Nechako White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative

2025-2026 REVIEW & UPDATE

NWSRI Newsletter • Spring 2026
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TWG - MONITORING, RESEARCH, AND RESTORATION

The **Technical Working Group** (TWG) is made up of representatives, experts, and managers from the provincial and federal governments, universities, non-profits, and local First Nations. The TWG conducts a variety of ecological and habitat focused projects on Nechako White Sturgeon, with the overarching goal to return to a self-sustaining Nechako population. Their work informs recovery recommendations the NWSRI provides to government decision makers for this species and population. Here is a snapshot of some of the different projects that happened in 2025 and what to look out for in 2026.

A JUVENILE NECHAKO WHITE STURGEON CAUGHT IN 2025. THESE REMARKABLE FISH HAVE INTERESTING COLOUR PATTERNS, AND ARE MORE DARK GREY THAN 'WHITE'. PHOTO BY FFSBC.

Monitoring & Research

ADULT SPAWN MONITORING *(May-Jun)*

Looks at timing of spawning, incubation success, larval drift, and the physical parameters of the river that occur during spawning. Goal: to inform habitat restoration decisions.

Research boats from Freshwater Fisheries Society of BC (FFSBC) or Carrier Sekani Tribal Council (CSTC) are seen from May to June placing egg mats and drift nets to collect wild-spawned eggs and larvae. Eggs or larvae are brought back to the hatchery to rear, which increases their chance for survival and to add to the genetic diversity in juveniles for release in the subsequent two years.

What you'll see in 2026! Both upstream and downstream of the Burrard Bridge, over 20 buoys marking the locations of egg mats. Please be mindful and stay clear of them when on the river!

JUVENILE STURGEON INDEXING *(Jul-Oct)*

This program is conducted using set lines to gain insight into hatchery-origin juvenile survival and growth rates, to monitor the presence of wild-origin juveniles, and to refine knowledge of juvenile habitat use.

Monitoring happens in the mainstem Nechako River as well as Fraser and Stuart lakes and in portions of the Upper Fraser River by both FFSBC and CSTC fisheries staff. These crews deploy set-lines—long lines with multiple hooks—during the summer and fall in an effort to capture juvenile sturgeon. Every juvenile sturgeon that is captured is entered into a database, and this extensive data-set is being used to model future sturgeon abundance in the watershed.

In 2025, water level was sometimes too low to access some of the key locations used for indexing, or, temperatures in the river were unsafe for sampling. In general, fish that are exposed to temperatures higher than 20°C for prolonged period of time can become overly stressed. The upper threshold temperature for sturgeon is not fully understood. **In 2025, and again in 2026, researchers are exploring temperature preferences of sturgeon in the Nechako River.**

Check-out the NWSRI YouTube Channel!

Find over 20 videos about Nechako White Sturgeon, including tours of the hatchery, research and monitoring methods, life cycle and the watershed. **Be sure to subscribe @NWSRI**

Restoration

TAKING CORE SAMPLES ALONG THE NECHAKO SPAWNING REACH IN EARLY MARCH, 2026. PHOTO BY MICHELLE ROBERGE

SPAWNING BED CLEANING *(April-May)*

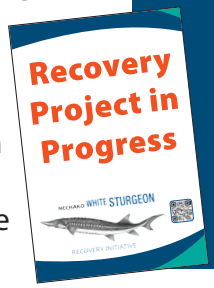
Exploring methods to clean (remove fine sediments and leave clean gravels and cobbles) and restore spawning habitat to conditions suitable for successful wild-spawned egg survival and larval.

As was seen in 2025, crews will be in the spawning reach in the spring of 2026 (you may have already seen them), to continue testing methods for cleaning sturgeon spawning substrate, as part of the larger spawning habitat restoration project lead by the TWG. Already in 2026, a coring machine took sampling along the shore of the spawning reach to better understand the substrates that may be below the spawning reach. This informs next steps.

