Columbia River Project Water Use Plan

Lower Columbia River

Reference: CLBMON #28 (Year 8)

Lower Columbia River Adult White Sturgeon Monitoring Program: 2015 Investigations Data Report

Study Period: January 2015 - December 2015

BC Hydro and Power Authority

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

White Sturgeon (*Acipenser transmontanus*) in the Canadian section of the lower Columbia River (LCR), are one of four populations that were listed as endangered under the Species at Risk Act in 2006. The population was identified as a priority during the Water Use Planning (WUP) process because it is undergoing recruitment failure and considerable uncertainties exist related to recovery. However, given the high value of power generation mandated under the Columbia River Treaty, significant flow alterations on the system were not deemed feasible and, as such, the system was designated as a working river. As a result of this designation, management responses targeted on White Sturgeon were focused on the collection of biological information that could determine the possible mechanisms resulting in recruitment failure and address issues related to recovery along with non-operational habitat improvements designed to increase spawning and rearing success. The general objectives of this program were to 1) collect data to describe abundance trends, population structure and reproductive status of adult White Sturgeon, 2) collect mature adult White Sturgeon to serve as broodstock for the annual Conservation Aquaculture Program as needed, 3) determine White Sturgeon spawning locations, habitat use, and movements using both direct (capture) and indirect (telemetry) methods, and 4) determine the timing and frequency of spawning events.

In 2013, a five-year population assessment was initiated to estimate survival rates and abundance of the entire transboundary White Sturgeon population. Additionally, data from this program are being used to determine growth, fish condition, age class structuring, and sex ratios. Movement data collected using acoustic telemetry indicated that adult sturgeon activity generally occurred during the summer months for the assumed purposes of foraging or spawning. Adult White Sturgeon in the LCR are selecting deeper habitats of low flow, which do not appear to be limited under the current operational regime.

In 2015, spawning was estimated to have occurred from mid-June into mid-July. The timing and duration of spawning activity was similar to past years, with the majority of spawning days occurring on the descending limb of the hydrograph at water temperatures above 14ºC. Based on developmental stages of collected eggs and larvae, it was estimated that 8 and 4 spawning days occurred in 2015 at Waneta and Kinnaird, respectively.

A 2011-2012 genetic study determined the number of adults spawning in the LCR was more than 10-fold the number used as broodstock in the Conservation Aquaculture Program. In efforts to increase genetic diversity among stocked juvenile White Sturgeon, increase effective breeding number, and maintain genetic diversity within the population, a Streamside Incubation Facility (SIF) was developed and constructed near the Waneta spawning location for the purpose of incubating naturally produced eggs collected in the LCR. Hatched larvae were transported to the KSH and reared for release in the following spring. While implemented in 2014 concurrently with the broodstock program (2001-2014), as of 2015, the SIF program is now the sole provider of juvenile offspring to be stocked in the LCR.

The state of knowledge pertaining to the various management questions associated with this monitoring project are summarized in Table ES1.

Table ES1. CLBMON #28 Status of Lower Columbia River Adult White Sturgeon Monitoring Program Objectives, Management Questions, and Hypotheses.

Management Question	Status
What are the abundance trends, population structure and reproductive status of adult White Sturgeon in the lower Columbia River?	- The most recent abundance estimate for adult White Sturgeon remains at 1,100 in the Canadian section of the lower Columbia River as estimated by Irvine et al. (2007). A systematic stock assessment was initiated in 2013 and encompasses the entire Transboundary Reach of the lower Columbia River in Canada and the US. The goals of the stock assessment are to develop population and survival estimates that can be used to track recovery targets for this population. At the conclusion of 2015, six sessions have been completed and data analyses to develop preliminary estimates have begun. - Generally, the wild population remains dominated by adult age classes, with limited wild juveniles captured during sampling programs (<1%). Juveniles released from the Conservation Aquaculture Program are surviving and are represented in a large proportion of the adult captures. These juveniles have extended the estimated extirpation of this population by several decades and are just reaching a size where they will start entering the adult population. - An aquaculture program that centers on using wild collected eggs and larvae was developed in 2014 based on results from previous year's genetic analyses. This is currently the sole source of offspring collected for stocking purposes in order to meet long term genetic goals for the population. It has resulted in suspending the traditional broodstock program going forward.
How much spawning occurs annually at known spawning locations, and are there other spawning locations unidentified in the lower Columbia River?	- Wild spawning has been detected annually, and while confidence around the estimates of the number of spawning days is unknown, it is estimated that multiple spawning days occur annually with eggs surviving to hatch. - Using genetic methods, it was found that 121.5 ± 34.7 adults (mean ± SD) were spawning within the Canadian section of the lower Columbia River within each of two

Management Question	Status
	years (2011 and 2012). - Spawning occurs annually at the Waneta area, with the number of estimating spawning days varying by year. - Spawning has been identified through egg and larval captures downstream of Hugh Keenleyside Dam and Arrow Lakes Generating Station (ALH). ALH represents the second known location of egg deposition in the Canadian section of the lower Columbia River and has been incorporated into annual monitoring programs to further describe spawning frequency and duration. - An additional spawning location is used annually (2007-2015) in the vicinity of Kinnaird but the exact location(s) of egg deposition remains unknown. - Additional spawning sites are used annually south of the international border (e.g., Northport WA).
What is the degree of interaction among sub-populations of White Sturgeon in the lower Columbia River?	- Though fidelity to specific habitats or locations has been identified as high, individuals have been identified to move throughout the river during the spring and summer months based on subsequent captures or telemetry tracking. Further, we know through direct capture and telemetry methods that fish move between Canada and the United States. However, though movements have been identified, further data are required to address the interaction (i.e., spawning) of individuals from different sections of the lower Columba River.
How do existing river operations affect adult movements, habitat preference, spawning site selection, or spawning activity?	- Adults select deep, slow moving sections of the river, which are currently not limited by the existing operating regime of the river. Site fidelity is extremely high to very specific habitats and individuals spend >60% of their time at a single location. When movements do occur, they tend to occur during periods of warmer water and increasing flows assumed to be for either feeding or spawning. - Spawning related movements have been identified for a select number of mature males and females. Individuals tend to move to spawning locations within the reach of river where they spend the majority of

Management Question	Status
	their time. Additional data are required to increase our confidence regarding the use of acoustic telemetry to address spawning related movements.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

1.0 INTRODUCTION

White Sturgeon (*Acipenser transmontanus*) in the Canadian section of the lower Columbia River (LCR), are one of four populations that were listed as endangered under the Species at Risk Act in 2006. The population is undergoing recruitment failure (Hildebrand and Parsley 2013) and the current level of natural recruitment is considered to be insufficient for maintaining a self-sustaining population. The exact mechanisms resulting in recruitment failure are unknown and as a result White Sturgeon were identified during the Water Use Planning (WUP) process as a priority species for conservation in the Columbia River. As such, a monitoring program was developed to address recovery of the population. It was recognized that in order to make progress towards recovery, baseline data were lacking on the population such as spawning locations, spawning activity (i.e., timing and frequency), and population level metrics like habitat use, movements, growth, and age class distribution.

Identification of spawning activity is an important component of recovery as it locates critical spawning habitat allowing for protection or enhancement of these areas as recovery moves forward. Prior to 2007, studies have identified White Sturgeon spawning sites at two primary locations in the mainstem LCR, including the confluence with the Pend d'Oreille River (Waneta, river kilometer (rkm) 56.0; UCWSRI 2012) and in the vicinity of Northport, Washington (Howell and McLellan 2006). From additional work, other sites have been located in the Canadian portion of the LCR based on egg and larval captures and adult movements. Spawning has been identified at the area immediately downstream of Hugh Keenleyside Dam (HLK) and the Arrow Lakes Generating Station (ALH, rkm 0.1; BC Hydro 2013; BC Hydro 2015) and is known to occur in the vicinity of Kinnaird (rkm 13.0 to 19.0; Golder 2009a, 2009b; BC Hydro 2013, 2015), though the exact location(s) of egg deposition remains unknown. These results demonstrate that undocumented spawning locations remain in the LCR, and emphasize the importance of continued monitoring to describe adult reproductive ecology, determine mechanisms influencing spawning site selection, and understand underlying mechanisms resulting in recruitment failure.

In 2001, a broodstock acquisition program was developed to spawn captured mature adults and contribute supplemental offspring released in the LCR (BC Hydro 2009). The program (2001 – 2014) was successful in providing 175 individuals adults (78 females and 97 males) contributing 105,262 hatchery reared juvenile sturgeon released in the Canadian portion of the LCR. Based on a study by Jay et al. (2014), it was advised by the Upper Columbia White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative Technical Working Group (UCWSRI TWG) to design a Streamside Incubation Facility (SIF) to incorporate wild offspring into the stocking practices increasing representation of LCR spawning adults and levels of genetic diversity among stocked juvenile White Sturgeon. Along side the broodstock acquisition program, a pilot SIF program was implemented in 2014 and was successful in releasing 1,095 wild progeny into the LCR the following spring. In 2015, the broodstock program was suspended and all juvenile white sturgeon stocked in 2016 will be of wild origin collected through the SIF program. Development of the SIF in Canada also aligned with the US portion of the LCR White Sturgeon population, as collections of wild origin larvae serve as the basis for hatchery releases.

In 2013, a systematic population assessment program was initiated to improve confidence in the abundance and survival rate estimates of the White Sturgeon population in the Transboundary Reach (TBR) of the LCR including both Canada and the US. While estimates have been made independently for both segments of the LCR population, it was deemed critical that confidence in the number of wild and hatchery origin at large was needed both to track progress towards recovery and to determining long-term population targets. This stock assessment program was developed to incorporate all habitats in Canada and the US and is being implemented concurrently by recovery initiative partners on both sides of the border. Data from this five-year program will not only provide confidence in the number of wild adults remaining, but will be used to determine growth rates and sex ratios across mature adults and immature fish (<150 cm fork length), assess fish condition, age class structuring, and identify density dependent responses due to an increasing hatchery origin population.

Given that the collection of life history data is an important component of addressing the mechanisms resulting in recruitment failure and overall recovery of White Sturgeon, the general objectives of this program were to:

1. Collect naturally produced White Sturgeon egg and larvae to contribute to the annual Conservation Aquaculture Program.
2. Determine White Sturgeon habitat use, movements and identify spawning locations through acoustic telemetry.
3. Describe White Sturgeon spawning locations, timing, and frequency through the deployment of egg mats and drift nets.
4. Implement the Canadian portion of the transboundary stock assessment to develop survival and abundance estimates for wild and hatchery origin White Sturgeon in the LCR population.

More specific objectives are provided in section 1.2.

1.1 Management Hypothesis

While impoundments and water management in the Columbia watershed have contributed to declines in White Sturgeon recruitment in the LCR, the precise mechanism(s) remain relatively unclear. Several recruitment failure hypotheses suggest that early life stages, including larval and early feeding phases, appear to be the most adversely affected life stage (Gregory and Long 2008). Additionally, other uncertainties regarding recruitment failure exist and could be influenced by spawning site selection, spawning timing, and possible adult behavioral responses related to water management decisions under the Columbia River Treaty.

This monitoring program was designed to provide long term information on adult White Sturgeon abundance, biological characteristics exhibited under current operation conditions, and reproductive status. In addition, it was designed to include continued baseline data collection on the remaining wild adults, which will be utilized as foundation to evaluate and explore other recovery measures.

Specifically, it will provide data on current adult movements and spawning site selection to assess future management responses, and may also be used to refine current and future recruitment failure hypotheses.

It is intended that future monitoring of the LCR adult White Sturgeon population may provide key information to help resolve a number of the following outstanding issues identified by the WUP Fisheries Technical Committee (FTC).

1) As the annual average number of spawning days at Waneta appears small relative to the adult population size and the approximate female reproductive cycle, this adult monitoring program may identify additional spawning sites.

2) Changes in movement and spawning behaviour in response to management responses (relative to the baseline established through this monitoring program) may reveal that additional spawning sites (and sub populations) exist in the LCR.

3) Baseline information acquired through this monitoring program may verify that the abundance of adult White Sturgeon in the LCR will not be adversely affected by management response measures.

The overall approach of this monitoring program is intended to be descriptive rather than experimental in nature and, as such, is designed to provide baseline information that can be used in later years of the program to address the program's management questions.

1.2 Objectives and Scope

The monitoring program is intended to address a number of uncertainties related to the current status of the population in the LCR, but it will also provide: (i) input to and assist with the ongoing consideration of recruitment failure hypotheses and the evaluation of the effects of future management efforts on spawning success; and (ii) new information to guide adult broodstock acquisition, if deemed necessary, and assist with adjustments to stocking targets related to the Conservation Aquaculture Program.

The objectives for this program will have been met when:

1) Adult White Sturgeon life history characteristics including size, growth, age structure, and condition, and population characteristics including abundance and trajectory, survival rates, genetic status, and reproductive potential are quantified with sufficient consistency to describe annual trends.

2) Biological characteristics including spawn monitoring to assess annual timing and trends, and movements to assess seasonal habitat use and spawning site selection under the current range of operating conditions are adequately defined.

The specific objectives related to the various components of this adult monitoring program are summarized as follows.

1.2.1 *Spawn Monitoring*

1. Identify the timing and frequency of annual spawning days at the Waneta, ALH, and Kinnaird sites using egg mats and drift nets to collect White Sturgeon eggs and larvae.
2. Provide information on trends in the number of discrete spawning days as a measure of population demographics and reproductive potential.
3. Develop baseline data to assess the effectiveness of future management strategies.
4. Collect naturally produced eggs and larvae for streamside incubation and KSH rearing for stocking purposes.

1.2.2 *Population Monitoring, Abundance, and Characteristics*

Biological, mark-recapture, and related age structure data accumulated through bi-annual stock assessment program will be used to:

1. Assess population size and age structure, abundance, annual survival rates, and population trajectories.
2. Provide relative abundance and periodic updates to population estimates of the LCR White Sturgeon population.
3. Periodically compare new length frequency data to archived fin ray age analyses to correct for possible aging underestimates.
4. Collect blood samples from all captured fish of wild and hatchery origins to assess ploidy levels and determine proportion of population experiencing spontaneous autopolyploidy (12N).

Data from this program will be analyzed and evaluated on an ongoing basis to drive program decisions or to identify any emerging and imminent threats to the remaining population.

1.2.3 *Acoustic Tagging and Telemetry*

Monitor movements of acoustically tagged adult White Sturgeon using a passive remote receiver array established throughout the LCR to:

1. Assist with directing broodstock acquisition efforts by following movements of fish of known sex or maturity.
2. Provide new information on suspected staging areas, and other suspected spawning sites throughout the LCR that may be used during varying ranges of flows.
3. Provide information on seasonal and annual movements, macro-habitat use, and transboundary interactions.

