

Fraser Salmon & Watersheds Program



Fraser Basin Council



2009/10 FINAL REPORT

FSWP File Number* FSWP 09 EE 69

* Please use the FSWP File Number provided in previous FSWP project correspondence.

1. Project Information

1.1. Project Title

Nechako White Sturgeon Community Outreach Support

1.2. Proponent's Legal Name

Nechako White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative

1.3. Project Location

Nechako River Watershed

1.4. Contact for this report

Name: Carla Wainwright

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1.5 Funding Amount

| Original Approved Grant Amount: | Total FSWP Expenditures: | Final Invoice Amount: | Final Non-FSWP leveraging, including cash and in-kind: |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|--|
| \$15,000.00 | \$15,000.00 | | \$39,253.85 |

2. Project Summary

Please provide a single paragraph describing your project, its objectives, and the results. As this summary may be used in program communications, clearly state the issue(s) that were addressed and avoid overly technical descriptions. Maximum 300 words.

White sturgeon are presently listed as Endangered (COSEWIC) and the Nechako component of Fraser white sturgeon are in the most critical state of the Fraser population groupings due to a 40-year-long recruitment failure, the result of which is a virtually complete lack of wild juveniles. This project focused on reducing threats to the remaining stock and mitigating those threats through the development and implementation of alternative practices while the causes of recruitment failure are researched and mitigated by the Technical Working Group of the NWSRI. Reduction of harm directly addresses Priority Activities within the Recovery Plan that has been developed for the Nechako population. In addition to recruitment failure, there are additional mortalities incurred in the First Nations food fishery. As well, this fishery inadvertently targets sturgeon in the 1-2.5 meter range and is therefore harming the most reproductively viable portion of the population. Reducing by-capture and potential sturgeon mortalities assists in the maintenance of the most important portion of the population and increases the potential of the eventual recovery of the population.

In 2009-2010, 3 main projects were undertaken: information sessions in First Nations and non-First Nations regional communities, a 2009 Save our Sturgeon school event in Vanderhoof and coordination services for the NWSRI.

The primary objectives of the information sessions were to increase awareness on the biology of white sturgeon, the decline of the Nechako population, and to provide strategies for how to decrease white sturgeon by-catch and mortality. In addition to increasing the knowledge and awareness, the sessions were also designed to purposefully conduct a low level of audience research on current 'knowledge and beliefs' in each of the target communities. Funds from FWSP also aided in the organization and execution of the 2009 SOS – Save our Sturgeon juvenile release event for over 200 First Nation and non First Nation school children from the Nechako. And finally improved coordination and support services were provided to the Community Working Group arm of the Nechako White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative. This in turn helped improve community-level awareness regarding the decline of the Nechako white sturgeon population, habitat loss and recovery activities;

OPTIONAL Please give a short statement (up to 100 words) of the most compelling activity or outcome from your project.

The most compelling activity of our project were the First Nations' workshops. We were able to build upon past successes and make some significant inroads towards increasing knowledge and awareness about white sturgeon and bi-catch in fisher's nets. We hope to see fewer white sturgeon mortalities as a result of this (and ongoing) work.

3. Final Project Results and Effectiveness

3.1 Copy EXPECTED OUTCOMES from your detailed proposal and insert into this section. Add additional rows as needed. Then please list the FINAL OUTCOMES (the tangible end products resulting from this work) associated with expected outcome.

If FINAL OUTCOMES differ from the original EXPECTED OUTCOMES please describe why, and the implications for the project.