Why does this need to happen? Female sturgeon spawn by releasing their eggs into the water column, where they eventually settle onto the riverbed. Sturgeon eggs are sticky and if they land on silty substrate, fine particles can cling to them, posing a risk of suffocation. Ideally, the substrate for spawning should consist of clean gravel and cobble. Once the eggs hatch, the small and vulnerable larvae seek refuge in the crevices of the gravel and cobble substrate, providing them with protection from predators and reducing the chance of them from being swept downstream.

What will be happening? In 2025, a 'raking' method was tested to re-distribute the substrate and move the fines below the cobbles. There were both pros and cons with the method, and after a winter of analysing the results and discussions, the method will be re-tested in 2026 along with a new "dig, sort, replace" method. For the new method, crews will carefully lift the top 20-30 cm of riverbed (dig), pass it through a sorting screen to separate the fine materials from the cobbles (sort), then return the cleaned course material to the riverbed (replace). This work will be completed before sturgeon return to this area to spawn by mid-May.

Watch the **Habitat Restoration Video** video about the work done in 2025.



So passersby know what's going on, we have a new **'Recovery Project in Progress'** sign that will be placed at project sites.

NWSCC Online

Stay up-to-date on tours dates and time, and link to the new virtual tour from here.

NECHAKO WHITE STURGEON CONSERVATION CENTRE

(NWSCC) *Aids in the recovery of Nechako White Sturgeon by hatching eggs and rearing juvenile sturgeon to replenish the population.*

The NWSCC is always a bustle of activity. In 2025, the crew not only reared the year's cohort of sturgeon, but also conducted daily tours, participated in the sturgeon release, supported research projects, and carried out their own monitoring programs for the safe function of the hatchery. This winter, FFSBC and NWSRI partnered with School District 91 to create a **virtual tour** of the hatchery! Linked from the NWSRI website, this virtual tour allows folks to explore the hatchery at their own pace and get extra details and fun facts about conservation-based aquaculture.

CWG - EDUCATION & OUTREACH

The **Community Working Group** (CWG) of the Nechako White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative (NWSRI) strives to provide new and interesting awareness activities to the community. The role of the CWG is to increase awareness of the endangered Nechako White Sturgeon population. This includes highlighting and explaining the work of the TWG.

JUVENILE STURGEON RELEASE

To raise awareness about Nechako White Sturgeon, the Nechako Watershed, and other species living in the watershed.

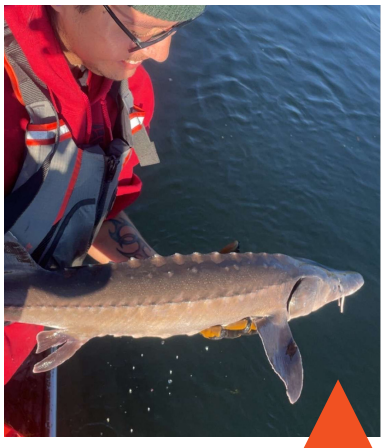
On June 6, 2025, the NWSRI along with School District 91, FFSBC, the District of Vanderhoof, and many other partner groups hosted the Juvenile Sturgeon Release. This much anticipated school and community event invites students from across the Nechako Watershed to release 2 year old sturgeon reared at the Nechako White Sturgeon Conservation Centre. At this event, 63 sturgeon were released into the Nechako River in an effort to support the recovery of the population. Along with releasing their sturgeon, students spent their time visiting educational and interactive booths to learn about fish, river habitat, the watershed, and stewardship. The next release event is scheduled for June 5, 2026!

STUDENTS ENJOYING THE 2025 JUVENILE STURGEON RELEASE EVENT IN VANDERHOOF! PHOTOS BY MICHELLE ROBERGE AND BENJAMIN SMITH.

EVERY STURGEON COUNTS

To reduce harm to sturgeon caught accidentally during the First Nation Food, Social, and Ceremonial (FSC) Fishery.

There are approximately 500 adults left in the wild and it is critical that no fish are lost from the population accidentally! This program provides the tools needed to safely release a sturgeon during the FSC Fishery, as well as supplies to mend damaged nets. There are plans to host a net mending workshop in 2026.



