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## **BC Hydro participates in release of white sturgeon to Columbia River**

CASTLEGAR – BC Hydro, a partner in the Upper Columbia White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative (UCWSRI), hosted 90 elementary school students from Blewett Elementary, Castlegar Primary and Robson Community School at Hugh Keenleyside Dam where nearly 5,000 juvenile white sturgeon were released into the Columbia River on Tuesday.

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

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.

“White sturgeon can live for a century,” said Robson Community School grade 2 student Kelsey Law. “But if we don’t help them now, no one else may get to see them.” Children, parents, teachers and others were able to release a sturgeon by hand into the Columbia River. “It’s a powerful experience,” added Principal Mike Balahura.

Working together since 2000, to prevent the extinction of white sturgeon in the upper Columbia River, the UCWSRI consists of over 25 stakeholders including Canadian and BC governments, U.S. federal and state governments, industry, First Nations, public and tribal agency stakeholders.

BC Hydro has committed \$2.1 million to the UCWSRI since its inception to help restore the white sturgeon population on B.C.’s portion of the Columbia River.

The juvenile sturgeon were raised at the Kootenay Sturgeon Conservation Hatchery near Fort Steele. Broodstock were collected from the Columbia River downstream of Hugh Keenleyside Dam. A total of 12,000 white sturgeon will be released this year to compliment the 9,000 released in 2002.

Assisting in the UCWSRI sturgeon release at Hugh Keenleyside Dam were: BC Hydro, Columbia Basin Trust, Columbia Power Corporation, UCWSRI Action Planning Group and Recovery Team, Selkirk College students, Celgar Pulp Company, Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection, Columbia Basin Fish & Wildlife Compensation Program, Columbia Kootenay Fisheries Renewal Partnership, Freshwater Fisheries Society of BC, Golder and Associates and West Kootenay Naturalists.

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