1.3 Study Area and Study Period

The study area for the 2015 monitoring program consisted of a 57 km stretch of the LCR between HLK and the Canada/U.S. Border (downstream of the Pend d'Oreille River confluence; Figure 1). The study area also included a small section (~2.5 km) of the Kootenay River below Brilliant Dam extending to its confluence with the LCR. To identify distribution of White Sturgeon for certain components (e.g., population assessment, telemetry), the LCR study area was stratified into 5 equal zones (11.2 km in length; consecutively numbered 1 though 5 from HLK to Canada/Us Border). Specific areas of the LCR sampled under the various components of the program are described below.

While the focus of this study is in the Canadian section of the Columbia River, additional data are presented in Section 2.3 that were collected for the US section of the Columbia River (Transboundary Reach; Figure 1).

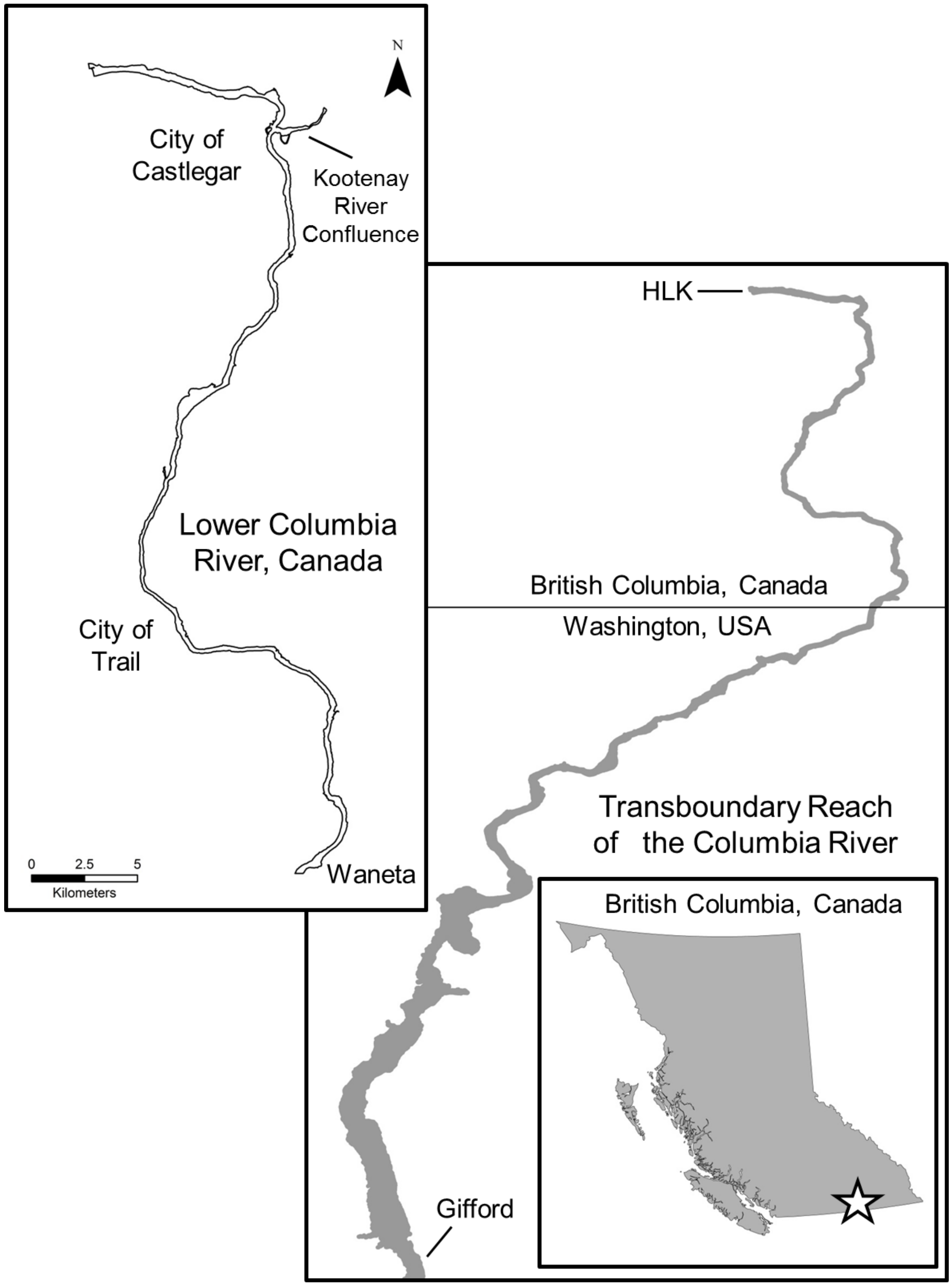

Figure 1. Overview of the study area in the lower Columbia River between Hugh L. Keenleyside Dam (HLK, rkm 0.1) and the Canada/US border (rkm 57.0) in relation to the Transboundary section of the Columbia River.

2.0 METHODOLGY

The monitoring study design follows the recommendations of the Upper Columbia White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative (UCWSRI) Technical Working Group (TWG) who provided an outline for what they viewed as the components of a LCR adult monitoring program (UCWSRI 2006) during the development of the Columbia WUP. Further, it incorporates the guidance of the WUP Fisheries Technical Committee (FTC). The program is divided into data collection during spawn monitoring, stock assessment, movement studies, and a suite of population characteristics including age structure and population size and survival estimation. These are described separately below.

2.1 Physical Parameters

2.1.1 *Discharge*

In 2015, discharge records for the LCR at Arrow Reservoir (combined HLK and ALH discharges from Arrow Lakes Reservoir; rkm 0.1), the Kootenay River (combined discharge from Brilliant Dam and the Brilliant Expansion facility; rkm 10.5), the LCR at Birchbank (combine discharge from Arrow Lakes Reservoir and Kootenay River; rkm 29), and the LCR at the Canada/United States border (combined discharge from Birchbank and the Pend d'Oreille River; rkm 57.0) were obtained from BC Hydro power records. Discharge data were recorded at one-minute intervals and averaged hourly in cubic meters per second (cms) and cubic feet per second (cfs) of passage flow.

Typically, the metric discharge measurement (cms) is used to discuss and present results of volumetric flow rates in technical reports and scientific publications. However, water planners and biologists readily use the non-metric discharge measurement (cfs) to discuss flows from hydroelectric facilities. As such, both units of measure (cms and cfs) are presented and referenced within the results section of this study report.

2.1.2 *Water Temperature*

For the 2015 study period, water temperatures were collected at several locations on the LCR including HLK (rkm 0.1), Kootenay River (rkm 10.5), Kinnaird (rkm 13.4), Genelle (rkm 26.0), and Waneta (rkm 56.0). Water temperatures were recorded hourly at each location using thermographs (Vemco Minilogs, accurate to ±0.1°C).

2.2 Spawn Monitoring

2.2.1 *Study Design*

Monitoring of White Sturgeon spawning was carried out at several sites for this program based on previous data collection where White Sturgeon have been confirmed or suspected to have spawned. LCR White Sturgeon cannot be observed congregating to spawn due to water depth and relatively high flow volume therefore spawning was documented through the collection of progeny.

Monitoring of spawning activity occurred at Waneta (rkm 56.0) located at the Pend d'Oreille River confluence immediately upstream of the Canada/US border (Figure 2). This site has been monitored for spawning activity since 1993 and is designated as the primary White Sturgeon spawning area within the Canadian portion of the LCR (Hildebrand et al. 1999; Irvine et al. 2007; Golder 2009a). Two secondary spawn monitoring sites were located in upstream sections of the LCR at ALH (rkm 0.1) and Kinnaird (rkm 13.4 to rkm 19.2). Spawning has been previously documented immediately downstream of ALH with geographical boundaries described by Terraquatic Resource Management (2011; Figure 2). Sampling extended for six rkm downstream of Kinnaird based on past spawn monitoring surveys and White Sturgeon movement studies (BC Hydro 2013, 2015; Figure 2).

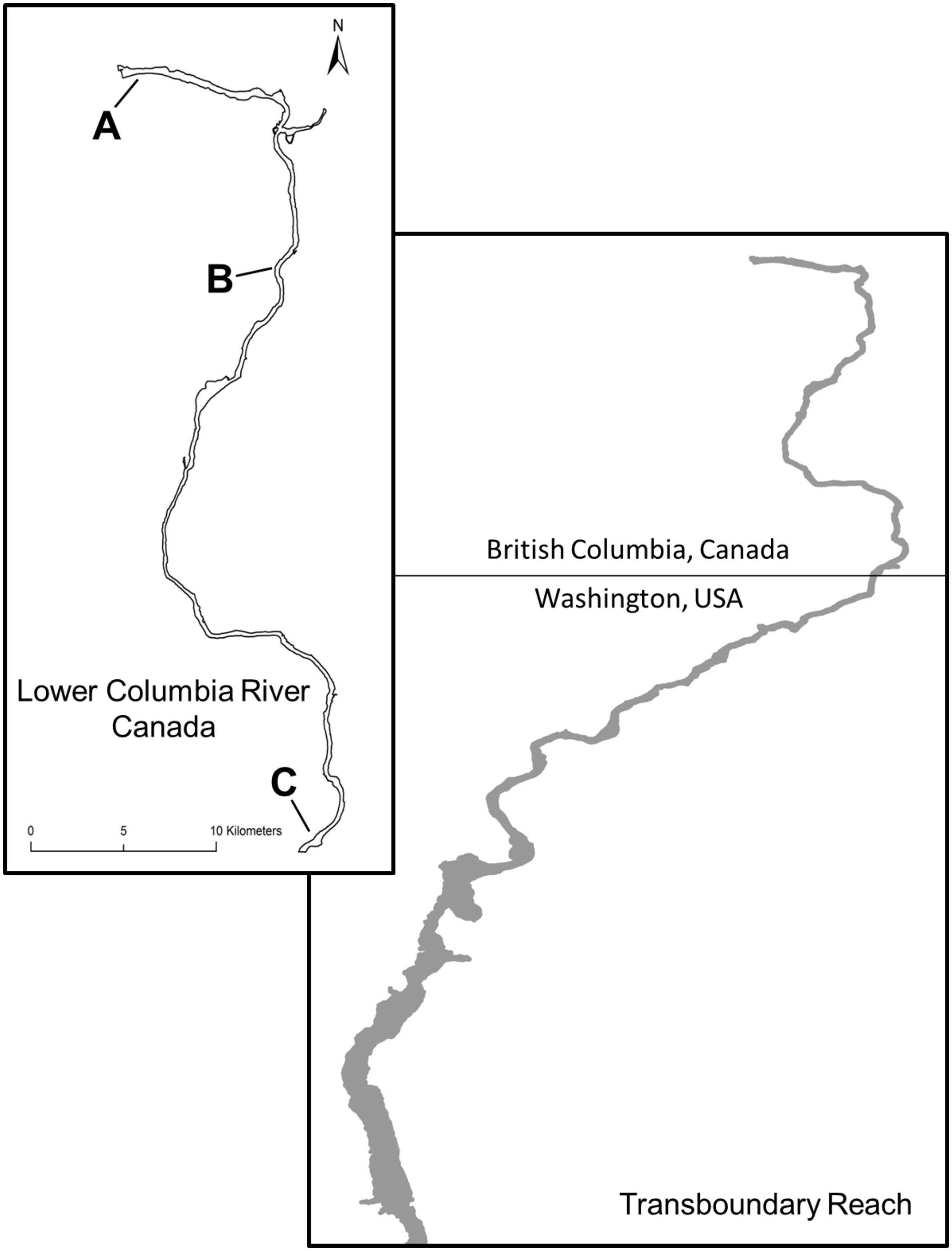

Figure 2. Egg mat and drift net deployment sites of ALH (rkm 0.1; A), Kinnaird (rkm 13.4 to rkm 19.2; B), and Waneta (rkm 56.0; C) in the lower Columbia River in 2015.

2.2.2 *Egg Collection Mats and Drift Net Sampling Methods*

White Sturgeon are broadcast spawners allowing for the collection of eggs and larvae using passive techniques such as egg collection mats and drift nets. Egg collection mats are a proven method of collecting White Sturgeon eggs (McCabe and Beckman 1990; McCabe and Tracey 1993) and have been effective in the LCR since 1993 (Golder 2002, 2010). Drift net sampling has been used successfully to capture both fertilized eggs and passively dispersing yolk-sac larvae for many sturgeon species including White Sturgeon (Golder 2009a), Lake Sturgeon (*Acipenser fulvescens*; Auer and Baker 2002), and Shortnose Sturgeon (*Acipenser brevirostrum*; Moser et al. 2000). Drift net sampling has been added as a component to the adult spawn monitoring program in recent years and has proven successful at documenting spawning activity through the collection of and eggs and larvae (BC Hydro 2013).

Spawn-monitoring remained consistent with previously established locations of egg mat and drift net sampling (see Golder 2009b, 2010, 2012, 2013, 2014, and Terraquatic Resource Management 2011 for details). Egg mats were deployed at Waneta (n=9) and drift nets were deployed at Waneta (n=7), ALH (n=3), rkm 13.4 (n=5), rkm 16.9 (n=1), rkm 17.3 (n=1), rkm 18.2 (n=4), and 19.2 (n=1).

Egg Collection Mats – Equipment and procedures for deployment and retrieval were replicated from previous monitoring protocols (Golder 2009a; Terraquatic Resource Management 2011). Egg mats consisted of latex coated animal hair filter material fastened to a 0.76 m by 0.91 m steel frame. Two lead steel claw river anchors (30kg) attached by approximately 6 m of 3/8 galvanized chain were used to anchor each egg mat. One 30 m section of 0.95 cm diameter braided rope was extended between the upstream anchor and a buoy at the surface of the river providing means to remove the entire anchoring system. A second rope was attached between the downstream anchor and the front of the egg mat. A third 0.95 cm diameter braided rope was attached from the back of the egg mat to a surface buoy to facilitate deployment and retrieval without dislodging the anchor system. In areas of low flow, egg mats were deployed with a single 10 kg lead anchor fastened to a leading bridal. A rope from the back of the egg mat to a surface buoy was used to facilitate deployment and retrieval of the entire system.

Egg mats were deployed for 24 to 48 hour periods. Egg mats rested flat on the river substrate and entrapped drifting or deposited eggs in the filter material. Upon retrieval, egg mats were brought to the surface by means of the egg mat buoy line. Once at the surface, egg mats were detached from the anchor system and brought into the boat for inspection. Both sides of the egg mats were inspected thoroughly by a minimum of 2 crewmembers before being redeployed. Eggs were enumerated by egg mat for each sampling location and occasion. Deployment and retrieval times, water temperatures (°C), and depths (m) at each sampling location were recorded.

Drift Net – Deployment and anchor system specifications were consistent among sampling locations in the LCR. Drift nets used during the sampling period were of standard and altered designs. Standard drift nets consisted of a 1.3 cm rolled stainless steel frame (D shape) with a 0.6 m x 0.8 m opening trailed by a 4 m tapered plankton net (0.16 cm delta mesh size) ending with a collection cup device. Altered drift nets included 1.3 cm rolled stainless steel bars welded vertically across the standard drift net frame at 15 cm intervals to prohibit adult and juvenile White Sturgeon from entering the drift net. Standard drift nets were deployed for 2 to 4 hours periods (short-set). Altered drift nets were deployed for 24-hour periods (long-set).

