechakowhitesturgeon.org)

## Sturgeon Recovery

The Federal Species at Risk Act lists Nechako White Sturgeon as an endangered species. The Nechako White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative (NWSRI) works toward sturgeon recovery.

### Ways to support recovery!

- *keep the water and shores of Stuart Lake clean.*
- *learn more about Nechako White Sturgeon by visiting the NWSRI website.*
- *donate to the NWSRI!*
- *visit the Nechako White Sturgeon Conservation Centre in Vanderhoof.*

