

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Nechako White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative Spawning Habitat Restoration Project

Vanderhoof British Columbia January 27, 2011

The Nechako White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative (NWSRI) is implementing a white sturgeon spawning habitat restoration project during the winter of 2011. This project is expected to provide an important advancement toward resolving the recruitment problems facing this endangered species.

Our research revealed that recruitment failure for Nechako Sturgeon likely occurs early in life during the egg incubation and/or larval hiding or rearing phases. Accumulation of fine sediments (silt and sand) in the spawning areas covers the sticky eggs which prevents them from adhering to gravel on the river bottom. Fine sediments also fill in spaces within the gravel further limiting the ability of larvae to hide between the gravel and avoid predators. The goal of this project is to place up to 2,100 m³ of clean gravel at two sites in the Vanderhoof spawning reach to fix impaired habitat and increase survival during the critical egg and larval stages. The detection of 15 day old dispersing sturgeon larvae would be the key indicator of success, and such success would provide the basis for planning long-term habitat restoration on a large enough scale to restore natural recruitment. The likelihood of success in our 2011 project is high considering the results of previous work by the NWSRI as well as other sturgeon recovery teams.

The number of mature sturgeon of breeding age is currently estimated to be less than 450. Nechako white sturgeon are federally listed as Endangered under Schedule One of the *Species at Risk Act* due to ongoing recruitment failure (since 1967), which has led to a near complete lack of juveniles. The Nechako White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative has a two-pronged strategy for recovery that concurrently seeks to use hatchery production to preserve the remaining genetic variation, and to determine and mitigate the habitat based causes of recruitment failure. Both components of this strategy are critical to achieve the goal of restoring a naturally self-sustaining population. Investment in Nechako sturgeon recovery in the short term offers one of the best chances for the successful recovery of this endangered population.

Backgrounder

The Community Working Group works together with the Technical Working Group to implement and communicate the Nechako White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative. For further background information please visit www.nechakowhitesturgeon.org or contact.

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