FISHERS FROM STELLAT'EN FIRST NATION SAFELY RELEASED THIS YOUNG STURGEON BACK INTO THE STELLAKO RIVER IN SEPTEMBER 2025. PHOTO BY DARIEN WILLIAMS.

In 2025, **16 sturgeon were caught accidentally** and all but one was released live! One by-catch was a hatchery-reared sturgeon released in 2024 by UNBC students. The fish's name... The Magnificent Barry Booth.

Learn more about the BKP from the **2011-2025 Boat Kit Program Summary Report** or by going to the NWSRI website. The NWSRI wants to expand this program, **contact us to receive a free Kit.**

OTHER OUTREACH PROJECTS

To provide diverse awareness and educational opportunities for students and the public that inform about the natural history and recovery programs for Nechako White Sturgeon.

Interpretive Signs & Displays

There are over 15 locations across the Nechako Watershed where you can read about Nechako White Sturgeon! New in 2025 is this low-profile sign by the bird tower at Riverside Park in Vanderhoof. It links sturgeon (and other fish species) to the seasons.

Sturgeon Curriculum Videos

Three new short videos were created to add to the existing Nechako White Sturgeon Curriculum. They delve into the genetics of sturgeon and some of the key parts of conservation-based aquaculture.

Find the entire library of videos plus the curriculum on Nechako White Sturgeon from this page of the NWSRI website!

Use this QR Code to get to the NWSRI website where you will find all this information and more!

2025 FUN FACTS

A snapshot of the events and programs from 2025 that supported sturgeon recovery.

SEARCHING FOR EGGS FROM AN EGG MAT IN THE SPAWNING REACH.*


PREPPING FOR THE AERIAL RADIO-TAG SURVEY IN AUGUST. PHOTO BY FFSBC.

STUDENTS EXPLORING THE EDUCATION BOOTHS AT THE RELEASE EVENT.*

STORM DRAIN PAINTING IN FORT ST. JAMES.*


TAKING UNDERWATER IMAGES AFTER HABITAT RESTORATION.*

87 sturgeon were caught in 27 days of sampling during the brood capture program. Of the 87 sturgeon, 13—5 females and 8 males—were used for the breeding program.

103 wild spawned sturgeon eggs were collected from egg mats placed in the spawning reach in Vanderhoof. This was the lowest egg collection years since 2014. From those that hatched, 11 have survived and will be released in 2027.

141 tags detections of sturgeon were made during a single radio-telemetry flight over the Nechako River in August. Most detections were made downstream of Vanderhoof, several detected at the Nautley River confluence and Prince George.

330 juvenile sturgeon raised in the hatchery were released into the Nechako River and Fraser Lake in May and June. Of those, 300 were 2-year olds, and 30 were 1-year olds for a research project. In total, 80 of these sturgeon have radio-telemetry tags in them so that the TWG can follow their movements for the next 2-8 years.

850 students from across the Nechako watershed—with teachers and NWSRI partners—came together at Riverside Park on June 6 to celebrate, learn, and release 64 juvenile sturgeon into the Nechako.

37 juvenile sturgeon were captured during the indexing program. Of those, **14** were river-raised sturgeon—river raised means they were either spawned in the wild, or hatchery-fertilized eggs released in the river. DNA testing in 2026 will confirm their origin.

12+ storm drains were painted with sturgeon images this year by 6 students from Fort St. James. This project reminds folks to keep chemicals out of storm drains to protect fish habitat.

2500+ people from across BC, Canada and the world toured the Nechako White Sturgeon Conservation Centre in 2025!

16 sturgeon were caught accidentally as by-catch and 15 were released safely as part of the Emergency Release Boat Kit Program. **One sturgeon caught in Stuart Lake is from the 2024 Release Event!** Check out this fish at the ***Where is My Fish*** site... search for PIT# 0A18224A39.

2 weeks of testing substrate cleaning methods in the riverbed ahead of sturgeon spawning. Hundreds of hatchery-spawned eggs were released on the cleaned bed to test its effectiveness. It will take up to 3 years before fish from this egg release are big enough to be caught during juvenile indexing. Genetic testing will link juveniles to this release!

*PHOTOS BY MICHELLE ROBERGE