
It's a Fact (Sheet)



History and Biology of Upper Columbia River White Sturgeon

History:

White Sturgeon are 'dinosaurs of the deep' they have remained similar in appearance for the past 175 million years! White Sturgeon are the largest freshwater fish in North America, and can live for more than 100 years.

Once abundant, White Sturgeon populations are now in decline from over-fishing, dwindling food resources and water pollution, dam construction, diking and drainage projects and other forms of human development.

In the upper Columbia River significant Sturgeon harvest started in the mid-1970s, about the same time as recruitment problems were identified; this likely contributed to the population decline. Then, in the 1990s, harvest of sturgeon was closed and First Nations people voluntarily stopped their sustenance harvests. This important step allowed more fish to survive.

White Sturgeon are in danger of disappearing from the upper Columbia River. In 2005, the entire transboundary population was about 3,100, with approximately 1,100 living above the Canadian side of the border. Without intervention, the population is projected to decline more than 500 over the next 50 years, and the upper Columbia River population is expected to become functionally extinct around 2141; therefore taking action now to help this species is critical.

WHITE STURGEON FISHING
IS PROHIBITED IN THE
CANADIAN PORTION OF THE
COLUMBIA RIVER

Appearance & Behavior:

- Have a torpedo shape.
- Have armor-like skin instead of scales.
- Can grow up to 6 meters (19 feet) long.
- Can weigh up to 682 kilograms (1500 lbs).
- Have 5 rows of bony plates called "scutes".
- Have a snout with whisker-like sensors called barbels, used to detect food, including live or dead fish, aquatic insects, and plants.
- Are as much a hunter as a scavenger.
- Have a tube-like mouth, and no teeth.
- Have a cartilage skeleton instead of bone.
- Locally, White Sturgeon males mature at about 16, and females at 25-30 years of age.
- Females spawn every 3 to 7 years depending on conditions, releasing up to 1-million eggs.
- Have an annual mortality rate of 2.9%.

Population Status Listing Progression:

- 1990 – ENDANGERED, Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC)
- 1993 – CRITICALLY IMPERILED (Red Listed), BC Conservation Data Centre
- 2006 – SPECIES AT RISK, Canada's Species at Risk Act

For more information about the Upper Columbia White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative visit www.uppercolumbiasturgeon.org

