

OUTREACH PROGRAMS

Outreach, awareness, and harm reduction are part of the NWSRI's mission to support sturgeon recovery.

Annual Release Event: The Sturgeon Release Event was held on June 6, 2025 at Riverside Park in Vanderhoof. Nearly 1,100 learners, educators, volunteers, community members and leaders, attended this event. In total, 63 70cm+ juvenile sturgeon and nearly 1,000 Chinook salmon fry were released into the Nechako River. Participants also learned about the watershed, fish biology, and more from the numerous booths at the park!

Curriculum: Three new videos were produced this past year with the focus on sturgeon genetics (ploidy) and nitrification—the process of breaking down ammonia (toxic to fish) to nitrate (tolerated by fish). The videos are geared for older learners.

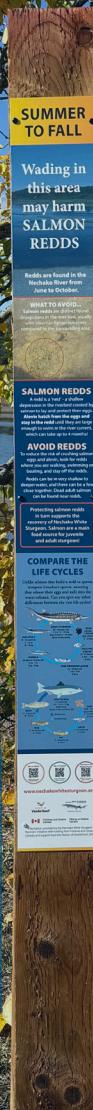
Interpretive Signs: The NWSRI partnered with the Fort St. James National Historic Site to create new sturgeon displays for their museum and interpretive centre. The work is on-going, however visitors to the historic site can learn about sturgeon over geological time, and their general biology.

Storm Drains: A popular and simple activity that spreads awareness and harm reduction to fish waterways is the storm drain painting project. Learners from Fort St. James painted storm drains in 2025.

Boat Kit Program: With the large salmon run in 2025, 15 of 16 sturgeon by-catch in the First Nation Food, Social and Ceremonial fishery were released live. Since 2011 this harm reduction program has released live 103 (89%) sturgeon.

Students from Fort St. James paint storm drains with sturgeon and salmon images to remind their community that storm drains are linked to fish habitat.

LEFT: Juvenile sturgeon caught as by-catch in the Stellako River, and reported to the Emergency Boat Kit Program.
Photo by Darien Williams.



Cover corner image: Juvenile caught during indexing in 2025.

Photo by Penelope Roberge.
Back page corner image: A 2-year old hatchery sturgeon being put into the Nechako River during the Juvenile Sturgeon Release Event.

New sign at Riverside Park in Vanderhoof that highlights the ecology of the river during different seasons. This first sign—Summer to Fall—highlights salmon redds and the interaction between salmon and sturgeon.



NWSRI WEBSITE



NWSRI YOUTUBE CHANNEL



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Unless stated, photos by Michelle Roberge.



Nechako White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative

YEAR IN REVIEW 2025-2026



Provincial sturgeon biologists reviewing underwater images of spawning habitat during the habitat restoration project in April 2025.

The Nechako White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative thanks the organizations, individuals and agencies that have contributed to recovery initiatives in 2025-2026. Contact us for more information or to book a tour inside the Conservation Centre:

info@nechakowhitesturgeon.org
www.nechakowhitesturgeon.org

This brochure provides a brief overview of the work done by the Working Groups of the Nechako White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative in 2025-2026.

Find more reports at: www.nechakowhitesturgeon.org/publications/annual-reports



Fisheries and Oceans Canada

Pêches et Océans Canada



TECHNICAL PROGRAMS

The Technical Working Group (TWG) partners with several agencies to carry out research and monitoring programs in the Nechako Watershed. The TWG provides recommendations on recovery for Nechako White Sturgeon based on this research.

Adult Spawn Monitoring: Examines spawn timing, incubation success, larval drift, and the physical parameters of the river that occur during spawning. The goal is to inform habitat restoration plans.

In total, 87 sturgeon were caught as part of the brood program. Spawning at the hatchery was on May 21 with crosses from 5 females and 8 males. From egg mats, 103 wild spawned eggs were recovered and transported to the hatchery for rearing—the lowest number since 2014.

