

Juvenile Sturgeon Release for the Public at Shelter Bay

For release, April 25, 2014

ARROW LAKES It's that Sturgeon time of year once more! The annual Sturgeon release event, hosted by the Upper Columbia White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative (UCWSRI), will occur between **11.30 a.m. and 1.30 p.m., on Wednesday May 7**, at Shelter Bay Provincial Park, and the public are invited.

"During the session, we host elementary school students and members of the public, and the mix works well," says Gerry Nellestijn, chair of the Community Working Group of the UCWSRI. "For young and old alike, it is a great opportunity to help an endangered species. The fish look - and feel - like creatures from prehistoric times; in fact they have remained largely unchanged for 175 million years. By getting the community, particularly the younger generations, involved, and increasing awareness, we feel there are much better chances for the survival of this population."

The release event is organized by the Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program in the Columbia Region, (a partnership between BC Hydro, the Province of B.C., First Nations and the public), with support from BC Hydro, Revelstoke Rod and Gun Club, Columbia Power Corporation, Fortis BC, and the Freshwater Fisheries Society of B.C. (FFSBC).

Approximately 5,500 ten month-old juvenile White Sturgeon, raised by FFSBC at the Bull River hatchery in the East Kootenay through a program funded by BC Hydro, will be released; they are produced from wild adults, caught last June.

The average weight of the fish to be released at Shelter Bay is about 200 grams; this is twice the average weight of fish recently released in the Columbia River below Hugh Keenleyside Dam. Juveniles are being released at a larger body size to help researchers determine if it improves survival of the sturgeon through the first winter following the release.

Though releases of hatchery raised sturgeon into the Arrow Lakes have been occurring since 2007, very few individuals have been recaptured as a part of ongoing monitoring programs. It will take time to be able to tell whether recovery efforts in Arrow Lakes Reservoir are making a difference. In an area as large as Arrow Lakes Reservoir, finding and capturing small white sturgeon is extremely difficult. Further monitoring is planned for the next four years.

"The population of sturgeon in Arrow Lakes Reservoir is estimated at roughly 50 adults and, though they are known to spawn near Revelstoke, there is no evidence that any of the hatched young survive," says James Crossman, white sturgeon biologist for BC Hydro. "Juvenile white sturgeon stocked from the hatchery provide us with an important learning tool to assess

survival, growth, and determine important habitats for juvenile sturgeon in Arrow Lakes Reservoir.”

The Sturgeon Recovery Initiative is a partnership of more than 20 stakeholders from government, First Nations, industry, community and environmental organizations. Sturgeon recovery includes research to determine the causes of decline, release of hatchery-reared juveniles from wild stock adults, restoration of habitat, and monitoring and management of water flows.

For more information about the sturgeon release event call the BC Hydro office at 250-365-4550, and to find out more about the UCWSRI visit www.uppercolumbiasturgeon.org.