Sports Anglers/Tourism Stakeholders

The sports anglers of BC have for many years worked in conjunction with the Fraser River Sturgeon Conservation Society to promote the conservation of white sturgeon populations in the lower Fraser river watershed. The white sturgeon fishery has been a catch and release fishery since 1994. Sports fishers have fully supported this. That year a number of large female sturgeon washed up onto the banks of the Fraser River indicating that a large scale mortality event had devastated mature spawning sturgeon. Roughly 80% of the White Sturgeon tagged with radio transmitters were caught and released by this stakeholder group over the last 10 years. They have played a key role in facilitating the study of this fish.

For fishers drawn to this sport few species produce the adrenaline rush of catching a fish that can weigh over a thousand pounds and stretch up to six meters. Sports anglers will pay hundreds of dollars for a day of fishing with a guide in the upper reaches of the Fraser River between Mission and Yale. This industry supports hundreds of guides and many guide companies and fishing resorts are situated along the Fraser River. Sports fishing bring millions of dollars of revenue into the provincial coffers through annual licensing fees. Tourists from outside Canada will pay a premium for the right to fish for these majestic fish. The ripple effect of these tourists spreads out through the economy as boat builders, marinas, tackle shops, restaurants and hotels see many dollars of business pass their way. The white sturgeon has become a valuable trophy fish, attracting thousands of fishers from around the world.

Since September 12, 2008, sport anglers taking part in the white sturgeon fishery in the lower and middle freshwater portions of the Fraser River watershed are required to carry a new White Sturgeon Conservation License (WSCL) in addition to a basic provincial angling license. All revenue generated from the sales of the WSCL will be directed to the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation for use in sturgeon stock management activities.

The lower and middle portions of the Fraser River watershed (which includes the Fraser River tributaries), from the Mission Bridge to and including Williams Lake River in the Cariboo Region, are the only fresh waters in B.C. where it is legal to fish for White Sturgeon in a unique catch-and-release fishery. All other fresh waters in B.C. are closed to sturgeon fishing. Heavy lobbying by the lucrative sports fishery left this exemption open for sports anglers. Indeed, many lodges and guides are dependant upon this revenue stream.

Significant tensions exist between the Sports, First Nations and Commercial fishers as they rely on dwindling supply of salmon stocks. This years sockeye returns were predicted to be huge with over 7 million salmon expected. The collapse of this run has left many questioning the management of the salmon fishery here in BC with some comparing the recent events to the collapse of the cod fishery on the East Coast in the early 1990's. Salmon are the main food supply of the sturgeon, which as bottom feeders rely on the millions of rotting salmon carcasses for a steady supply of food drifting down the river through the fall and winter months. The long term impact of the demise of the salmon fishery will make sturgeon sustainability even more challenging.