

Outdoors

White Sturgeon recovery boat kits are a success

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The Nechako White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative (NWSRI) and the Carrier Sekani Tribal Council have joined together in the implementation of a pilot study aimed at maintaining the Nechako White Sturgeon population.

The NWSRI provided 20 First Nation fisher families with the tools necessary for the successful release of live sturgeon, if they are caught in gill nets.

"We put together an emergency Sturgeon release boat kit, which contains all the tools necessary to successfully live release a sturgeon from a gill net as well as patches and needles to mend nets that have been damaged as a result of a live release," said Brian Frenkel, chair of the community working group.

"The boat kit can be signed out by any fisher family that would like to participate in the program and is small enough to remain within the boat at all times," said Frenkel.

The goal of the pilot program is an immediate reduction in the harm and deaths of sturgeon in the Nechako-Stuart-Takla system as a result of by-catch by providing the means to live release the sturgeon from the net.

The community group includes representatives from First Nations, the communities of Vanderhoof and Prince George, Rio Tinto Alcan and wildlife groups.

"We worked together with First Nations and some of the folks in the working group thought the kits would be a really great idea. We made up 20 of the kits and most of them have gone out. So far, 12 fish were released live ... so that's way better than past years. The First Nations really need to be commended they are helping us to do a great job," said Frenkel.

"The Nechako River was dammed in the 1950s. It's now a managed river system, so somewhere in there something has happened. It could be agriculture, but we don't know why, we just know that the population is declining. We need to get more fish in the water - we know the ones we put in are surviving," said Frenkel.

There are an estimated 350 adult sturgeon



These tools, necessary for the successful release of live sturgeon, if they are caught in gill nets, have been provided to 20 First Nation fisher families by the Nechako White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative.

left in the Nechako River system, down from an estimated healthy population of about 8,000.

"We have to make sure we hold on to those numbers. [We] don't want that number to get any lower. What the biologists and the fish experts are saying is that if [the numbers of fish] decline then the fish won't be genetically diverse," said Frenkel.

"The boat kits should be viewed as more than just a set of tools but also a method that further allows for people and communities to take a leadership role in the plight of the white sturgeon. The tool kit provides a realistic solution to the current fishing situation," said Lana Ciarriello, recovery co-ordinator.

The kits include a sharp knife, a set of pliers, a pair of cotton gloves [so people aren't harmed], a net mending kit [including two mending needles, a Norwegian net needle and a number five net needle], webbing, small patches, electrical tape and a waterproof camera.]

"It doesn't seem like a lot, but the kits were fairly expensive ... somewhere around \$200 a piece. It was enough to give everyone the ability to cut the net, save the fish and then mend the net," said Frenkel.

The Nechako white sturgeon were placed on Canada's endangered list in 2006.

For more information on the sturgeon recovery efforts, visit www.nechakowhitesturgeon.org or contact 250-567-6603.