Two lead steel claw river anchors (30 kg) attached by approximately 6 m of 3/8 galvanized chain were used to anchor each drift net. One 30 m section of 0.95 cm diameter braided rope was extended between the upstream anchor and a buoy at the surface of the river providing a means to remove the entire anchor system. A second rope was attached between the downstream anchor and the front of the drift net. A third 0.95 cm diameter braided rope was attached from the top of the drift net frame to a surface buoy for deployment and retrieval without dislodging the anchor system.

Drift nets were deployed to stand perpendicular to the river bottom and collect drifting eggs and larvae in the tapered plankton net. Upon retrieval, drift nets were brought to the surface by means of the drift net buoy line. Once at the surface, drift nets were detached from the anchor system and brought into the boat for sample collection. Collection cups were removed from the plankton net, and contents were rinsed into a 19L bucket containing river water. Contents remaining in the drift nets were also rinsed into the same collection bucket. Collection cups were reattached and drift nets were redeployed. Collection contents were diluted with river water and small aliquots were transferred into white plastic inspection trays to improve contrast when searching for White Sturgeon eggs or larvae. Eggs and larvae were enumerated by net for each sampling location and occasion. Deployment and retrieval times, water temperatures (°C), and depths (m) at each sampling location were recorded.

2.2.3 *Egg and Larval Sampling*

All live eggs and larvae were transported to the SIF (Section 2.2.5). No live samples were sacrificed and preserved as practiced in previous years (BC Hydro 2013, 2015). Dead larval samples collected at the upstream locations (ALH, rkm 0.1; Kinnaird, rkm 14.5 – 18.2) were preserved for possible future genetic analyses.

2.2.4 *Developmental Staging and Estimation of Fertilization Date*

Prior to transportation to the SIF, live eggs were examined in the field using a handheld magnifying glass and assigned a developmental stage. Yolk-sac larvae dead upon collection were preserved and assigned a developmental stage at a later date. Enumeration of stages corresponded to the classification by Dettlaff et al. (1993) including embryonic stages of 1 (fertilization) through 35 (pre-hatch) and yolk-sac larval stages of 36 (hatch) through 45 (exogenous feeding). No collected samples were developed beyond stage 45.

Fertilization date for collected eggs and larvae was estimated by back-calculation from the recorded date and time of preservation based on developmental stage and mean incubation water temperature. The estimated age (hours; eggs, Parsley, U.S. Geological Survey, unpublished; yolk-sac larvae, Jay 2014) was subtracted from the preservation date and time to determine the estimated date and time of fertilization (i.e. spawning date). Calculated fertilization dates provided an estimation of spawning duration for each spawning site. However, the accuracy of egg developmental staging as a method to delineate spawning days and estimate time of spawning can be affected by individual White Sturgeon spawning behaviour, egg maturation rates, and more importantly, the fluctuation in daily thermal regimes (Parsley et al. 2010).

2.2.5 *Streamside Incubation Facility (SIF)*

Design of the LCR SIF was based on the culture techniques used in the hatchery program (FFSBC 2015). The facility was placed near the Waneta spawning location on the banks of the LCR, as this is the primary spawning location where it was envisioned most of the eggs would be collected from. Eggs collected from the LCR were transferred to the SIF for incubation in hatching jars (MacDonald Type; J30, Dynamic Aqua-Supply Ltd., Surrey, BC). Five jars were available for each collection location (i.e., upstream, downstream) and eggs of similar developmental stages were grouped together. Water was flow through from the LCR and flows were maintained to ensure adequate egg separation and oxygenation (~5 L/min). Upon hatch, yolk-sac larvae were flushed from the hatching jars directly into rearing troughs associated with each hatching jar and supplied with artificial substrate (1” diameter sinking Bio-Spheres; Dynamic Aqua-Supply Ltd. Surrey, BC) allowing yolk-sac larvae to burrow into interstitial spaces mimicking behaviour documented in the wild (McAdam 2011). To reduce sediment in the incubation jars and tanks, intake water was filtered (254 micron; Spin-Down Separator, Denton, TX) and tanks were cleaned twice a week by purging to remove sediment and waste. All yolk-sac larvae were transported to the KSH within 7 days of hatch in tanks of ambient river water provided with an oxygen source. Juveniles were reared at the KSH until date of release into the LCR (see FFSBC 2016 for details). Temperature loggers were stationed to record inside facility air, LCR water, and facility tank water temperatures.

2.3 Population Monitoring, Abundance, and Characteristics

White Sturgeon life history information, population characteristics, and mark-recapture related information have been accumulated through the annual broodstock collection program since it was initiated in 2001 and through adult sampling conducted under CLBMON 28 (BC Hydro 2013). Starting in 2013, a systematic stock assessment program to address uncertainties in the current adult abundance and survival estimates was developed between Canadian and US recovery partners. This study represents the first systematic population estimate for the entire TBR. The design of the stock assessment includes two annual surveys, one in the spring and one in the fall, and will continue for five years, ending in 2017.

2.3.1 *Study Area and Design*

The study area for the stock assessment program started at HLK, Canada, and extended downstream to Gifford, Washington, USA (Figure 3). Sampling effort was consistent at 1.6 hooks per hectare of river throughout the entire study area and sampling sites were distributed randomly and spatially balanced using the Generalized Random-Tessellation Stratified Design (GRTS). This was conducted with the statistical package R (Program R, version 2.9.0) using the library packages spsurvey and sp, provided by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA). The library package spsurvey allows a user to input data/criteria needed for a GRTS sampling design. We developed shapefiles (i.e., geo-referenced maps) for each river zone using ArcMap (version 10.0, Environmental Systems Research Institute, Inc. (ESRI)). Each river zone shapefile was imported into spsurvey and sampling sites were randomly generated. The locations of each sampling site were output as coordinates in Universal Transverse Mercator (UTM) format for visual display on maps and for importing into handheld global positioning system (GPS) devices used for field application. Sites were sampled in ascending order until the required effort had been expended (further detail provided below).

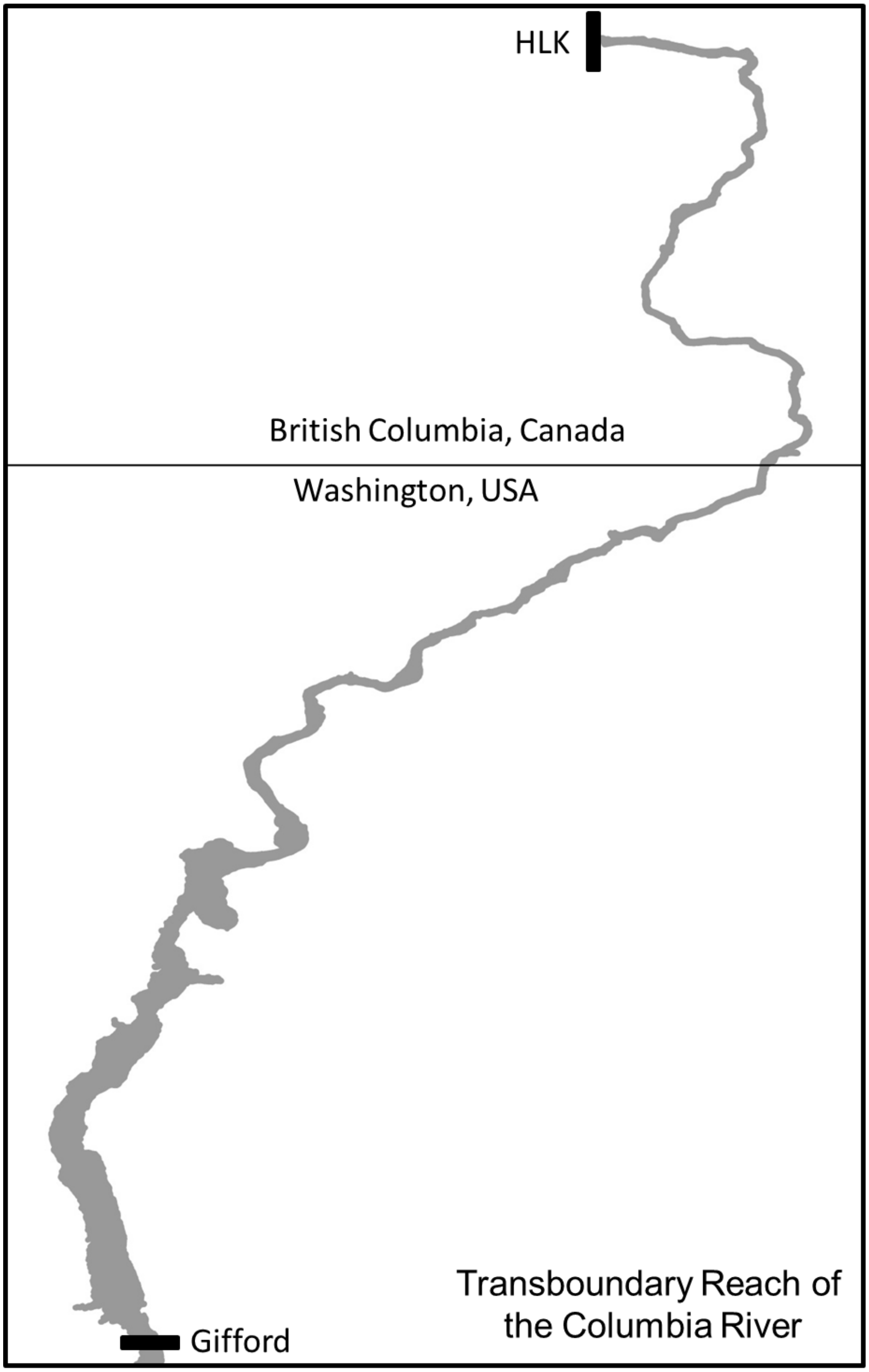

Figure 3. Study area for White Sturgeon stock assessment survey occurring from 2013-2017 in the transboundary reach of the Columbia River. Upstream extent of the study area is Hugh Keenleyside Dam in British Columbia, Canada, and the downstream extent of the study area ends at Gifford, Washington, USA.

2.3.2 Fish Capture

The requirement for a consistent, well-documented approach to adult White Sturgeon collection activities is a necessary component of the Upper Columbia River White Sturgeon Recovery Plan (UCSWRI 2012). The document, entitled "Upper Columbia River Adult White Sturgeon Capture, Transportation, and Handling Manual" provides a very detailed and standardized methodology for the capture and handling of adult White Sturgeon (Golder 2006). Set lines were the only method used to capture White Sturgeon during the stock assessment and have been successfully used in the LCR for the past few decades (Irvine et al. 2007).

A medium line configuration was the standard used for set lines, similar to that used by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to capture White Sturgeon in the United States portion of the Columbia River (Nigro et al. 1988). Medium lines measured 84.0 m in length and consisted of a 0.95 cm diameter nylon mainline with 12 circle halibut hooks attached at 6.0 m intervals. Hooks were attached to the mainline using a 0.95 cm swivel snap and a 0.7 m long ganglion line tied between the swivel and the hook. Four different Halibut hook sizes were used to select for different size classes of White Sturgeon. Hook sizes included 14/0, 16.0, 18/0, and 20/0 that a known to select for both adult and juvenile White Sturgeon. Hooks were systematically attached to the mainline in 3 sets of each hook size in descending order of size. The barbs on all hooks were removed to reduce the severity of hook-related injuries and to facilitate fish recovery and release. All set line hooks were baited with pickled squid obtained from Gilmore Fish Smokehouse, Dallesport, WA USA.

Set lines were deployed from a boat at preselected sampling locations and set configuration was based on the physical parameters (i.e., depths and water flow) of the site. Set line configuration consisted of either deploying the line parallel to the shore in faster flowing water or perpendicular to the shore in slower moving water. This was conducted to ensure that fish were able to orientate themselves into the current and rest on the bottom of the river, minimizing stress. Prior to each set, water depth (m) was measured by an echo sounder, and this information was used to select a float line of appropriate length. Anchors were attached to each end of the mainline and a float line was attached to the back anchor of the mainline. The set line was secured to shore with a shore line of suitable length to ensure that the set line was deployed in water depths greater than 2 m. Set lines were deployed and remained in overnight at each selected site.

The set line retrieval procedure involved lifting the back anchor using the float line until the mainline was retrieved. The boat was then propelled along the mainline and each hook line was removed. If a fish was captured on a hook, the boat was stopped while the fish was removed. White Sturgeon removed from the set line were tethered between two anchor points to the port or starboard side of the boat. While tethered, the entire body of the fish was submerged. Once all fish were removed from the set line, the boat was idled into shore or anchored within a nearby back eddy and White Sturgeon were individually brought aboard for biological processing (described in Section 2.3.3). Catch per unit effort (CPUE) was calculated as the total number of fish captured per set line hour.

2.3.3 Fish Handling and Release

Captured White Sturgeon were individually guided into a 2.5 m by 1.0 m stretcher that was raised into the boat using a winch and davit assembly. The stretcher was secured on the boat and fresh river water was continuously pumped over the gills during the processing period. A hood on one end of the stretcher protected the head of the White Sturgeon from exposure to direct sunlight and also retained a sufficient amount of water allowing the fish to respire during processing.

All individuals were checked for the presence of a Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) tag (400 kHz PIT tags or 134.2 kHz ISO PIT tag; Biosonics Inc.) indicating previous capture. Untagged fish were considered to be new captures (i.e., not previously handled by researchers) and had PIT tags injected subdermally in the tissue layer between the ventral edge of the dorsal fin and the right mid-dorsal line. Prior to insertion, both the tag and tagging syringe were immersed in an antiseptic solution (Germaphene). Care was taken to angle the syringe needle so the tag was deposited in the subcutaneous layer and not the muscle tissue. The 2^{nd} left lateral scute was removed from new captures (or recaptured White Sturgeon if present) using a sterilized scalpel in a manner consistent with the marking strategy employed by WDFW and ODFW.

White Sturgeon were measured for fork length to the nearest 0.5 cm. Weight was determined by suspending the fish in the stretcher from the winch and davit assembly using a 250 kg capacity spring scale accurate to ± 2.2 kg. All life history data were recorded in the field on standardized data forms and later entered into an electronic database. Tissues samples were taken from every wild fish captured for future genetic analysis. A small piece of tissue (approximately 1.5 cm by 1.5 cm) from the tip of the dorsal fin was removed using surgical scissors, split into two sub samples, and archived in labelled scale envelopes.

