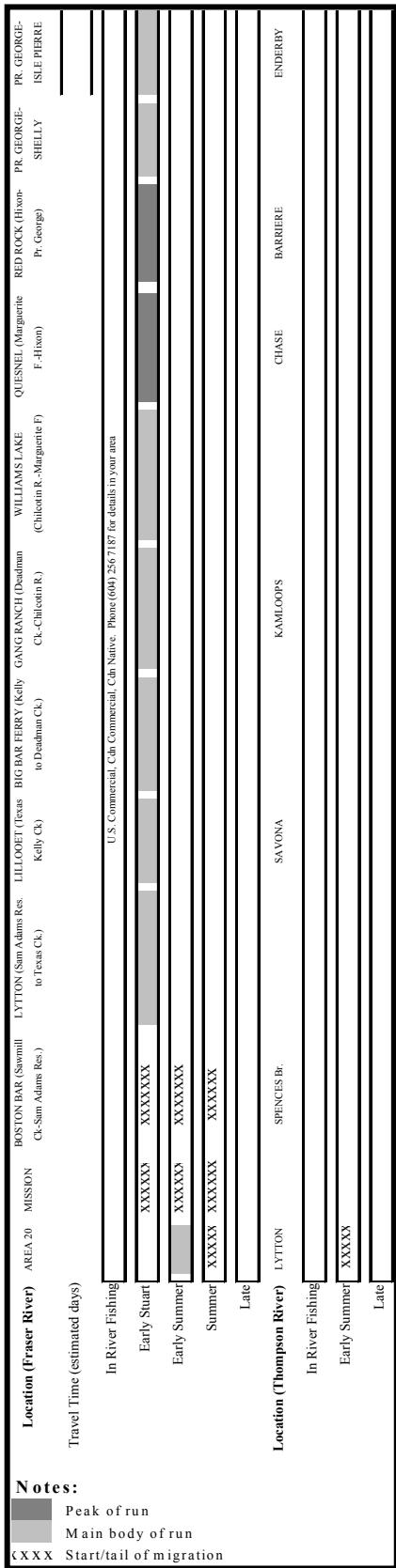


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# Watershed Talk

A weekly Aboriginal fisheries newsletter for  
fisheries representatives and their organizations



## 2003 LATE RUN FRASER SOCKEYE RADIO TAGGING STUDY

Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), in conjunction with the Pacific Salmon Commission, is conducting a tagging study on migrating Fraser River sockeye in July-October 2003. The objectives of this study are to obtain information on the migration timing and survival of late run sockeye.

Approximately, 600 radio tags will be applied to sockeye in marine areas. Radio-transmitters will be inserted into the stomach of each fish. Radio tagged fish will be evident by a thin wire antenna protruding from the mouth and an external, blue Floy tag attached to the antenna. Radio tagged fish will be tracked as they enter the Fraser River and throughout the watershed as they migrate toward their spawning grounds.

If you catch a radio-tagged sockeye and choose to keep it, please remove the radio tag with the Floy tag attached and contact DFO at once at the phone number listed below. If you choose to release the fish, record the tag number, time, date and location of catch. Individuals returning radio tags to DFO along with information on time and place of capture will be sent the complete tracking history of the fish and a small token of appreciation for participating in the study.

If you catch a radio tagged fish or you have any questions related to this study, please call the following phone number: Toll free in Canada or US: 1-877-666-7575. **FOR MORE INFORMATION: AI Cass, Science Branch, Pacific Biological Station 250-756-7142**

## NECHAKO RIVER WHITE STURGEON RECOVERY INITIATIVE - BACKGROUND

**By Jason Yarmish**

Over the past 10 years, a lot of research to better understand the sturgeon of the Fraser watershed revealed some interesting data. At present there are five genetically distinct white sturgeon populations in the Fraser, one of which is the Nechako River population.

Following seven years of sampling in the Nechako watershed, several things became apparent. First, the population estimate is approximately 600 sturgeon. Second, there are no "juveniles" in the Nechako and despite intensive sampling, I believe that only 2 sturgeon under 1 meter length were ever captured. No eggs or larvae have ever been captured despite specific sampling around "spawning type" events. Third, the mean age of the population in the Nechako is shifting annually, indicating no



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recruitment. In other words, the population is getting older. At present, the population has a mean age of between 30 and 40 years.

So considering the small, aging adult population, lack of juveniles and armed with a combined 7 years of research on the Nechako sturgeon, the Province hired Carl Walters, aided by Josh Korman, to look at the data, and the analysis pointed sharply towards genetic extinction within about 20 years without some sort of intervention. This put Nechako populations in greater danger than Columbia and Kootney sturgeon populations, which were already under recovery actions.

Three years ago, the Province spearheaded the Nechako White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative, consisting of both a technical Recovery Team, and an Action Planning Group (a.k.a. APG) who represent a broad cross section of the community. To date, the Recovery Team is finalizing a recovery plan and exploring technical options, and the APG is communicating with the Technical Recovery Team and community at large.

There is a lot more to this story. I have been involved with sturgeon research in the upper Fraser for a number of years now, and wanted to let people in the watershed know what was going on. Through Watershed Talk, I will continue to keep you

informed, but if you have specific questions, would like more information regarding sturgeon, or have suggestions for articles, please let me know. **For further information, contact Jason Yarmish at (250) 962-2712 or [jasonyar@telus.net](mailto:jasonyar@telus.net)**

## 2003 FRASER SOCKEYE SEASON – STILL DRAGGING ITS HEALS

**By: Jason Yarmish**

Well despite another week, the start of the sockeye season is still off to a slow start. Early Stuart sockeye have now been observed in Tlaz'ten Territory, but the peak of the run should be in the Williams Lake to Prince George area. The final numbers are not yet in for the Early Stuarts, but it appears that the overall estimate past Mission will be in the 25 to 30,000 range. Early Summers are also still trickling into the Fraser. The jury is still out on whether it is a late arrival or a poor return, however things have picked up a little in the marine test fisheries. The next week or so will really start to clear up the Early Summer question. The earliest of the Summers are also starting to show in test fisheries.

The big question mark today lies with Mother Nature. We are currently experiencing low water levels and higher than average temperatures, similar to those observed in 1998, a very difficult

year for Fraser sockeye. If the current trends in temperature and discharge continue, it could pose significant migratory (if not survival) challenges to sockeye of the Early Summer and Summer aggregates. **For further information, contact Mike Staley at (604) 261-7065 or [mstaley@mstaley.com](mailto:mstaley@mstaley.com)**

## UPCOMING MEETINGS & TELECONFERENCES

**JULY 31/03:** 4:00 PM - FRAFS Technical Fraser Sockeye Update Teleconference. Chair(s): Mike Staley/Ken Wilson.

**Aug. 6/03:** 9:00 AM – Ad Hoc Fraser Technical Committee Teleconference. Chair(s): Ken Wilson/Les Jantz

**AUG. 7/03:** 4:00 PM - FRAFS Technical Fraser Sockeye Update Teleconference. Chair(s): Mike Staley/Ken Wilson.