

# Crew hired for sturgeon project in the Nechako River

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A crew has now been hired to carry out a new sturgeon recovery project this spring.

The project aims to restore the spawning habitat of the endangered Nechako White Sturgeon by placing new gravel pads on two areas of the Nechako River.

Vancon has been hired to carry out the project, and Avison Management will be the environmental monitoring company.

The idea came about after research by the Nechako White Sturgeon Initiative (NWSRI) and the Technical Working Group (TWG), revealed that sediment at the bottom of the river is likely to be the cause of sturgeon recruitment problems.

“One of the concerns is that there is a heavy sediment load on the bottom of the river and the sturgeon require a good gravel base to successfully have the eggs survive,” said Brian Frenkel, Chair of the NWSRI Community Working Group.

“It is believed that the sediment on the bottom may be attaching to the eggs, thus disabling their ability to survive,” he said.

In addition, fine sediments that fill in the gaps between the gravel, prevent the sturgeon larvae from being able to hide from predators.

A barge is being brought in from Prince George to help with the placing of the gravel pads.

An excavator on top of the barge, will place the new gravel on the bottom of the river, in two separate areas.

The two gravel pads, also know as ‘thalwegs’, will be approximately 30 metres wide; one will be located to the west of the Nechako Bridge and the other will be just east of Stoney Creek, by Fehrs Bridge.

An underwater camera and a GPS system on the barge will be used to place the gravel as evenly as possible on the river bed.

“We’re still looking at the technology that’s going to be used - the GPS system will be used to know exactly where we are on the river and an underwater camera will give the operator the visual of what’s going on below him in the river,” said Frenkel.

The gravel placing will occur for a couple of hours every day, over a two to three week period, as soon as the river thaws out. The aim is to get all the gravel down before the spawning event takes place in May.

Once the first pad is complete, the barge will be moved to the second location.

The barge will use a cable system to move up and down and side to side, but Frenkel says there will not be cables crossing the entire length of the river.

“We will have to put some sort of signage and let everybody know ... that this is happening on the river for a two to three week period in April and the beginning of May,” said Frenkel.

“The contractor will not have cables strung across the river, but there will definitely be machinery working on the barge.”

“We will encourage people to stay away from the site while this is going on,” he said.

Efforts have been made to ensure the project does not cause damage to the environment. For example, all of the hydraulic fluid will be taken out of the excavator and replaced with vegetable oil in case of a leak.

The project is being funded entirely through the Nechako White Sturgeon Initiative.