| EXPECTED OUTCOMES | FINAL OUTCOMES |
|---|---|
| 1. As a result of this project there will be a continuation of First Nation fisher education with respect to sturgeon conservation status and providing a rationale to conserve and participate in recovery activities. This in turn leads to sturgeon harm reduction. | Part of the intent for these meeting was to have increased knowledge in communities such that community members would influence fisher families. Suggestions came out of these meetings for ideas of how educate, engage and remind fisher families of state of sturgeon population, actions if a sturgeon was caught and what to do if a sturgeon perished. These are listed in summary (attached) and incorporated into the new 5 year NWSRI communication plan. |
| 2. As a result of this project First Nations, stakeholders and members of the community will have an increased knowledge of the Nechako white sturgeon, conservation status and recovery efforts being made by the NWSRI. | Information sessions were held in 4 First Nation communities (Saik'uz, Nak'azdli, Tl'azt'en and Takla Lake First Nation) and 2 regional communities (Vanderhoof and Fort St. James). See Table 1 and attached summary below for outcomes. This information is being fed into our 2010-2015 Communications Plan. |
| 3. As a result of this project the CWG of the NWSRI will be able to continue working together with school children in School District 57 on the Save our Sturgeon release program in the fall of 2009. Funding for this program will allow us to provide a long-term connection to white sturgeon and the recovery initiative to the future stewards of the Nechako River. This connection is critical, given the long-term nature and complexity of Nechako white sturgeon recovery actions. | The 2009 Save our Sturgeon School Event was held in Vanderhoof at Riverside Park on October 7 th . Unfortunately due to funding constraints, the Initiative was unable to have juvenile fish for the children to release. However, a program was still put into effect – with a water quality testing station, a white sturgeon biology and conservation station and a sturgeon kite flying station. Fewer children attended this year, but the day was a definite success and feedback has been very positive. Students and participating adults increased their knowledge of white sturgeon biology as well as the importance of water quality and human impacts on the river. |
| 4. As a result of this project community members will be given the tools to affect white sturgeon conservation and watershed health in their own backwards. | With all activities, information was passed on to participants both verbally and with various take-home handouts. Further ideas of what else could be done (handouts, activities) were |

shared with our team and are listed in the attached the summary.

3.2 Please evaluate the EFFECTIVENESS of your project in achieving Project Objectives. Please identify the indicators you have used to measure the effectiveness of your project. Please include any notable successes or challenges.

First Nations Community Meetings & Outreach:

With the First Nations meetings, special effort was made to design the sessions from the perspective of what a FN person would want to hear about. Because of this, our team feels that these meetings were very effective. This is measured from the general atmosphere at the sessions, from the questions, the emotions in the room, the increased knowledge at the end of the session, and the responses and ideas that were put onto the questionnaires. Due to general good attitude, a great foundation has been established in Saik'uz, Nad'azdli, Tl'azt'en and Takla Lake communities. There should be a good relationship to continue to work next fiscal with FN communities to spread the knowledge on sturgeon biology, current status, NWSRI efforts and what can be done in the community to help. White sturgeon are very important in the culture of the FN communities in the Nechako Watershed. They are emotionally tied to water and all fish. However, they seem especially linked to salmon and sturgeon. In the past, the capture of a sturgeon resulted in a celebration in the community and the meat was shared with everyone.

With the expansion of this knowledge in the 4 First Nation communities (Saik'uz, Nad'azdli, Tl'azt'en and Takla Lake) there will be increased accountability within the community which should result an increase in the number of sturgeon that are released when they are caught in gill nets and a decrease in the number of mortalities. In addition, we are hoping that in each community, we can follow up and contact those who attended the sessions and we hope to establish a contact/lead who would help organize an event design for the community, by the community.

Vanderhoof & Fort St. James Meetings & Outreach:

Although the community meetings were not as well attended, there was still important feedback received regarding how to connect and impact local community members. How to continue to engage Vanderhoof will be challenging. As mentioned in Table 1 below, the community identifies with sawmills and geese, but little with its rivers, lakes or assets of water systems. There are undertones in the community that we 'missed the boat' on hatchery. We should possibly consider changing messaging and/or take a different approach around keep Vanderhoof residents on side and enthusiastic. More of an water/river/environmental message, with sturgeon as one of many reasons why they should care/do something/contribute.

The community of Fort St. James appears to be more connected to the land and water and more willing to do what it takes to recover sturgeon. There is the general feeling there are many untapped resources/ideas/energy in this community that will need to be teased out over the next year. There appear to be opportunities to work with the District and Chamber of Commerce to not only educate residents and visitors to the community about sturgeon, but to also use sturgeon as a drawing card to get travelers to visit Fort St. James.

A great number of ideas from participants on how to spread the word and teach community members are listed in the attached summary report and are being developed further in the 5 year communication plan.

School Release (SOS: Save Our Sturgeon Event) 2009:

Although we did not have fish to release this year, the SOS Fall Event was a success. From the beginning of September, our contracting teacher was in contact with the principals of all of the elementary and independent schools in the district. It was decided that this year's focus would be grades 4 through 7 (to increase the number of schools able to participate and get a wider range of students from across the district). The three stations had an emphasis on hands on, engaged learners, and were based on water quality and its importance to sturgeon, the status and habitat of sturgeon, and a kite flying station with an emphasis on students building kites with sturgeon in mind. Again this year, School District 91's superintendent, Ray LeMoigne was on board and very supportive. Numbers of classes, schools and students were down from previous events, and the event was scaled back from two days to one day. Those that did come mentioned how engaging the stations were, how enthusiastic the presenters were, and overall, what a great event we put on.

There were some things to think about for next year:

- in order to regain those schools that participated in previous years, we need sturgeon to release, or something tangible like that for the kids and teachers to attach to. Discussion needs to happen early on this point for future events.

- if the event continues in the future as it was presented this year, perhaps older students, including high school students, might be a better target audience. A questionnaire to high schools in the district may be useful

to gauge interest.

- of the three stations, the kite station was challenged by classes who did not make or could not bring kites. Bussing is an issue with this, as school district buses will only haul kites if they are in an undercarriage (only a few buses have these).

- as a last minute fill in, we had two high school classes join during the second block of time. Adding these students did work fairly well, but in the future, there may be more we would want to do with high school students and their advanced levels of understanding and participation.

- Having the high school students there to help really works well. They are so eager and energetic to work with both running stations and working with the students. Hopefully, they can continue having this opportunity again in the future.

As we continue doing the events, there is opportunity to diversify what we offer, the target audiences and how we engage the communities in the plight of the Nechako White Sturgeon. The entire event worked very well, especially considering the lack of fish. There are adult volunteers that have come back each year, so they know what to do and do a fabulous job engaging the students.

3.3 REQUIRED: attach all DOCUMENTATION of Final Outcomes, and LIST attachments here. These may include technical reports, maps, photos, evidence of communications, lists of meeting participants, etc.

NWSRI Summary_First Nation_RegionalComm_Oct2009-Jan2010.doc
 NWSRI Sturgeon Recovery Logic model.pdf
 NWSRI SOS report 2009.doc

(note: Communications Plan is still in draft format – a final copy will be sent upon completion.)

3.4 Please describe how the benefits of this project will be sustained and/or be built upon into the future. What are the planned next steps, or recommendations for further work, if applicable?

We will continue to nurture and grow relationships with all stakeholders in the Nechako watershed. Changing not only attitudes but actions requires time and repetition of our message. The 2010-2015 NWSRI Communications Plan will continue to guide our work with clear objectives and goals over the next 5 years. Our next steps are to begin implementation of this plan and to continue to listen to stakeholders and work together with them towards white sturgeon conservation.

3.5 What are the top three lessons learned from this project that could be useful to communicate to others doing similar work in the Basin?

1. It is so important to get into the communities and get the perspectives of those who live and work there. Sturgeon do strike an emotional cord in people and we need to play on this to increase not only awareness, but to motivate people to spread the word and ensure accountability (especially in FN communities) around the release of all sturgeon. Need to provide incentives to attend meetings (e.g. food, door prizes)

2. It seems that people just need to be told. Having a dinosaur fish in your backyard is unique and pretty special. We just have to figure out when and how to tell them, inspire them, give them the basic tools, and then they will do the rest. Living dinosaurs....watch out Drumheller!

3. Having live fish to release has a much bigger impact with children than other types of educational activities. The emotional connection is better established and there is a significantly greater interest from the community.

TABLE 1: Highlights of 4 sessions with First Nations and 2 Session with Regional Communities.

| Community | Date | Location | # of people | Highlights |
|-----------|------|----------|-------------|------------|
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|----------------------------------|-------------|--|----|--|
| Saik'uz First Nation – Session 1 | Oct 5 | Stoney Creek / Multiplex | 10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Need to keep working to get council more interested as they do not seem to engaged at this point -Community members that attended were genuinely interested -Agree with one comment that if asked, everyone in the community would agree that sturgeon are important and should be saved |
| Saik'uz First Nation – Session 2 | Oct 9 | Stoney Creek / Multiplex | 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -We had poor turnout for this session as we did not have extensive advertising -Able to obtain a list of families involved in fishing -Lots of questions from participants -good ideas for how to approach future session in Saik'uz - We were fortunate to have on elder who still fishes and had a good discussion with her |
| Vanderhoof Community Session | Oct 20 | Public Library | 10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -only 1 new family of 10 that attended This style of meeting (e.g. only for sturgeon) is not currently good method in Vanderhoof -Community identifies with sawmills and geese, but little with its rivers, lakes or assets of water systems -some feeling that there are some in community that feel we 'missed the boat' on hatchery -should consider changing messaging and/or take a different approach around keep Vanderhoof residents on side and enthusiastic |
| Tl'azt'en First Nation | Nov 2, 2009 | Tachie Village, Band Office board room | 6 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Attitude was good of the members that participated. -Turnout was less than expected due to death in community -established good contact with fisheries staff - We had a great idea to join in on a monthly elders gathering with a map and just tell them about sturgeon, listen to their stories, and have them show up on map where they use to catch them. We had hoped to do this later in November with a second trip, but there was (and still is) community unrest and we were advised not to visit the community until further notice. |

| Community | Date | Location | # of people | Highlights |
|------------------------|-------------|------------------------------|--------------------|---|
| Nak'azdli First Nation | Nov 9 & 10 | Kwah Hall, Nak'azdli Reserve | 10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Very good attitude, struck emotions of participants -very supportive of initiative -many good ideas that come from perspective of First Nation culture (art, visual, community, tie to the land). Highlight was concept of a |

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|---|--------------|--|----|--|
| | | | | 'Fish Festival' at beginning of fishing season -also some very practical suggestions (field day with fisher families) |
| Fort St. James Community Session | Nov 23, 2009 | Fort St. James, College of New Caledonia | 10 | Presented to mayor and Council prior to meeting (increase knowledge, gain support, look for assistance). Very supportive of initiative. Many unaware of details fish and current status. Should be opportunities to work with District in future. - One phone call from resident of prior to meeting (as result of newspaper article -Lots of questions -Article written by daughter of participant about her take on sturgeon, and published in Jan/Feb West Coast News (will be part of summary) |
| Takla Lake First Nation | Jan 22, 2010 | Takla Landing , Potlatch House | 30 | -Presentation done on Day 4 of 4 day resource mgmt workshop that Takla Lake FN had been planning since Sept 2009. -Fantastic turnout due to being part of a larger event. -Very positive feedback on questionnaires and 5 community members indicated that they would like to get more involved thus these would be persons to target for development of a community event next fiscal. |
| Friends of Fort St. James Historic Park (Parks Canada - National Historic Site) | Jan 28, 2010 | Fort St. James, On site @ historic park | 10 | -Not part of work under this funding, but invitation to be a guest speaker was a result of contacts made while setting up Fort St. James community meeting. - Outcomes relevant to work of NWSRI -Guest speaker at AGM of Friends of Historic Park -Outcome of presentation: This site has recently hired a full time/permanent 'product development coordinator'. He is very interested in discussing ways to incorporate a sturgeon display and theme into the site's interpretive program and special events through the season. |

8. Appendices

REQUIRED: attach all DOCUMENTATION of Final Outcomes, listed above in section 3.3. These may include technical reports, maps, photos, evidence of communications, lists of meeting participants, etc.

Please also visit: http://nechakowhitesturgeon.org/sturgeon/events/release_event_photos_2009.php

for pictures from the 2009 Save Our Sturgeon event.