

No. 240
February 20, 2004Contact: Sue Heaton
Public Affairs Officer
Phone: (250) 365-4562**Local elementary students name the Sturgeon mascot**

CASTLEGAR – Local elementary students from Castlegar Primary (CPS) and the Robson Community (RCS) Schools who helped to release thousands of juvenile white sturgeon last spring had the opportunity in late 2003 to assist with the naming of the Upper Columbia White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative (UCWSRI) mascot.

“We thought it was a great opportunity to involve those students who participated in the release,” said Public Affairs officer, Sue Heaton. “By keeping these students interested in sturgeon recovery efforts we will ensure that the sturgeon’s plight is not forgotten. In addition, we are hoping that some of these students will get involved later in their lives with restoring the sturgeon population to healthy numbers.”

The best submissions from all the entries received a special hand-painted white sturgeon pin, and a certificate compliments of BC Hydro during an assembly at their schools. The final name of the white sturgeon mascot was chosen out of these semi-finalist names.

In total there were 10 semi-finalist from the two schools:

Teslynn Boake – CPS	Logan LePage – RCS
Kenton Riebalkin – CPS	Jordan Gustavsson – RCS
Justin Conacher – CPS	Jassmyn Van Hoorn – RCS
Jordan Sherstobitoff – CPS	Shelby Jowsey – RCS
Matai Dusil – CPS	Caleisha Hunter-Oglow - RCS

“BC Hydro and the UCWSRI are proud to announce that Teslynn Boake of CPS (Teslynn has unfortunately moved out of the area) and Jassmyn Van Hoorn are the winners of the ‘name that sturgeon mascot’ contest,” said Heaton. “Both girls entered the name ‘Spike’ – which is now the official name of our sturgeon plush toy mascot.”

The UCWSRI began in 2000, when a review of stock status indicated a problem with survival of young fish. This led to a Letter of Understanding being signed between Fisheries and Oceans Canada, BC Environment (now the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection), BC Fisheries and BC Hydro to formalize their common commitment to a White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative. The agreement was the first step towards the stabilization and stock recovery of white sturgeon in the upper Columbia River.

“The UCWSRI now consists of over 25 stakeholders including Canadian and BC governments, U.S. federal and state governments, industry, First Nations, public and tribal agency stakeholders working together to prevent the extinction of white sturgeon in the upper Columbia River,” says BC Hydro Environmental and Social Issues manager and UCWSRI Recovery Team member, Gary Birch. “It is hoped that the Columbia River white sturgeon can make a full recovery of the population through a combination of water management, habitat restoration and hatchery conservation and supplementation to ensure their long term survival.”

White sturgeon are North America’s largest and longest-lived freshwater fish. This ancient species has survived 175 million years, including ice ages, volcanic eruptions, flooding and mass extinction. The causes of the white sturgeon’s decline are not fully understood, however, in the last 125 years, human development, construction of hydro electric dams, changes in flow patterns, loss of habitat and harvesting in the Columbia River has led to its decline and “critically imperiled” population status. While spawning has been recorded, young sturgeon are seldom found, indicating these fish are not reproducing successfully. Most recent estimates put the upper Columbia population, between Hugh Keenleyside Dam and the U.S. border, at approximately 1,400 sturgeon.

The sturgeon plush toy will be available for sale by the UCWSRI at various outreach events throughout the area. All money raised will be used for sturgeon recovery efforts.

To find out more about the UCWSRI or how you can help, please view the web site at www.uppercolumbiasturgeon.org or call 1-888-358-3474 (FISH).