The ploidy of White Sturgeon has been previously determined to be 8N (Hedrick et al. 1991). However, spontaneous autopolyploid (12N) females that successfully mated with normal (8N) males producing viable offspring of intermediate ploidy (putative 10N; Drauch Schreier et al. 2011) using artificial spawning techniques has recently been detected in the wild brood within the Kootenai River White Sturgeon Conservation Aquaculture Program (Schreier et al. 2013). This has raised concerns within the LCR White Sturgeon Conservation Aquaculture Program, as the hatchery reared offspring reproductive success and effects on the wild population are unknown. Due to these recent discoveries, blood samples were recommended to be collected from all captured fish in this monitoring program going forward, to determine the incidence of 12N fish in the wild as well as hatchery-reared fish stocked in earlier years when ploidy levels were unknown.

To assess ploidy levels of individual White Sturgeon captured, blood samples were collected from all fish captured via the caudal vein. Fish were held ventral side up in the stretcher and a blood sample was taken midline just posterior of anal fin. A hypodermic needle (25 gauge) was inserted into the musculature perpendicular to the ventral surface until the spine was reached or blood entered the syringe. Blood was extracted until a sufficient amount was collected (approximately 2 ml) and a blood smear was made immediately after extraction. For each blood smear, a drop of blood was placed on an untreated slide and smeared by placing the end of another slide at an angle and dragging the blood toward the end of the sample slide. Slides were labeled with the fish ID number, air dried, and stored for later analyses by the FFSBC Fish Health Lab.

Once all biological data was collected, White Sturgeon were returned to the water following processing and remained in the stretcher until they swam away under their own volition.

2.3.4 Data Analyses

Adult and juvenile White Sturgeon biological data analyzed in this report include sex ratios, fork length frequencies, mean weight, and mean relative weight (W_r). Relative weight (W_r) is a measure of fish plumpness allowing comparison between fish of different lengths, inherent changes in body forms, and populations (Wege and Anderson 1978). W_r is calculated with the following formula:

$$W_r = (W/W_S) * 100$$

where W is the actual fish weight (kg), and W_S is a standard weight for fish of the same length (Wege and Anderson 1978). W_S was calculated according to the White Sturgeon standard weight-length equation developed by Beamesderfer (1993):

$$W_S = 2.735E^{-6} * L^{3.232}$$

where L is fork length (FL; cm).

After the completion of the stock assessment study, mark-recapture data will be used to estimate population abundance, age class structure, growth rates, density dependent responses, and survival rates of both wild adults and hatchery released juveniles. Catch records are analyzed across all past years of broodstock collection and stock assessment in an effort to provide recommendations to annual conservation aquaculture breeding plans and maximize the genetic diversity available for culture practices.

2.4 Acoustic Tagging and Telemetry

Acoustically tagging White Sturgeon within the LCR is required to monitor movement trends such as seasonal habitat use, and spawning site selection, timing, and duration. Additionally, unknown spawning habitat locations within the

LCR have been identified through spawn related movements (BC Hydro 2013). Spawn related movements are defined as rapid movements from one area of long-term residency to an area of short-term residency during the spawning season (June/July/August), and returned movements to the original area of long-term residency. In 2015, movements of multiple fish were examined to provide additional support when identifying a possible spawning location.

Vemco model V16 acoustic tags (operational life of 10 years) were allocated to adult White Sturgeon predicted to spawn within the following 1-3 years (based on sex maturity examinations) in 2009, 2011, and 2013 (BC Hydro 2011, 2013). In 2007 through 2012, all adults collected for broodstock were implanted with an acoustic tag prior to their post spawning release (BC Hydro 2013). In 2013, only one female that was collected for broodstock and did not successfully spawn was implanted with an acoustic tag prior to release in order to monitor post release movements related to spawning. No fish were acoustically tagged in 2014. In June 2015, 4 females expected to spawn the following July/August were acoustically tagged. Total number of White Sturgeon acoustically tagged is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Acoustic tags implanted by year for female and male adult White Sturgeon in the lower Columbia River (LCR). Tags were either implanted in wild adults captured and released back into the LCR or in those selected as broodstock that were transported to the Kootenay Sturgeon Hatchery for spawning and then returned to the LCR.

Year	Wild		Broodstock		Total
	Female	Male	Female	Male	
2007	0	0	5	6	11
2008	0	0	8	7	15
2009	11	8	10	12	41
2010	0	0	9	10	19
2011	4	1	10	11	26
2012	0	0	8	10	18
2013	1	1	1	0	3
2014	0	0	0	0	0
2015	4	0	0	0	4
Total	19	11	50	56	137

2.4.1 *Acoustic Receiver Array*

We used an array of fixed station remote receivers (Vemco, model VR2 and VR2W) already deployed within the LCR to detect spatial and temporal movements of acoustically tagged White Sturgeon. Since being initially deployed in 2003, the spatial extent of the array encompassing the LCR from HLK (rkm 0.1) southward to the Canada/U.S. International Border (rkm 57.0) remained constant until 2009. In early May of 2010, the array was repositioned to 3 km intervals starting at HLK and moving downstream to the international border. This was done to improve spatial coverage throughout the study range (as indicated through increased detectability of individual fish exhibiting site fidelity). We also increased the spatial coverage of the array by adding receivers in areas that were previously not covered, improving our ability to detect movements on a finer spatial scale.

Each station consisted of a weighted mainline of either 0.95 cm diameter nylon rope or 0.64 cm stainless steel cable extended between a large pyramid reinforced concrete anchor (55-80 kg) and a highly buoyant low drag float (Model LD-2 or LD-3). Materials used for each station was dependent on location and water flow. A receiver was secured with cable ties approximately 3 m below the water surface on the weighted mainline with the hydrophone orientated towards the river bottom. Data downloading and equipment maintenance (e.g., replace or repair cable ties, rope, float, mainline, and batteries) for all stations was conducted quarter annually. Raw data were downloaded using Vemco User Environment (VUE) software (version 2.2.2) and all raw data were exported at the end of each calendar year into a Microsoft Access database.

2.4.2 *Telemetry Data Analysis*

Although the acoustic array was originally intended to track the movements of White Sturgeon, multiple research projects involving other fish species are ongoing in the LCR and, as such, user agreements with other agencies and researchers have been developed for the utilization of the telemetry array. For all projects combined, we often recorded more than 4 million detections annually. Over a period of the last several years, this has resulted in a larger amount of data than anticipated and issues regarding tag collisions increasing the total number of "false" detections occurring in the database. False detections are echoes generated by the system's environment (e.g., bathymetric profile, substrate, narrow river) or pings of multiple tags colliding resulting in detections that were not linked to an active transmitter, or does not align with movement data for an active transmitter. Finally, our ability to upload, store, and analyze raw data collected from the multitude of acoustic receivers has become more labour intensive with the large numbers of active acoustic transmitters at large (>400) in the LCR between HLK in Canada and Grand Coulee Dam in WA, USA.

We developed a telemetry database using a Client-Server model in Microsoft Access to help address data requirements related to examining White Sturgeon movements, assist with identifying "false" detections, and filter out unwanted/unnecessary tag data (e.g., non sturgeon species). The database was designed as a filtering tool that allows the organization and summary of data in a manner that results in outputs suitable for analyses. Queries were generated for each individual tag containing the total number of times each tag was detected by day at a particular station or river kilometer. Data were binned in 24-hour periods, as site fidelity is known to be high in this system and hourly observations of movement proved to be too fine scale for this species. The detection record was examined for each individual, and observed false detections were removed.

Detection data from 2015 were summarized and proportional habitat use throughout the LCR was examined as a function of individual fish and sex. We calculated the proportional spawning site use as a function of individual fish and sex based on suspected spawn related movements (defined in Section 2.4).

Additionally, we examined migration trends from site of residency to suspected spawning site including total distance travelled (rkm), travel time (days), and time spent at a spawning location (days).

3.0 MONITORING RESULTS

It is intended that the long term results of all White Sturgeon monitoring programs will be used to characterize movements and redistribution patterns, spawning behavior and frequency, relative abundance, habitat preferences, growth rates, and survival. Additionally, results will provide information on potential new hypotheses and physical works options, and provide baseline information necessary to evaluate physical works experiments and effects of opportunistic flows.

3.1 Physical Parameters

3.1.1 *Discharge*

Mean daily discharge (cms; cfs) measured from Arrow Reservoir, Kootenay River, Birchbank, and Canada/U.S. International Border for the 2015 study period is presented in Figure 4. Minimum and maximum discharge (cms; cfs) for each location and year is given in Table 2.

White Sturgeon spawning in the LCR typically occurs when water temperatures exceed 14.0°C and flows are on a descending pattern (Hildebrand et al. 1999; BC Hydro 2013). The timing and duration of White Sturgeon spawning period is annually estimated to occur between June 1 and August 15 based on egg and larval collections (see Section 2.2.4). At the US border, peak freshet flows of 4,399.9 (cms) were reached on June 3, 2015 ahead of with the estimated initial spawning date (Figure 4; Section 3.2.2). Considerable variation in hourly mean discharge occurred within the predicted spawning period.

Table 2. Minimum and maximum discharge (cubic meters per second, cms; cubic feet per second, cfs) at four locations on the lower Columbia River in 2015.

Location	Discharge			
	Minimum (cms)	Maximum (cms)	Minimum (cfs)	Maximum (cfs)
Arrow Reservoir	248.4	2,035.2	8,771.5	71,873.1
Kootenay River	181.0	1,090.8	6,391.4	38,519.6
Birchbank	1,320.9	3,468.8	46,645.5	122,498.3
Border	1,803.0	4,399.9	63,672.6	155,382.3

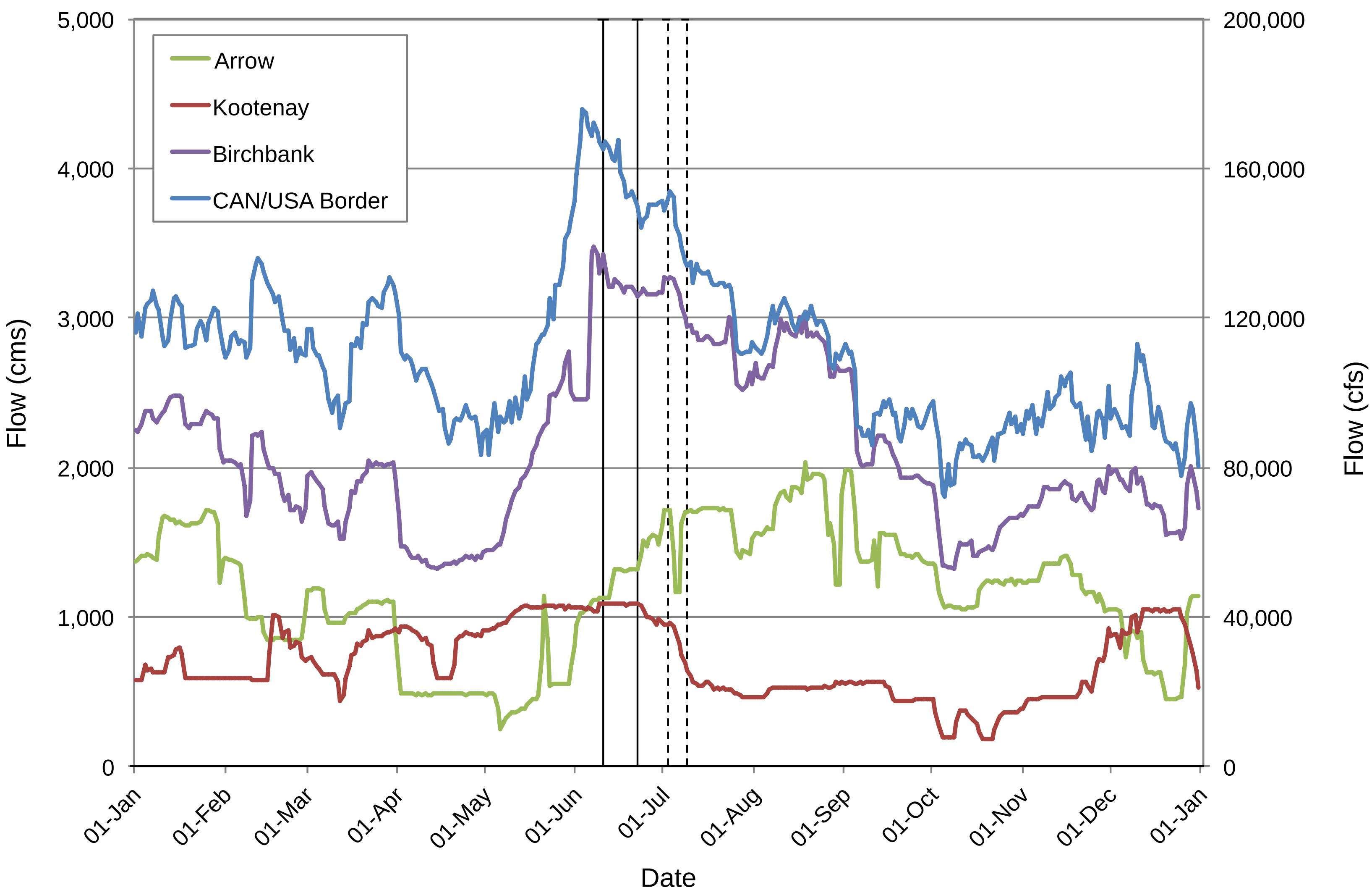

Figure 4. Mean daily discharge measured from Arrow Reservoir, Kootenay River, Birchbank, and the Canada/U.S. International Border on the lower Columbia River from January 01, 2015 – December 31, 2015. The solid and dashed vertical bars represent the first and last estimated spawning dates at Waneta and Kinnaird, respectively. Estimated spawning dates were based on the developmental stage of collected eggs and/or larvae. Estimated spawning dates were not calculated for ALH due to poor condition of samples collected.

3.1.2 *Water Temperature*

LCR mean daily water temperatures (°C) during 2015 are illustrated in Figure 5. Annual mean (± SD), minimum, and maximum water temperatures (°C) at locations HLK (rkm 0.1), Kootenay Eddy (rkm 10.5), Kinnaird (rkm 13.4), Genelle Eddy (rkm 26.0), and Waneta Eddy (rkm 56.0) are summarized in Table 3. The date of occurrence of spawning temperature threshold (14°C) at each location is provided in Table 3. Variations in water temperatures experienced during the study period can be attributed to warm/cold water influences caused in the Arrow Reservoir system (i.e., combined HLK and ALH discharges from Arrow Lakes Reservoir), and other cold-water tributary influences.

Table 3. Daily mean (± SD), minimum, and maximum water temperatures (^{o}C) recorded within the lower Columbia River during 2015. Data was recorded at locations of Hugh L. Keenleyside dam (HLK; rkm 0.1), Kootenay Eddy (rkm 10.5), Kinnaird (rkm 13.4), Genelle Eddy (rkm 26.0), Rivervale (rkm 34.8), and Waneta Eddy (rkm 56.0).

