

## Upper Columbia White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative

*...Helping hands for ancients of the deep*

**NEWS RELEASE**

**May 18, 2004**

### **School kids release white sturgeon to upper Columbia River**

CASTLEGAR – More than 50 Upper Columbia White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative (UCWSRI) partners and community volunteers welcomed 175 area school children to release over 9,000 juvenile white sturgeon into the upper Columbia River over two days last week.

Students from Grades one through seven from schools in Castlegar, Trail, Salmo, Nelson and Creston attended the second annual spring event at Beaver Creek Park on Wednesday, May 12 and Hugh Keenleyside Dam on Thursday, May 13. Staff from Freshwater Fisheries Society of B.C., one of more than 25 partners involved with the UCWSRI transported the year-old fish, from the Kootenay Sturgeon Conservation Hatchery located near Cranbrook to the Columbia River release sites.

The Initiative's U.S. partners, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Spokane Tribe of Indians and Colville Confederated Tribes also released approximately 2000 juvenile white sturgeon on May 12. This marked the first time a transboundary event occurred. The juveniles were released into Lake Roosevelt, marking their first effort to recover declining populations of the largest and oldest freshwater fish in the upper Columbia River.

“While spawning has been recorded, young sturgeon are seldom found, indicating these fish are not successfully surviving to adulthood,” said BC Hydro Kootenay Environment and Social Issues manager, Gary Birch. “Most recent estimates put the upper Columbia adult population, between Hugh Keenleyside Dam and the Canada/U.S. border, at approximately 1,400 sturgeon.”

White sturgeon are North America's largest and longest lived freshwater fish. The sturgeon family 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 “endangered” population status.

“This matters to us and to the sturgeon because they are an endangered species now and if we don't look after them they could all die,” said Robert, a grade four student from the Lower Kootenay Band's Yaqaan Nukiy School. “They've been around since this Earth was made and we should try to keep them from more harm. I felt happy when we were helping them back into the river.”

Working together since 2000, to prevent the extinction of white sturgeon in the upper Columbia River, the UCWSRI is a collaboration of partners including government, First Nations

and American tribes, industry, environmental groups and other to the challenge of building a healthy future for the white sturgeon in the upper Columbia River in British Columbia and across the border in the United States. Over \$4.0 million has been invested in the UCWSRI for research, hatchery operations and fish culture, education and outreach.

Broodstock were collected from the Columbia River downstream of Hugh Keenleyside Dam. Approximately 12,000 white sturgeon will be released on both sides of the border to the Columbia River this year to compliment similar release numbers in 2001 and 2003.

Assisting in the UCWSRI sturgeon releases at Beaver Creek Provincial Park and Hugh Keenleyside Dam were several Initiative members, representatives and community volunteers including BC Hydro, Columbia Basin Trust, Teck Cominco Metals Ltd., Selkirk College, Celgar Pulp Company, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Columbia Basin Fish & Wildlife Compensation Program, Government of Canada's Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk, Freshwater Fisheries Society of BC, Columbia Power Corporation, Golder Associates, West Kootenay Naturalists, Salmo Watershed Streamkeepers Society, Trail Community Skills Centre and Trail BC Rivers Day.

For more information about the UCWSRI, please visit our website at [www.uppercolumbiasturgeon.org](http://www.uppercolumbiasturgeon.org), or contact our Sturgeon Hotline at 1 888 358-FISH (3474).

**The UCWSRI Partners are:**

- Province of British Columbia
- BC Hydro
- Fisheries and Oceans Canada
- Habitat Conservation Trust Fund
- Freshwater Fisheries Society of British Columbia
- The Government of Canada's Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk
- Endangered Species Recovery Fund
- Columbia Basin Trust
- Spokane Tribe of Indians
- Canadian Columbia River Inter-tribal Fisheries Commission
- Bonneville Power Administration
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- Columbia Power Corporation
- Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Colville Confederated Tribes
- Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program
- Celgar Pulp Company
- Teck Cominco Metals (Trail Operations)
- Salmo Watershed Streamkeepers Society
- West Kootenay Naturalists
- Golder Associates
- Lake Roosevelt Forum
- Revelstoke Rod and Gun Club
- Columbia-Kootenay Fisheries Renewal Partnership
- USGS Western Fisheries Research Center
- Oregon State University
- Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife