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For Immediate Release

Sturgeon Society Applauds Findings of RPA for Lower Fraser River White Sturgeon Urges Immediate Action

Vancouver, BC – The Fraser River Sturgeon Conservation Society (FRSCS) has called for immediate action toward the recovery of White Sturgeon in the lower Fraser River, based on the findings contained a report recently released by Fisheries and Oceans Canada. The Recovery Potential Assessment (RPA) report for Lower Fraser River White Sturgeon states that the abundance of White Sturgeon in the lower Fraser River has been declining since 2006 and is projected to continue to decline if the numbers of juvenile sturgeon entering the population does not increase from current levels. The report identifies the major threats to sturgeon in the lower Fraser River and provides examples of how these threats could be addressed.

“The FRSCS is currently working with the BC government and Fraser River First Nations to develop a management and action plan to reduce the threats to Fraser sturgeon. Specific actions are required to protect critical sturgeon habitat and reduce the impact of fisheries on sturgeon growth and survival,” said Rick Hansen, who serves as chairman of the FRSCS.

The report identifies salmon and eulachon as important sources of food for sturgeon and nutrients for the lower Fraser ecosystem. The total biomass of Chum salmon, that spawn and die in the lower Fraser River each year, has been in decline since 1999. The total return of Chum salmon to the Fraser River in 2021 was one of the lowest on record.

Fisheries expert Karl English, lead author of the report, said “the data collected by FRSCS volunteers over the past 21 years shows that annual growth rates of White Sturgeon in the lower Fraser River have been declining since 2005, and flagged the importance of rebuilding Fraser salmon and eulachon populations.”

The report does provide some positive news; the current abundance of mature adult sturgeon in the lower Fraser River may be sufficient to initiate population recovery, but only if sturgeon spawning areas are protected, fisheries impacts are reduced, and juvenile sturgeon have sufficient food and rearing habitat. Since 2013, the FRSCS has been working with the BC Government to identify sturgeon spawning areas in the lower Fraser River. The FRSCS strongly supports the protection of critical spawning habitats, including the restriction of all fisheries in those areas during the sturgeon-spawning period from May through July.

Hansen added, “The fate of lower Fraser sturgeon is in our hands. Let's work together to rebuild this iconic and amazing species.”

The 2020 cumulative results of the FRSCS monitoring and assessment program can be found at www.frasersturgeon.com.

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