

Boat kit program saves sturgeon

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FISH: 49 Sturgeon have been live released since the boat kit program pilot phase in 2011.

— *image credit: Rebecca Watson*

Endangered white sturgeon are being saved from gill nets throughout the Nechako, thanks to the Nechako White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative.

The Emergency Sturgeon Live Release Boat Kit program is offered to all First Nation fishers that may incidentally encounter a Nechako white sturgeon during their fishing operations. The kit is small enough to remain in the boat at all times and contains all the necessary tools for a successful live release.

“The reality of the situation is First Nations fish with gill nets. There is no fishing for sturgeon at all but these fish are still accidentally being by-caught. With the population so low, even a few released back is still a huge percentage of the population being saved,” Lana Ciarniello, recovery co-ordinator for NWSRI.

The Nechako White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative (NWSRI) and the Carrier Sekani Tribal Council (CSTC) would like to thank the First Nation fisher families that participated in the live release of Nechako White sturgeon during 2014. Participating Firsts Nation communities include Saik'uz, Nak'azdli, Tl'azt'en, Takla, Nadleh Whut'en, Stellat'en and Lheidli T'enneh.

The Emergency Live Release Boat Kit program has seen the return of 49 sturgeon released back to the Nechako since it's pilot phase in 2011. In 2014, 12 sturgeon were live released by First Nation fishers. The first reported sturgeon by-catch of the year was six feet in length and live released at the end of July near Stoner Creek south of Prince George. Large sturgeon especially are important to maintaining the breeding stock of the endangered fish. About 600 mature Nechako white sturgeon remain in the Nechako Watershed.

“Forty-nine sturgeon live released over four years may seem like an insignificant number, but with so few sturgeon left, every fish counts,” Ms. Ciarniello said.

If you are a First Nation Fisher in the Nechako or Upper Fraser watershed and are interested in participating in the program contact the Nechako White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative at info@nechakowhitesturgeon.org. For more information on the program or any NWSRI activities visit www.nechakowhitesturgeon.org.