

# HSBC Fraser River Sturgeon Education Program



## Fraser River Sturgeon Conservation Society Stakeholders

This non-profit organization has spear-headed much of the research and work done in the last decade regarding white sturgeon conservation. Founded in 1997, this organization, led by Rick Hansen, has brought together many stakeholders including the provincial, federal and First Nations levels of government, commercial and sports fishers and biologists who monitor and study white sturgeon populations in the Lower Fraser River watershed. This organization, relying mainly on volunteer participants, but guided by professional biologists, has conducted a number of valuable studies directing public attention to the plight of the white sturgeon.

Program volunteers have tagged and released over 40,000 white sturgeon within a study area that stretches 185 linear kilometers, from the mouth of the Fraser River to the Fraser Canyon. This project has been done in order to produce reliable estimates of the population of Fraser River white sturgeon. The novel life history of this amazing species and its migratory patterns has been carefully studied as information is collected regarding its habitat and life cycle. This work has heightened awareness levels in the public regarding the state of this culturally and ecologically significant species.

This species has now been declared endangered and is listed by SARA. All white sturgeon fishing is strictly catch and release in the Lower Fraser River valley.

The society has organized a number of educational initiatives over the last few years directed at elementary and secondary students in an attempt to broaden the base of knowledge and support for its goal of promoting the sustainability of this endangered species. Corporate sponsorship from the HSBC and the support of many community organizations and volunteers has made these initiatives possible.

The FRSCS sponsors a yearly sturgeon fishing derby held in October which is open to the public and designed to draw attention to the goals of the organization. While some have suggested that there is an awkward irony in a conservation society holding a fishing derby, the FRSCS would point to the hard work of thousands of anglers who have participated in the tagging program, helping to provide the data required to study this endangered fish. Others would state that catching fish by hook and line, especially repeatedly, threatens the fish trying to be protected. According to Troy Nelson, the former biologist leading these studies, very little is known about the long term effects of catch and release angling on white sturgeon mortality.