

Sturgeon curriculum flows through schools

by Rebecca Watson - Vanderhoof Omineca Express posted Nov 3, 2014 at 2:00 PM



The Nechako White Sturgeon Curriculum is now in schools throughout District No. 91. Michelle Roberge, local biologist who helped write the program is seen here with Linnea Moutray 12, Olivia Manojlovic 12, and Zach Whitecotton 12, who have all participated in the sturgeon program during its pilot stage in 2013.

— image credit: Rebecca Watson

After two years in the making, the Nechako White Sturgeon Curriculum has finally flowed its way into classrooms.

“It’s about the river that runs through our community, the watershed in which we live in and an endangered species in our own backyard, so it’s definitely applicable,” said Michelle Roberge, one of the local biologists who wrote the curriculum. “It teams science, social responsibility, a bit of geography, history and First Nations content.”

What started as The Healthy Watersheds for Sturgeon School Program, is now a new and improved curriculum that aims to teach younger generations the fundamental role healthy watersheds and riparian zones have on all organisms.

It has attracted a number of organizations including the school system because of the inclusiveness of rivers, streams, riparian areas, restoration, and sturgeon.

The program has three main units, each with a variety of lesson plans written to engage grades 4-7. Every school in District 91 with those grades were given two complete modules this past September.

“Teachers are encouraged to use any part of it. All the background information is provided,” said Ms. Roberge. “It even includes power-point presentations, smart board activities, and field trips all already planned out.”

Two sturgeon stuffed animals are also available on loan to teachers who wish to show students a real size ratio of how big the fish can get.

Lana Ciarnielle, the Nechako White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative co-ordinator who oversees programs geared to outreach and harm reduction, contracted Mia Moutray, a teacher from Vanderhoof, (through funding from Rio Tinto Alcan and the Freshwater Fisheries Society of BC) to work with summer students to create an outline of the learning package.

They used outreach material provided in part by the NWSRI and Murray Creek Rehabilitation Project (in-kind contribution from Murray Creek) to form the Healthy Watersheds for Sturgeon School Program.

The following year through grant funding by the Habitat Stewardship Program, Ms. Roberge was contracted to complete the curriculum and get it ready to pilot in schools (2013).

She made the program ‘teacher and student friendly’ and then piloted the program during the 2013-14 school year to get feedback from teachers.

Wanda Nemethy, a teacher at McLeod Elementary, used the program during its pilot stage with her grade four students.

“We didn’t do the whole unit, we did parts, but it was quite educational,” said Ms. Nemethy. “It’s a great unit to have because it’s local. It’s something my students can relate to because in the past they have been part of the sturgeon being released into the river. The field trip to Murray Creek was great, Michelle came and did some stations with the kids. We then met with Michelle at the end of the year to go over things that could be changed, mainly wording that was a little too advanced for my students.”

Although the program is geared toward grades 4-7, Ms. Ciarniello hopes to expand the program over the next few years and make it usable for kindergarten through to grade 12.