Location	RKM	Temperature			Date of Suspected
		Mean ± SD	Minimum	Maximum	Spawning Threshold (14°C)
HLK	0.1	9.6 ± 4.8	3.7	18.2	06-Jun
Kootenay	10.5	10.6 ± 5.7	3.0	20.8	10-Jun
Kinnaird*	13.4	10.2 ± 4.9	3.1	20.4	10-Jun
Genelle*	26.0	10.6 ± 5.8	3.4	20.8	10-Jun
Rivervale*	34.8	9.7 ± 5.4	3.2	18.7	10-Jun
Waneta*	56.0	10.3 ± 6.3	3.7	18.2	n/a

*Data incomplete due to lost or damaged temp loggers

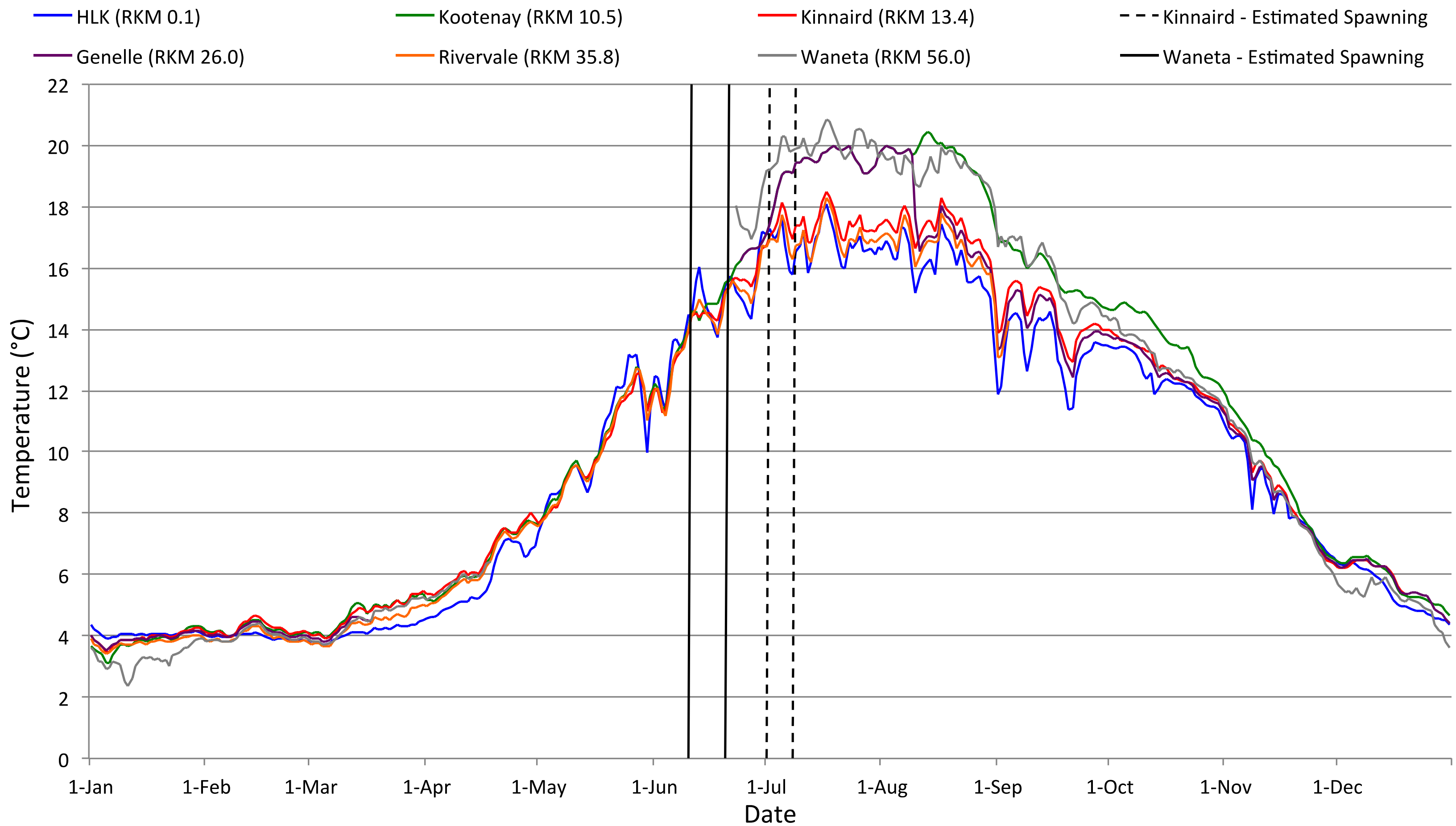

Figure 5. Mean daily water temperature (°C) of the lower Columbia River in 2015. Data was recorded at locations of Hugh L. Keenleyside dam (HLK; rkm 0.1), Kootenay Eddy (rkm 10.5), Kinnaird (rkm 13.4), Genelle (rkm 26.0), Rivervale (rkm 35.8) and Waneta (rkm 56.0). Missing data is due to lost or damaged temperature loggers. Vertical solid and dashed lines represent first and last estimated spawning dates at Waneta and Kinnaird, respectively. Estimated spawning duration was based on the developmental stage of collected fertilized eggs or larvae. Spawning dates were not estimated for Arrow Lakes Generating Stations (ALH; rkm 0.1) due to poor condition of samples collected.

3.2 Spawn Monitoring

3.2.1 *Egg and Larval Sampling Effort and Collection*

Downstream Location – Waneta (rkm 56.0)

Egg mats (n=9) and drift nets (n=7) were deployed on June 5 and sampling continued until July 31. Water temperatures ranged from 16.5 to 21.6°C (Figure 5) and water depth (mean ± SD) was 5.1 ± 3.9 m and 7.8 ± 2.5 m for egg mats and drift nets, respectively. Total sampling effort for egg mats and drift nets were 22,016.5 hours and 275.6 hours, respectively (Table 4). Single set effort was 115.9 ± 28.0 hours and 2.7 ± 0.9 hours for egg mats and drift nets, respectively.

A total of 253 eggs (egg mat, n=245; drift net, n=8) and 56 larvae (egg mat, n=1; drift net, n=55) were captured at Waneta between the dates of June 10 and July 13 (Table 4). The largest daily egg mat sample was 137 (eggs, n=137; larvae, n=0) collected on June 22 representing 0.54 of total egg mat sample collection. The largest daily drift net sample was 28 (eggs, n=0; larvae, n=28) collected on June 26 representing 0.44 of total drift net sample collection. Of the total capture, 220 eggs and 2 larvae were staged and transported to the SIF. Hatched larvae were transported to KSH.

Upstream Location – Kinnaird (rkm 13.4 to rkm 19.2)

Drift nets were deployed at rkm 13.4 (n=4; short- and long-set), rkm 16.9 (n=1; short- and long-set), rkm 17.3 (n=1; short- and long-set), rkm 18.2 (n=4; long-set), and rkm 19.2 (n=1; short-set) on July 7 and sampling continued until August 7. Water temperatures ranged from 16.5 to 18.8°C (Figure 5) and sampling water depth was 6.7 ± 2.0 m. Total sampling effort for drift nets were 4,410.5 hours (rkm 13.4, 805.1 h; rkm 16.9, 43.0 h; rkm 17.3, 187.2 h; rkm 18.2, 1,767.1 h; rkm 19.2, 91.3 h; Table 4). Mean daily effort for long- and short-sets was 23.2 ± 1.4 hours and 4.0 ± 1.0 hours, respectively.

A total of 8 larvae (rkm 13.4, n=1; rkm 16.9, n=4; rkm 17.3, n=1; rkm 18.2, n=2; Table 4) were collected between July 8 and July 15. All larvae collected in the drift nets were dead upon capture and preserved for developmental staging. No eggs were collected over the entire sampling period.

Upstream Location – ALH (rkm 0.1)

Drift nets (n=3) were deployed on July 6 and sampling continued until August 7 with water temperatures ranging from 15.3 to 18.2°C (Figure 5). Total drift net sampling effort was 1,373.4 h (Table 4). Mean daily effort was 23.9 ± 2.1 h and sampling water depth was 5.7 ± 1.4 m. One dead larvae was collected at ALH on July 10 and was preserved for developmental staging (Table 4).

Table 4. White Sturgeon egg and larval collection and sampling effort for monitoring locations in the lower Columbia River including Waneta (rkm 56.0), downstream of Kinnaird (rkm 13.4, rkm 14.5, rkm 15.0, rkm 15.6, rkm 16.9, rkm 17.3, rkm 18.2, rkm 19.2), Kootenay (rkm 10.5), downstream Arrow Lakes Generating Station (ALH; rkm 6.0), ALH (rkm 0.1) and Hugh L. Keenleyside dam (HLK; rkm 0.1) for years 2008 through 2015.

Year	Location	Egg Mats			Drift Nets		
		Eggs	Larvae	Effort (hrs)	Eggs	Larvae	Effort (hrs)
2008	Waneta	3,456	7	19,428	494	220	72
	rkm 18.2	0	0	16,493	0	1	164
2009	Waneta	1,715	2	21,964	77	39	90
	rkm 18.2	-	-	-	0	5	976
	rkm 6.0	-	-	-	0	0	3,091
2010	Waneta	4,003	16	18,204	888	89	113
	rkm 18.2	0	0	10,600	1	8	2,104
	ALH	12	0	3,608	30	115	2,084
2011	Waneta	2,318	9	19,882	234	16	50
	rkm 18.2	-	-	-	2	32	1,400
	rkm 14.5	-	-	-	0	0	154
	rkm 10.5	-	-	-	0	0	993
	HLK	-	-	-	0	0	461
	ALH	2	0	3,614	183	308	2,538
2012	Waneta	226	2	16,627	134	15	48
	rkm 18.2	-	-	-	0	0	197
	ALH	-	-	-	6	0	2,929
2013	Waneta	410	0	14,739	-	-	-
	rkm 18.2	-	-	-	0	4	363
	rkm 14.5	-	-	-	0	1	154
	ALH	-	-	-	0	0	680
2014	Waneta	5,729	5	19,362	33	62	43
	rkm 18.2	-	-	-	5	8	1,514
	rkm 17.3	-	-	-	0	1	128
	rkm 16.9	-	-	-	0	2	43
	rkm 15.6	-	-	-	0	0	77
	rkm 15.0	-	-	-	0	0	106
	rkm 14.5	-	-	-	1	2	670
	ALH	0	0	1,808	0	0	857

Table 4 Cont. White Sturgeon egg and larval collection and sampling effort for monitoring locations in the lower Columbia River including Waneta (rkm 56.0), downstream of Kinnaird (rkm 13.4, rkm 14.5, rkm 15.0, rkm 15.6, rkm 16.9, rkm 17.3, rkm 18.2, rkm 19.2), Kootenay (rkm 10.5), downstream Arrow Lakes Generating Station (ALH; rkm 6.0), ALH (rkm 0.1) and Hugh L. Keenleyside dam (HLK; rkm 0.1) for years 2008 through 2015.

2015	Waneta	245	1	22,016	8	55	275
	rkm 13.4	-	-	-	0	0	533
	Rkm 14.5	-	-	-	0	1	272
	rkm 16.9	-	-	-	0	4	186
	rkm 17.3	-	-	-	0	1	187
	rkm 18.2	-	-	-	0	2	1,767
	rkm 19.2	-	-	-	0	0	91
	ALH	-	-	-	0	1	1,373

3.2.2 *Developmental Staging and Estimated Spawning Dates*

Eggs and larvae were assigned a developmental stage based on Dettlaff et al. (1993) to calculate an estimated date of fertilization. Stages were generalized compared to previous sampling years (BC Hydro 2015) to reduce handling of collected eggs and larvae. Samples ranged from newly fertilized eggs to yolk-sac larvae (Table 5).

An estimated 8 discrete spawning days occurred at Waneta between the dates of June 11 and June 22 (Table 6). Spawning was estimated to have occurred between July 2 and July 9 downstream of Kinnaird with an estimate of 4 spawning dates (Table 6). Spawning dates were estimated solely based on larvae samples.

Estimated spawning dates at locations of Waneta, Kinnaird, and ALH for sampling years 2011 through 2015 are provided in Table 7. Spawning has generally been estimated to occur at Waneta in mid June to late July and at Kinnaird in early to late July. Estimates of spawning dates at ALH have only been calculated in 2011 due for reasons of poor condition of samples collected inhibiting assignment of developmental stage or no samples were collected for sampling years of 2012 to 2015.

Table 5. Proportion of White Sturgeon eggs and larvae collected across different developmental stages from lower Columbia River spawn monitoring locations of Waneta (rkm 56.0), Kinnaird (rkm 13.4 to rkm 19.2), and Arrow Lakes Generatin Stantion (ALH; rkm 0.1) in 2015. Developmental stages are based on Dettlaff et al. (1993). Due to limited handling of eggs and larvae collected for the Streamside Incubation Facility, developmental stages were generalized compared to previous collection years (BC Hydro 2015).

Development Category	Stage	Waneta		Kinnaird		ALH	
		n	*Prop.*	*n*	*Prop.*	*n*	*Prop.*
Cleavage - Gastrulation - Yolk Plug	1 - 18	14	0.05	0	0.00	0	0.00
Neurulation - Heart Formation	19 - 33	201	0.74	0	0.00	0	0.00
Pre-Hatch	34 - 35	1	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Yolk-Sac Larvae	36 - 45	56	0.21	8	1.00	1	1.00

Table 6. Estimated spawning dates in the lower Columbia River during 2015 at locations of Waneta (rkm 56.0), and Kinnaird (rkm 13.4 through rkm 19.2). Dates are determined through back calculation from date of capture based on developmental stage of each sample. Samples collected from Arrow Lakes Generating Station (ALH) were not developmentally staged due to poor condition.

Spawning Event	Location	Date
1	Waneta	June 10
2	Waneta	June 11
3	Waneta	June 12
4	Waneta	June 13
5	Waneta	June 18
6	Waneta	June 20
7	Waneta	June 21
8	Waneta	June 22
9	Kinnaird	July 2
10	Kinnaird	July 3
11	Kinnaird	July 4
12	Kinnaird	July 9

Table 7. Estimated spawning days and duration for White Sturgeon at lower Columbia River spawn monitoring locations of Arrow Lakes Generating Station (ALH; rkm 0.1), Kinnaird (rkm 13.4 to 19.2), and Waneta (rkm 56.0) for years 2011 through 2015. Estimated spawning duration was based on the developmental stage of collected eggs or larvae. Yearly data was excluded due for reasons of poor condition of samples collected inhibiting assignment of developmental stage or no samples were collected.

Location	Year	Number of Estimated Spawning Days	Duration		Water Temperature (°C)	
			Start	End	Minimum	Maximum
ALH	2011	5	01-Aug	05-Aug	14.8	16.1
Kinnaird	2013	2	23-Jul	27-Jul	16.8	18.1
Kinnaird	2014	3	14-Jul	22-Jul	16.5	17.8
Kinnaird	2015	4	02-Jul	09-Jul	16.7	19
Waneta	2011	19	30-Jun	03-Aug	11.8	18.1
Waneta	2012	18	28-Jun	22-Jul	13.0	16.0
Waneta	2013	12	18-Jun	18-Jul	12.8	19.9
Waneta	2014	5	21-Jun	15-Jul	11.3	18.7
Waneta	2015	6	11-Jun	21-Jun	n/a	n/a

3.2.3 *Streamside Incubation Facility*

Daily air and water temperatures recorded at the streamside facility are illustrated in Figure 6. Mean (± SD), minimum, and maximum air and water temperatures are provided in Table 8. Despite elevated air temperatures in the SIF, water temperatures recorded from the LCR and facility tanks were more similar however significantly different (Student's t-Test; $P < 0.001$).

Eggs (n=216) and larvae (n=5) collected at Waneta (Figure 7) were transferred to the SIF for incubation. No viable eggs or larvae were collected at Kinnaird or ALH. Post hatch yolk-sac larvae (n=56; 0.67 hatch success at SIF) and eggs (n=132; 0.57 hatch success at KSH) were transported to the KSH. Weekly survival and total abundance is illustrated in Figure 8 and 9, respectively. In the spring of 2016, 76 wild progeny were released into the LCR at an average FL and weight of 36.7 ± 8.4 cm and 411.6 ± 259.9 g, respectively.

Table 8. Mean (± SD), minimum, and maximum air and water temperatures recorded at the location of the Streamside Incubation Facility (SIF). Temperature loggers were stationed to record inside air, lower Columbia River (LCR) water, and SIF tank water temperatures (°C).

Source	Temperature (°C)		
	Mean ± SD	Minimum	Maximum
Air Inside	25.2 ± 8.5	10.9	44.3
Water LCR	16.4 ± 1.1	14.2	18.8
Water Tank	17.6 ± 3.1	14.4	27.4

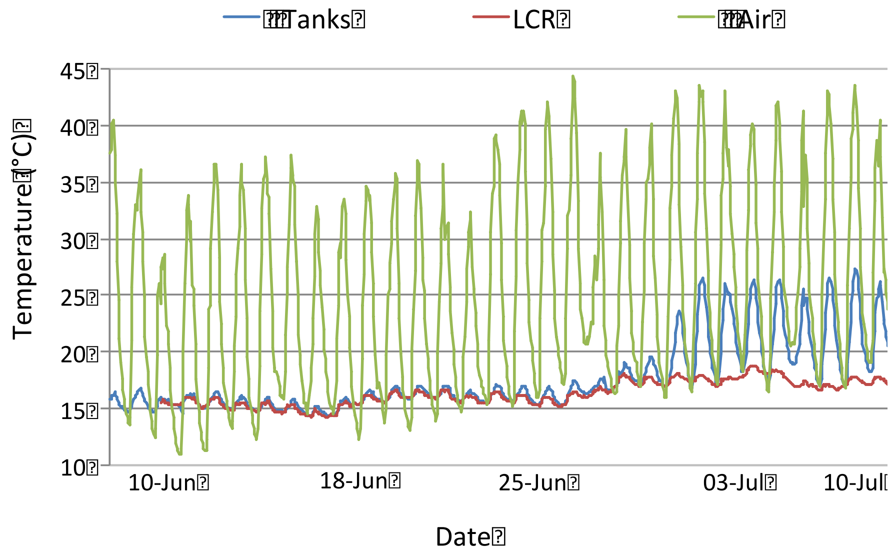

Figure 6. Hourly temperature (°C) recorded at the lower Columbia River (LCR) Streamside Incubation Facility in 2015. Data includes air temperature inside the facility, and water temperatures of the LCR and incubation tanks.

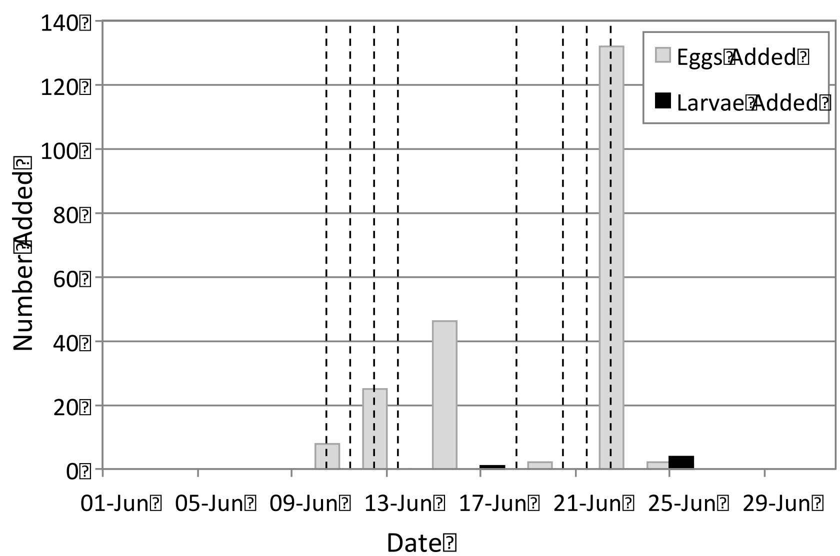

Figure 7. Eggs and larvae collected by egg mat and drift net at Waneta spawn monitoring site in the lower Columbia River during the 2015 sampling period (June 5 through July 31) and added to the Streamside Incubation Facility (SIF). Vertical dashed bars represent estimated spawning dates (n=8) based on developmental stages of collected eggs and larvae. No eggs or larvae collected at spawn monitoring sites of Kinnarid or Arrow Lakes Generating Station (ALH) were viable for incubation at the SIF.

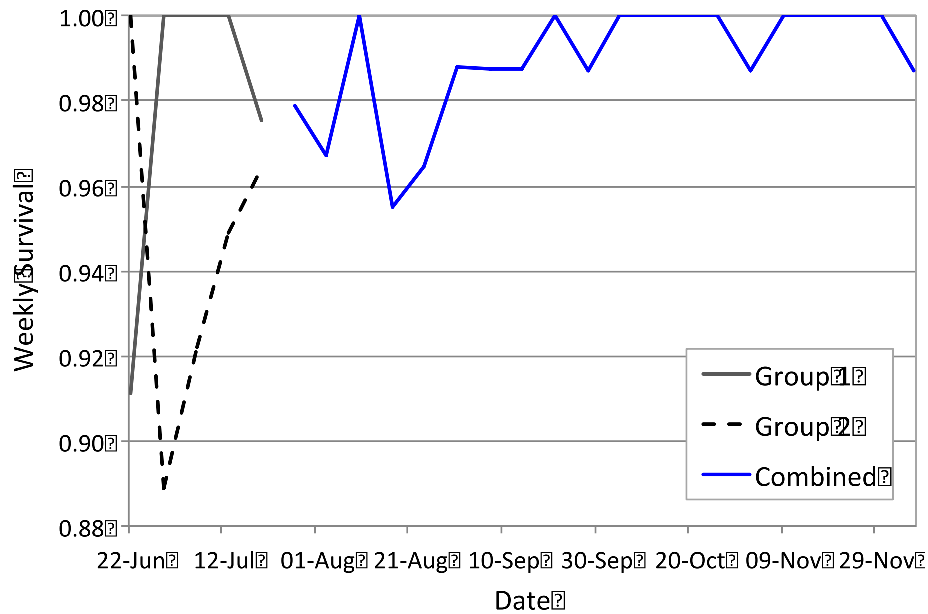

Figure 8. Weekly survival of larvae at the Kootenay Sturgeon Hatchery (KSH) collected from the lower Columbia River Waneta spawn monitoring site in 2015. Group 1 and 2 were organized based on field collection periods and estimated fertilization dates. Groups were combined at the beginning of week 6 (July 7, 2015). No mortalities occurred after week 25 (December 7, 2015).

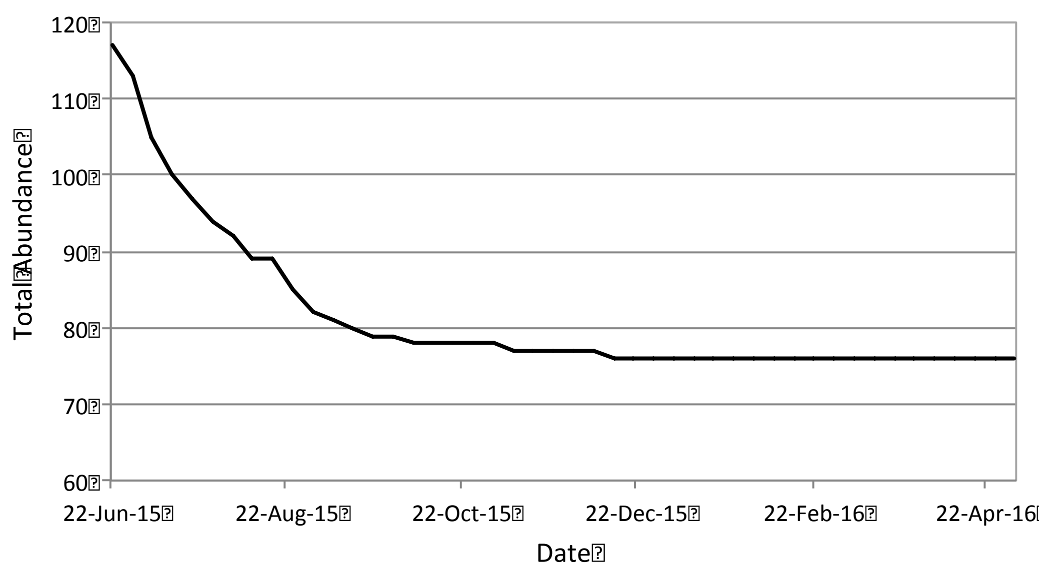

Figure 9. Total abundance of juvenile White Sturgeon of wild origin reared at the Kootenay Sturgeon Hatchery from date of collection (June 22, 2015) to release (May 7, 2016). Juveniles were collected as eggs and larvae at the lower Columbia River (LCR) Waneta spawn-monitoring site via egg mat and drift net in 2015. No viable samples were collected at Kinnaird or Arrow Lakes Generating Station (ALH) spawn-monitoring sites. A total of 76 juveniles of wild origin were released into the LCR in spring 2016.

3.3 Population Monitoring, Abundance, and Characteristics

3.3.1 *Fish Capture and Handling*

The biannual stock assessment program was initiated in Spring 2013. Sampling will continue twice a year (spring and fall) in the TBR extending from HLK in Castlegar British Columbia, Canada, to Gifford Washington, USA, until Fall 2017. Results are presented for data collected in the Canadian portion of the LCR as well as the TBR.

Within Canada, spring and fall stock assessments were conducted between the dates of May 4 through May 15 (12 days) and September 28 through October 9 (12 days) with water temperatures (mean ± SD) of 8.9 ± 0.5°C and 13.7 ± 0.3°C (Figure 5), respectively. During the spring assessment, 1,584 hooks were set using 132 lines. During the fall assessment, 1,440 hooks were set using 120 lines. Sampling effort for the spring and fall assessments was 2,694.8 h and 2,450.4 h, respectively. Set line deployment during the spring and fall assessments was 20.4 ± 1.9 h and 20.4 ± 1.6 h at water depths of 9.8 ± 3.8 m and 9.2 ± 4.0 m, respectively. Sampling effort within the USA portion of the TBR was not available at the time of this report.

Within Canada, total White Sturgeon captures of 2015 was 295 and 360 for a CPUE of 0.109 and 0.147 captures/effort hour during the spring and fall stock assessments, respectively (Table 9 and 10). Across all sampling years (2013-2015), number of captures (82 to 227) and CPUE (0.088 to 0.229) was highest in sampling zone 1 and lowest in sampling zone 4 (number of captures, 2 to 16; CPUE, 0.004 to 0.048; sampling zones represent 11.2 km increments; consecutively numbered 1 through 5 from HLK to Canada/Us Border). Total White Sturgeon within the USA was 487 and 1,199 during the 2015 spring and fall stock assessments, respectively (Table 9). A total of 7287 captures have occurred over the three sampling years (2013 – 2015) within the TBR, of which, 1065 were recaptured fish (Table 9). The majority of seasonal captures were of juveniles captured in the USA (proportion of 0.64 ± 0.10), while juveniles captured in Canada (0.16 ± 0.08) and adults captured in Canada (0.09 ± 0.05) and the USA (0.12 ± 0.08) represented fewer captures (Figure 10). Of the total Canadian captures, 143 individuals were not previously handled (new fish; Table 9). This data was not available for captures in the USA.

Table 9. Total number of White Sturgeon captured during the 2013, 2014, and 2015 spring and fall stock assessments in the Transboundary Reach (TBR), including Canada and USA. Unmarked fish were considered new captures (i.e., not previously handled by researchers; does not include hatchery released juveniles). Recaptured fish were handled more than once during the sampling period.

Location	Year	Survey	Total	Adult	Juvenile	New Fish[a]	Recaptured Fish[b]	Water Temp (°C)[a]
CAN	2013	Spring	117	80	37	23	1	6.1 ± 0.8
CAN	2013	Fall	250	93	157	29	0	15.9 ± 0.6
CAN	2014	Spring	194	93	101	21	0	7.5 ± 0.7
CAN	2014	Fall	358	83	275	35	0	15.7 ± 0.7
CAN	2015	Spring	295	78	217	15	0	8.9 ± 0.5
CAN	2015	Fall	360	74	286	20	2	13.7 ± 0.3
CAN	ALL	ALL	1574	501	1073	143	149	-
USA	2013	Spring	626	178	448	n/a	2	n/a
USA	2013	Fall	1259	185	1074	n/a	20	n/a
USA	2014	Spring	341	83	258	n/a	4	n/a
USA	2014	Fall	1802	247	1555	n/a	32	n/a
USA	2015	Spring	487	36	451	n/a	0	n/a
USA	2015	Fall	1199	52	1147	n/a	8	n/a
USA	ALL	ALL	5714	781	4933	n/a	907	-
TBR	2013	Spring	743	258	485	n/a	3	n/a
TBR	2013	Fall	1509	278	1231	n/a	20	n/a
TBR	2014	Spring	535	176	359	n/a	4	n/a
TBR	2014	Fall	2160	330	1830	n/a	32	n/a
TBR	2015	Spring	782	114	668	n/a	0	n/a
TBR	2015	Fall	1559	126	1433	n/a	10	n/a
TBR	ALL	ALL	7288	1282	6006	n/a	1065	-

[a]USA data was not available at time of report
[b]Fish recaptured within a sampling period (e.g., 2013 spring stock assessment) and location (e.g., Canada)

Table 10. Total number of White Sturgeon captured and catch per unit effort (CPUE) by sampling zone for the 2013, 2014, and 2015 spring and fall stock assessments in the lower Columbia River (LCR), Canada. Sampling zones represent 11.2 km increments starting from Hugh L. Keenleyside Dam and moving downstream to the US Border.

Zone	Total Capture (CPUE)					
	2013 Spring	2013 Fall	2014 Spring	2014 Fall	2015 Spring	2015 Fall
1	82 (0.088)	117 (0.203)	148 (0.176)	222 (0.227)	227 (0.223)	220 (0.229)
2	13 (0.023)	42 (0.090)	29 (0.058)	55 (0.138)	44 (0.113)	43 (0.165)
3	7 (0.012)	37 (0.073)	8 (0.021)	33 (0.078)	13 (0.025)	50 (0.106)
4	2 (0.004)	16 (0.048)	2 (0.006)	13 (0.050)	5 (0.015)	10 (0.030)
5	13 (0.027)	38 (0.083)	7 (0.017)	35 (0.079)	6 (0.014)	37 (0.088)
LCR	117 (0.039)	250 (0.106)	194 (0.079)	358 (0.143)	295 (0.109)	360 (0.147)

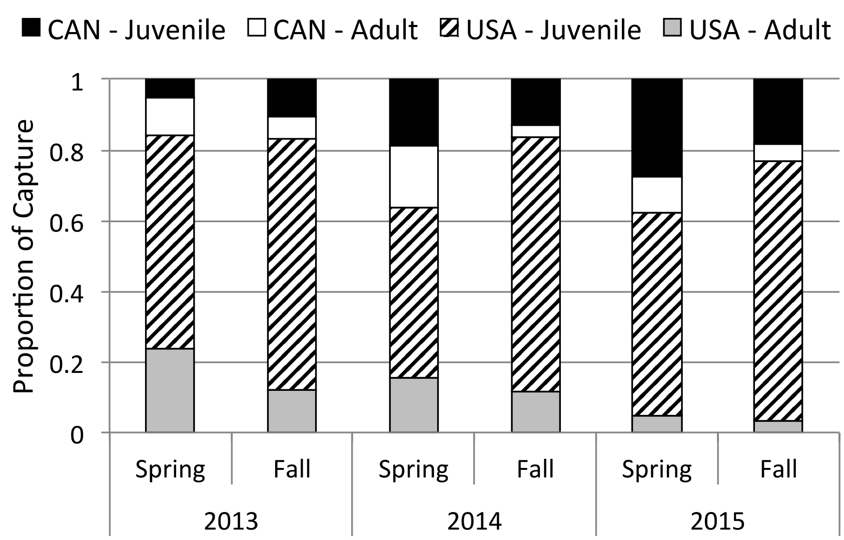

Figure 10. Proportional data of the total number of White Sturgeon captured for the 2013, 2014, and 2015 Transboundary Reach spring and fall stock assessments. Data includes fish captured in Canadian and USA sampling efforts extending from Hugh L. Keenleyside Dam in Castlegar British Columbia, Canada, to Gifford Washington, USA.

3.3.2 *Population Abundance*

Abundance and survival estimates will be calculated as additional recapture data become available in future years of the stock assessment program.

3.3.3 *Fork Length, Weight, and Relative Weight*

Fork length (FL; cm; mean ± SD) of all White Sturgeon collected within Canada during the spring and fall 2015 stock assessments (n=655) was 118.5 ± 38.6 cm (Table 11). Fork length of juveniles captured during the spring and fall was 99.6 ± 14.5 cm and 98.2 ± 13.6 cm, respectively. Fork length for adults captured in the spring and fall was 184.1 ± 16.5 cm and 182.1 ± 18.0 cm, respectively. These results are similar to the juvenile (98.2 ± 14.9 cm) and adult (182.3 ± 17.8 cm) FL recorded over all stock assessments conducted within the Canadian portion of the LCR (2013-2015).

Fork length of all White Sturgeon collected in the TBR during the spring and fall 2015 stock assessments (n=2341) was 108.4 ± 33.7 cm (Table 11). Fork length of juveniles captured in the TBR during the spring and fall was 102.6 ± 17.4 cm and 97.4 ± 19.0 cm, respectively. Fork length of juveniles captured in the USA (spring, 104 ± 18.5 cm; fall, 97.2 ± 20.1 cm) was similar to those captured in Canada (spring, 99.6 ± 14.5 cm; fall 98.2 ± 13.6 cm). Fork length for adults captured in the TBR during the spring and fall was 188.4 ± 21.7 cm and 190.8 ± 27.6 cm, respectively. Adults captured in the USA were larger in FL (spring, 197.8 ± 28.1; fall, 203.0 ± 33.7 cm) than adults captured in Canada (spring, 184.1 ± 16.5 cm; fall, 182.1 ± 18.0 cm). These trends were recorded across all sampling years (Table 11).

Weight of juveniles captured within Canada during the spring and fall was 7.0 ± 3.9 kg and 6.4 ± 2.9 kg, respectively. Adult weight was 48.1 ± 14.0 kg and 44.3 ± 15.5 kg for spring and fall captures, respectively. These results were similar to those recorded over the entire study (2013-2015; adult, 47.5 ± 16.0 kg; juvenile, 6.6 ± 3.5 kg; Table 12). Weight (kg) of all captures within Canada during the spring and fall 2015 stock assessments was 15.9 ± 18.4 kg (Table 12).

Weight (kg) of all White Sturgeon captured in the TBR during the spring and fall 2015 stock assessments was 13.0 ± 17.1 kg (Table 12). Weight of juveniles captured during the spring and fall was 9.1 ± 5.2 kg and 7.8 ± 4.9 kg, respectively. Juveniles were smaller in Canada (spring, 7.0 ± 3.9 kg; fall, 6.4 ± 2.9 kg) compared to juveniles captured in the USA (spring, 10.0 ± 5.4 kg; fall, 8.2 ± 5.2 kg). Adult weight was 53.6 ± 21.1 kg and 56.0 ± 29.8 kg for spring and fall TBR captures, respectively. Similar trends to FL were observed in weight of adults captured with fish captured in Canada (spring, 48.1 ± 14.0 kg; fall, 44.3 ± 15.5 kg) measuring smaller than fish captured in the USA (spring, 65.5 ± 28.1 kg; fall, 72.5 ± 36.9 kg; Table 12).

Relative weight (W_r) for all White Sturgeon captured within Canada in 2015 was 81.1 ± 8.0 (Table 13). Relative weight for adults captured in 2015 (79.9 ± 8.7) was lower than the W_r calculated for adults captured over the entire study (83.2 ± 10.1). Relative weight for juveniles captured in 2015 (81.4 ± 7.7) was similar to the W_r for juveniles captured over the entire study (81.3 ± 7.8).

Relative weight (W_r) for all White Sturgeon captured in 2015 was 93.4 ± 13.8 (Table 13). Relative weight for adults captured in the spring and fall was 83.2 ± 9.3 and 80.9 ± 9.4 respectively. Adult White Sturgeon captured in the USA had a larger W_r (spring, 85.5 ± 9.7; fall, 86.4 ± 8.9) compared to adults captured in

Canada (spring, 82.1 ± 8.9; fall, 77.5 ± 8.0); however, this trend was not as pronounced across all sampling years (Table 13). Juvenile W_r was 94.7 ± 14.4 and 94.7 ± 13.3 during the TBR spring and fall stock assessments, respectively. Juveniles in the USA had a larger W_r (spring, 100.4 ± 13.6; fall, 98.3 ± 11.9) than juveniles captured in Canada (spring, 83.0 ± 7.8; fall, 80.3 ± 7.4). This was seen across all sampling years (Table 13).

Table 11. Fork length (FL; cm; mean ± SD) for adult and juvenile White Sturgeon captured during the 2013, 2014, and 2015 Columbia River Transboundary Reach (TBR) stock assessments. Data includes fish captured in Canadian and USA sampling efforts extending from Hugh L. Keenleyside Dam in Castlegar British Columbia, Canada, to Gifford Washington, USA.

Location	Year	Survey	Adult	Juvenile	All Captures
CAN	2013	Spring	184.3 ± 19.0	102.3 ± 14.7	160.4 ± 41.5
CAN	2013	Fall	182.3 ± 17.8	93.4 ± 16.5	126.5 ± 46.3
CAN	2014	Spring	179.4 ± 17.2	103.8 ± 13.0	140.1 ± 40.8
CAN	2014	Fall	182.0 ± 18.3	97.1 ± 15.5	116.8 ± 39.4
CAN	2015	Spring	184.1 ± 16.5	99.6 ± 14.5	122.0 ± 40.2
CAN	2015	Fall	182.1 ± 18.0	98.2 ± 13.6	115.5 ± 37.0
CAN	All		182.3 ± 17.8	98.2 ± 14.9	125.1 ± 42.3
USA	2013	Spring	202.8 ± 26.7	99.7 ± 19.6	129.1 ± 51.4
USA	2013	Fall	209.6 ± 27.6	93.2 ± 19.3	110.3 ± 46.2
USA	2014	Spring	199.0 ± 27.5	104.2 ± 18.5	127.6 ± 46.0
USA	2014	Fall	206.7 ± 27.6	97.0 ± 19.8	112.2 ± 43.4
USA	2015	Spring	197.8 ± 28.1	104.0 ± 18.5	111.0 ± 31.3
USA	2015	Fall	203.0 ± 33.7	97.2 ± 20.1	101.8 ± 30.1
USA	All		205.0 ± 28.0	97.5 ± 19.8	112.3 ± 42.7
TBR	2013	Spring	197.0 ± 26.0	99.9 ± 19.3	133.9 ± 51.3
TBR	2013	Fall	200.5 ± 27.9	93.2 ± 18.9	113.0 ± 46.6
TBR	2014	Spring	188.7 ± 24.6	104.1 ± 17.1	132.1 ± 44.5
TBR	2014	Fall	200.5 ± 27.7	97.0 ± 19.2	113.0 ± 42.8
TBR	2015	Spring	188.4 ± 21.7	102.6 ± 17.4	115.1 ± 35.3
TBR	2015	Fall	190.8 ± 27.6	97.4 ± 19.0	105.0 ± 32.3
TBR	All		196.1 ± 26.9	97.6 ± 19.0	115.0 ± 42.9

Table 12. Weight (kg; mean ± SD) for adult and juvenile White Sturgeon capture during the 2013, 2014 and 2015 Columbia River Transboundary Reach (TBR) stock assessments. Data includes fish captured in Canadian and USA sampling efforts extending from Hugh L. Keenleyside Dam in Castlegar British Columbia, Canada, to Gifford Washington, USA.

Location	Year	Survey	Adult	Juvenile	All Captures
CAN	2013	Spring	53.6 ± 16.2	7.7 ± 4.2	40.2 ± 25.1
CAN	2013	Fall	48.2 ± 16.9	5.8 ± 3.6	21.6 ± 23.2
CAN	2014	Spring	43.7 ± 13.9	7.7 ± 3.1	25.0 ± 20.5
CAN	2014	Fall	47.4 ± 17.7	6.3 ± 3.5	15.9 ± 19.6
CAN	2015	Spring	48.1 ± 14.0	7.0 ± 3.9	17.9 ± 19.8
CAN	2015	Fall	44.3 ± 15.5	6.4 ± 2.9	14.2 ± 17.1
CAN	All		47.5 ± 16.0	6.6 ± 3.5	19.7 ± 21.3
USA	2013	Spring	72.0 ± 26.6	9.6 ± 6.3	27.0 ± 31.8
USA	2013	Fall	77.2 ± 30.3	7.2 ± 4.6	17.4 ± 27.5
USA	2014	Spring	70.8 ± 29.5	10.6 ± 5.9	25.5 ± 30.2
USA	2014	Fall	71.2 ± 30.3	8.1 ± 5.0	16.7 ± 24.8
USA	2015	Spring	65.5 ± 28.1	10.0 ± 5.4	14.2 ± 17.2
USA	2015	Fall	72.5 ± 36.9	8.2 ± 5.2	11.0 ± 16.1
USA	All		72.6 ± 29.9	8.4 ± 5.3	17.1 ± 25.0
LCR	2013	Spring	66.1 ± 25.3	9.5 ± 6.2	29.1 ± 31.2
LCR	2013	Fall	67.4 ± 29.8	7.0 ± 4.5	18.1 ± 26.9
LCR	2014	Spring	56.5 ± 26.3	9.8 ± 5.4	25.3 ± 27.0
LCR	2014	Fall	65.1 ± 29.5	7.8 ± 4.9	16.5 ± 24.0
LCR	2015	Spring	53.6 ± 21.1	9.1 ± 5.2	15.6 ± 18.3
LCR	2015	Fall	56.0 ± 29.8	7.8 ± 4.9	11.7 ± 16.4
LCR	All		62.7 ± 28.1	8.1 ± 5.1	17.6 ± 24.3

Table 13. Relative weight (W_r; mean ± SD) for adult and juvenile White Sturgeon collected during the 2013, 2014 and 2015 Columbia River Transboundary Reach (TBR) stock assessments. Data includes fish captured in Canadian and USA sampling efforts extending from Hugh L. Keenleyside Dam in Castlegar British Columbia, Canada, to Gifford Washington, USA.

Location	Year	Survey	Adult	Juvenile	All Captures
CAN	2013	Spring	91.3 ± 9.6	83.1 ± 9.6	88.9 ± 10.3
CAN	2013	Fall	84.0 ± 8.5	81.4 ± 8.7	82.4 ± 8.7
CAN	2014	Spring	80.8 ± 7.4	82.2 ± 7.2	81.5 ± 7.3
CAN	2014	Fall	83.0 ± 12.6	80.3 ± 7.4	80.9 ± 8.9
CAN	2015	Spring	82.1 ± 8.9	83.0 ± 7.8	82.7 ± 8.1
CAN	2015	Fall	77.5 ± 8.0	80.3 ± 7.4	79.7 ± 7.6
CAN	All		83.2 ± 10.1	81.3 ± 7.8	81.9 ± 8.7
USA	2013	Spring	90.8 ± 13.5	107.8 ± 14.5	103.1 ± 16.1
USA	2013	Fall	85.5 ± 10.0	100.3 ± 11.5	98.3 ± 12.4
USA	2014	Spring	91.4 ± 11.8	106.4 ± 13.8	102.8 ± 14.8
USA	2014	Fall	82.4 ± 12.0	98.8 ± 11.8	96.6 ± 13.0
USA	2015	Spring	85.5 ± 9.7	100.4 ± 13.6	99.3 ± 13.9
USA	2015	Fall	86.4 ± 8.9	98.3 ± 11.9	97.8 ± 12.0
USA	All		86.4 ± 12.2	100.4 ± 12.6	98.5 ± 13.4
LCR	2013	Spring	90.9 ± 12.4	106.1 ± 15.5	100.9 ± 16.2
LCR	2013	Fall	85.0 ± 9.5	97.9 ± 12.8	95.6 ± 13.3
LCR	2014	Spring	85.8 ± 11.1	99.5 ± 16.4	95.0 ± 16.2
LCR	2014	Fall	82.6 ± 12.2	96.0 ± 13.0	94.0 ± 13.8
LCR	2015	Spring	83.2 ± 9.3	94.7 ± 14.5	93.0 ± 14.4
LCR	2015	Fall	80.9 ± 9.4	94.7 ± 13.3	93.6 ± 13.5
LCR	All		85.1 ± 11.5	97.0 ± 14.0	94.9 ± 14.3

3.3.4 *Fork Length (FL) Frequency*

Total captures within Canada were predominately of juvenile fish (<150 cm FL) of hatchery origins (n=981; Figure 11). Grouping FL into bins of 20 (e.g., 70-89 cm), sampling zone 1 was highly represented by juvenile fish including FL bins of 70-89 cm (0.16, proportion), 90-109 cm (0.39), and 110-129 cm (0.17) (Table 14). Both juvenile (70-89 cm, 90-109 cm) and adult (170-189 cm) size classes were of the predominant FL bins represented in sampling zones 2, 3, 4, and 5 captures (Table 14).