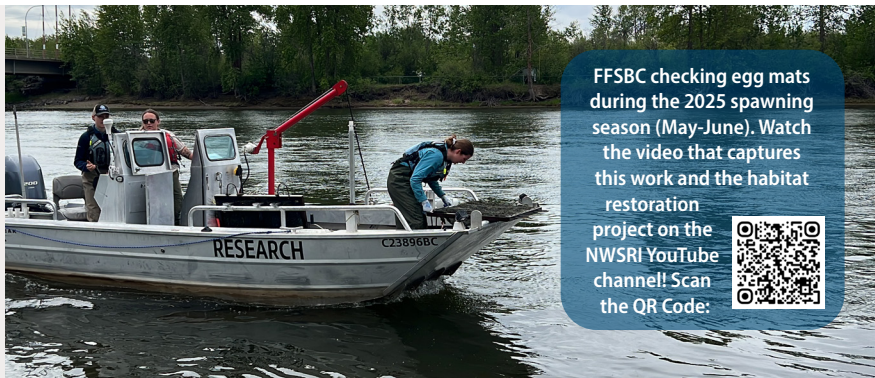
Juvenile Indexing: Uses set lines and angling to gain insight into hatchery-juvenile survival and growth rates, to monitor the presence of wild-origin juveniles, and to refine our knowledge of juvenile habitat use.

Due to higher than normal river temperatures and low water levels, crews from FFSBC and CSTC indexed for fewer days in 2025. In total, 67 fish were caught in the Nechako River (65) and Fraser Lake (2).

Some notable fish however included 15 never before seen fish—meaning that they were fish either spawned naturally in the river, or from fertilized eggs that were released as part of the habitat restoration project in years previous. Genetic samples will help determine their origin, with the results expected in 2026.

Tours at the Conservation Centre

In 2025, over 2,500 people toured the Conservation Centre! The summer students and staff also attended the Vanderhoof Farmers' Market and made presentation at libraries, at UNBC, and at other community events. [Visit the NWSRI website for tour times.](#)



FFSBC checking egg mats during the 2025 spawning season (May-June). Watch the video that captures this work and the habitat restoration project on the NWSRI YouTube channel! Scan the QR Code:



Radio-telemetry: This program provides information on sturgeon distribution, movement, and habitat use.

In 2025, 50 two-year old and 30 one-year old juveniles were radiotagged and released into the Nechako Watershed at five different locations. Their movements were recorded at any of the 7 station radio telemetry stations that were installed at key locations in the watershed, including in the Stuart Lake system. In addition, one aerial flight occurred in August. Overall, 103 radiotagged juveniles (released in 2025, 2024, 2023, and 2019), plus 38 adults were detected in 2025. Most detection were between Vanderhoof and Prince George.

Habitat Restoration: Studies explore the substrate needs of sturgeon to improve survival in the wild.

The TWG conducted substrate cleaning trials using a comb-like sorting device in the lower spawning bed. The goal was to redistribute the substrate to bring the larger gravel and cobbles (important for egg and larval survival) above the finer silts and sands (can suffocate sturgeon eggs). Using underwater photography and freeze core sampling (a method that shows us the size and distribution of materials in the top ~30cm of the riverbed) before and after the trials, the results showed positive change. Fertilized eggs with known genetics from the hatchery were released over the bed. Success of this work will be realized when fish from the egg release begin to be caught during juvenile indexing in 4-5 years.

Sturgeon Studies: Several graduate students conduct research on sturgeon and share their work with the TWG to help in recovery planning.

The multi-year study on sturgeon habitat use related to oxygen levels in Fraser Lake continued in 2025. Another study examines sturgeon behaviour and habitat preference in the river as it relates to water temperature. This work is on-going, and the preliminary data are showing some interesting results. Final results for both are expected in 2026.

Nechako White Sturgeon Conservation Centre The NWSRI continues to aid in the recovery of Nechako White Sturgeon by hatching eggs and rearing juvenile sturgeon based on TWG recommendations.

The 2025 brood and wild egg capture program will produce juvenile sturgeon for release in 2026 as part of an experimental one-year-old release, and again in 2027 as two-year-old juveniles. In June 2025, 300 two-year-old sturgeon averaging over 70cm in length were released into the watershed, along with an experimental release of 30 one-year-old juveniles.

This year the NWSRI partnered with School District 91 and the NWSRI to create a **walk-thru 360° virtual tour of the hatchery facility**. This is an exciting new way for anyone to visit the hatchery.

A great tool to increase accessibility to learn about all the interesting facts and details that go into running a conservation hatchery program.



Be a part of recovery!

Report sturgeon mortalities to the 'Sturgeon Mortality Watch' online reporting tool.



SCAN THE QR CODE TO GET THE FORM