

Express NEWS

Sturgeon release kits a success

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A number of sturgeon release kits that were sent out to area fisher families in August are proving a success with 12 successful releases of the endangered fish so far.

Earlier this year the Nechako White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative (NWSRI) made up 20 emergency sturgeon release boat kits to aid fisher families in five first nation bands.

The kits came about after outreach activities with the bands revealed that sturgeon sometimes get caught in nets when families are fishing for salmon.

"We've given them I think about a dozen things in these

kits from a knife to a pair of pliers, a measuring tape, cotton gloves, a net mending kit etc," said Brian Frenkel, Chair of the NWSRI Community Working Group.

"The sturgeon is a big animal and it can rip apart and wreck the nets - even if it just rolls up in the net and entangles itself with the scoots (sharp points along body) and the fins ... instead of unrolling it which may be impossible - they have to cut the net.

"So we want them to release the fish if it is still alive and the kit will help with the damaged net," he said.

Since August 30, the NWSRI has been told that 10 sturgeon have been released by Saik'uz First Nation fisher

families and two by Ti'azt'en First Nation.

"The efforts of the fisher families in the Saik'uz and Ti'azt'en First Nation bands should be commended.

"It takes patience, time and commitment to successfully live release a sturgeon and we are grateful for their support of this pilot program and their dedication to the conservation of sturgeon," said Frenkel.

So far 15 of the 20 kits have been given out and pending the continued success of the program, more kits will be made up in the future.

"This is a long-term thing and the more fisher families we give these boat kits to, the better off the sturgeon are," said Frenkel

The NWSRI has also produced a DVD that will go along with each new kit and will show how to get the fish out of the net.

"This problem with bycatch is one of the issues that we can help with," said Frenkel.

"Every fish is important and if it saves one or two fish a year, then it's a good win for everybody," he said.

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 an extremely low number of juveniles.