

HSBC Fraser River Sturgeon Education Program



The Forest Industry and Mill Operator Stakeholders

Forests cover two thirds of our province and the vast majority of the landmass that is part of the Fraser River watershed. Ninety-five percent of our forests are publicly owned and managed by the provincial government. This is an incredibly valuable asset that we all share. Over 20,000 people province wide are employed by this industry in a wide range of capacities. While the industry has been shrinking in terms of its levels of employment and its percentage of the provincial GDP (4% of the total in 1990 – 3% of the total in 2004) it continues to be a key source of revenue for our province. Roughly one third of the \$36 billion dollars of goods exported from BC (2005) are wood and paper products produced by this industry. Our forest products are sold all over the world and our society relies on the wood and paper products produced by this industry.

Large scale logging operations throughout the Fraser River watershed have left their indelible mark on the ecosystem. An unsustainable logging practice over many decades has altered the balance of life in our province. The rate of logging and some of the methods, such as clear cutting, has led to serious environmental problems. Streams and rivers suffer due to increased siltation impacting salmon and other fish species and their reproductive cycles. Habitat destruction threatens a number of species including spotted owls. Effluent from mills added toxic dioxins to the river impacting all life found in the river. Thankfully, the worst of these discharges is no longer happening, but its cumulative impact over decades has been significant. All these impacts are connected and contribute to the threat to the life cycle of the white sturgeon.

The Fraser River is a key transportation, manufacturing and storage hub for the coastal forestry industry. All along the banks of the lower Fraser River log booms store wood waiting to be turned into lumber and pulp. The riparian zones along the banks of the river in the foreshore suffer due to this practice. Log booms move up and down with the tide, sometimes resting on this sensitive habitat at low tide. The pounding of logs booms on the river banks alters the riparian habitat. Bark and other wood debris breaks off the log booms, gets water logged, and sinks, thereby building up high levels of organic detritus. The coarser textured gravel river bottom is silted up as the carrying capacity of the river along its banks is lowered by instream obstructions such as pilings, docks and booms. Shallow side channels of the river are important to the reproductive patterns of white sturgeon and their juvenile offspring.

Another environmental concern associated with lumber yards along the banks of the Fraser is the use of wood preservatives called sapstains. Fungicides are used on cut lumber to ensure that the wood does not discolour and begin to break down while waiting for shipment in our moist climate. Lumber is dipped in this chemical and then placed in lumber yard for storage. Some have expressed concerns that leachates from these highly toxic chemical products could end up in the river causing fish mortality. Balancing the pros and cons of this vital industry and finding a way to mitigate the environmental damage done by forest practices and lumber mills is just one of many challenges facing those entrusted with the task of protecting the habitat of the white sturgeon.