The trend of hatchery origin juvenile capture predominance was more apparent in the total captures within the TBR (Figure 12). Juveniles, including FL bins of 70-89 cm (0.25, proportion), 90-109 cm (0.30), and 110-129 (0.18), were the predominant size class captured in the USA (Table 15). Both juvenile (70-89 cm, 0.19; 90-109 cm, 0.33) and adult (170-189 cm, 0.14) fish were of the predominant FL bins represented in Canada captures (Table 15). Juveniles, including FL bins of 70-89 cm, 90-109 cm, and 110-129 cm, were the predominant size class captured in the spring and fall stock assessments (Table 16). Adult size classes (170-189 cm, 190-209 cm, 210-229 cm) were captured more frequently during spring (0.074, 0.075, 0.041) compared to fall (0.036, 0.034, 0.022) stock assessments (Table 16).

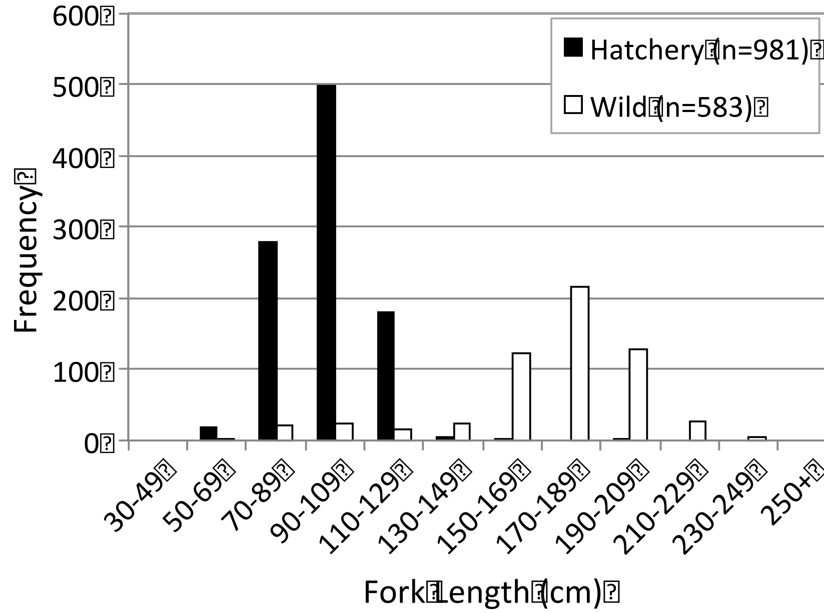

Figure 11. Fork length frequency of hatchery and wild origin White Sturgeon captured in the lower Columbia River during the 2013, 2014, and 2015 Canadian stock assessments.

Table 14. Proportion of fork length (FL; cm) freqeuncy of captures within each sampling zone of the Canadian portion of the lower Columbia River during the 2013, 2014, and 2015 spring and fall stock assessments. The three predominant FL bins in each sampling zone are highlighted bold for comparison. Sampling zones represent 11.2 km increments starting from Hugh L. Keenleyside Dam and moving downstream to the US Border.

FL Bin	Zone 1	Zone 2	Zone 3	Zone 4	Zone 5
50-69	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.08	0.09
70-89	**0.16**	**0.20**	**0.17**	**0.19**	**0.45**
90-109	**0.39**	**0.29**	**0.20**	**0.17**	**0.15**
110-129	**0.17**	0.05	0.07	0.02	0.03
130-149	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.04	0.02
150-169	0.07	0.08	0.12	0.10	0.05
170-189	0.11	**0.19**	**0.28**	**0.15**	**0.10**
190-209	0.07	0.12	0.10	0.19	0.07
210-229	0.01	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.04
230-249	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.04	0.00

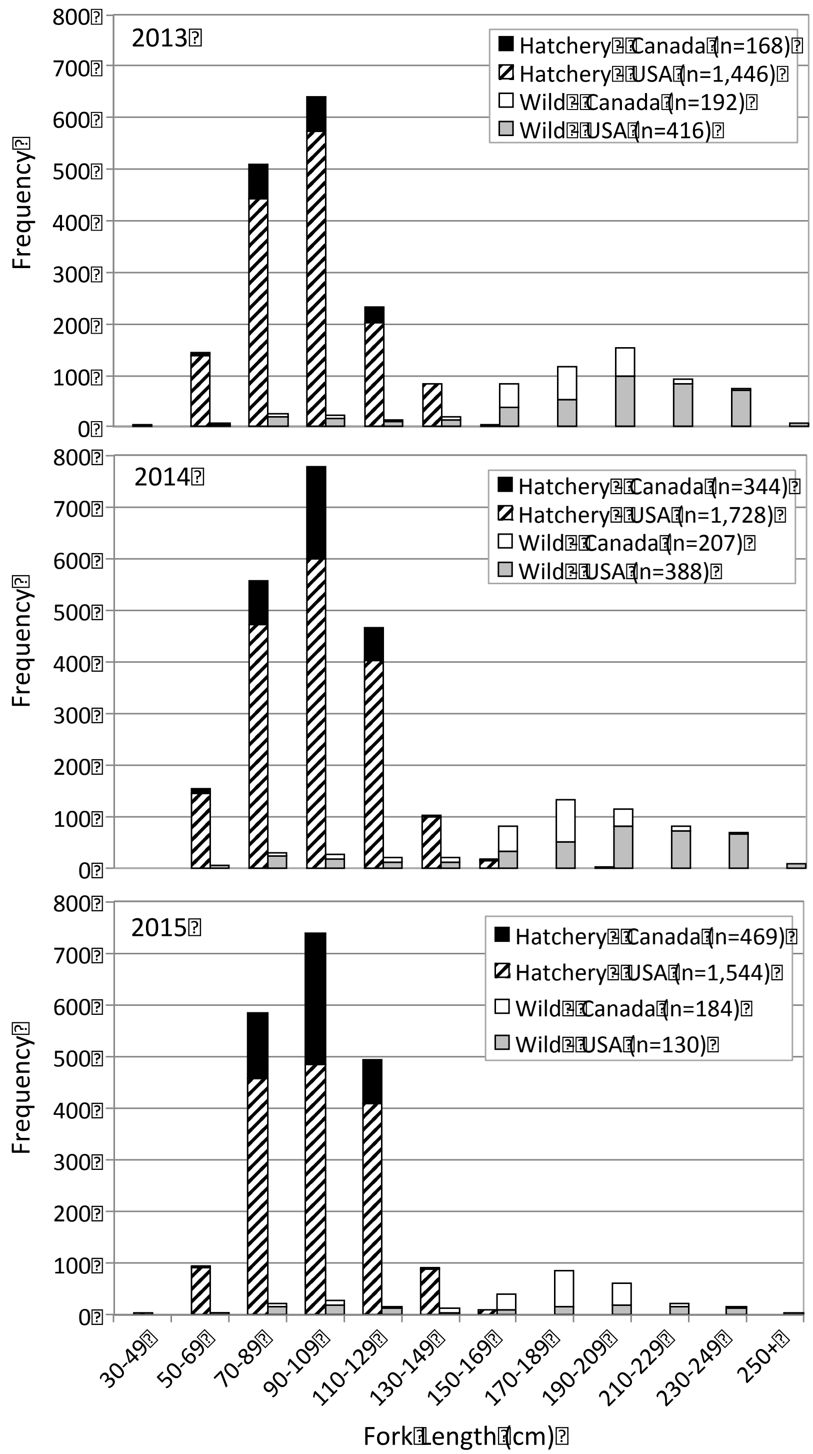

Figure 12. Fork length frequency of hatchery and wild origin White Sturgeon captured during the 2013, 2014, and 2015 Columbia River Transboundary Reach stock assessments. Data includes fish captured in Canadian and USA sampling efforts extending from Hugh L. Keenleyside Dam in Castlegar British Columbia, Canada, to Gifford Washington, USA.

Table 15. Proportion of fork length (FL) freqeuncy of White Sturgeon caputred within each sampling location (i.e., Canada and USA) during the 2013, 2014 and 2015 Columbia River Transboundary Reach stock assessments. Data includes fish captured in Canadian and USA sampling efforts extending from Hugh L. Keenleyside Dam in Castlegar British Columbia, Canada, to Gifford Washington, USA. The three predominant FL bins in each sampling location are highlighted bold for comparison.

FL (cm)	Can	USA
30-49	0.000	0.001
50-69	0.014	0.068
70-89	**0.191**	**0.253**
90-109	**0.333**	**0.302**
110-129	0.124	**0.185**
130-149	0.018	0.053
150-169	0.079	0.019
170-189	**0.137**	0.021
190-209	0.082	0.036
210-229	0.017	0.030
230-249	0.004	0.027
250+	0.000	0.005

Table 16. Proportion of fork length (FL) freqeuncy of White Sturgeon caputred for each sampling season (i.e., spring and fall) during the 2013, 2014 and 2015 Columbia River Transboundary Reach stock assessments. Data includes fish captured in Canadian and USA sampling efforts extending from Hugh L. Keenleyside Dam in Castlegar British Columbia, Canada, to Gifford Washington, USA. The three predominant FL bins in each sampling location are highlighted bold for comparison.

FL (cm)	Spring	Fall
30-49	0.000	0.001
50-69	0.023	0.070
70-89	**0.168**	**0.268**
90-109	**0.312**	**0.308**
110-129	**0.174**	**0.171**
130-149	0.057	0.041
150-169	0.053	0.024
170-189	0.074	0.036
190-209	0.075	0.034
210-229	0.041	0.022
230-249	0.022	0.022
250+	0.002	0.004

3.3.5 *Polyploidy*

Polyploidy levels were tested for both sturgeon reared in the hatchery for supplementation purposes (Table 17) and those collected in the wild (Table 18) to determine the rate of 12N fish present in both environments. In the hatchery progeny that originated from broodstock adults spawned, 5 and 7% of fish tested were identified as 12N in both 2013 and 2014, respectively (Table 17). Wild origin progeny reared in the hatchery that were collected as eggs or larvae from natural spawning events in the lower Columbia River had lower 12N polyploidy levels at <2% in both years (Table 17). For polyploidy levels specific by family group in 2013 and 2014, please refer to FFSBC (2016).

All sturgeon collected during 2014 and 2015 population assessments were tested for polyploidy levels to determine the presence of 12N individuals from hatchery releases that occurred prior to the autopolyploidy issue being discovered and to determine if 12N individuals were present in the wild population. One of 326 White Sturgeon of wild origin collected in the lower Columbia River was identified as 12N (Table 18). Of hatchery origin sturgeon tested, 2.4% (n=25) were identified as 12N. Hatchery origin sturgeon that were identified as 12N were from 2001, 2002, 2003, 2005, and 2006 year classes.

Table 17. The proportion of hatchery origin (broodstock origin) and wild origin (wild caught egg or larvae origin) White Sturgeon reared in the Kootenay Sturgeon Hatchery in 2013, 2014, and 2015 that tested positive as 12 N.

Origin	Year Class	Total	12N	
			n	Proportion
Hatchery	2013	180	9	0.05
Hatchery	2014	1693	124	0.07
Wild	2014	1098	2	0.002
Wild	2015	63	1	0.015

Table 18. The proportion of captured wild and hatchery origin White Sturgeon that tested positive as 12N during population assessments conducted in the Canadian portion of the lower Columbia River in 2014 and 2015.

Population Assessment	Total Capture	12N	
		n	Proportion
Spring 2014			
Wild	63	0	0.00
Hatchery	58	2	0.03
Spring 2014*			
Wild	0	0	-
Hatchery	242	2	0.01
Fall 2014			
Wild	95	0	0.00
Hatchery	263	7	0.03
Spring 2015			
Wild	86	0	0.00
Hatchery	209	8	0.04
Fall 2015			
Wild	82	1	0.01
Hatchery	274	6	0.02

*Broodstock collection

3.4 Acoustic Tagging and Telemetry

The movements of 101 adults (53 females and 48 males) tagged with acoustic transmitters were examined during 2008 through 2015. A total of 222,762 detection days were recorded with a mean (± SD) of 2,423.9 ± 2,220.9 and 2,062.0 ± 1,848.4 detection days for females and males, respectively. Habitat use was highest in the upper section of the river (e.g., Robson reach, rkm 0.1, 2.5, and 6.5) with marginal differences between females and males (Figure 13).

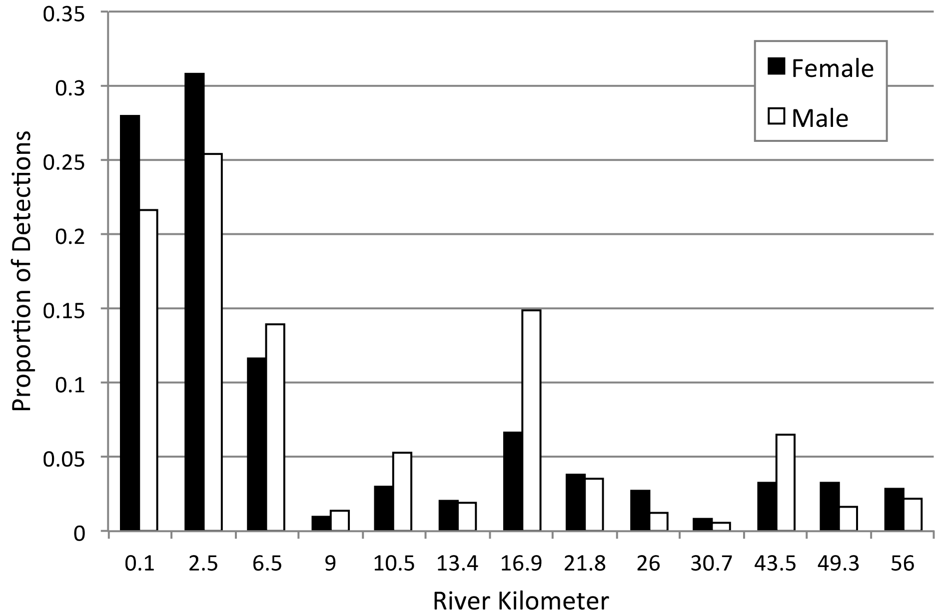

Figure 13. The proportion of detection days by river kilometer of female (n = 53) and male (n = 48) adult White Sturgeon implanted with acoustic transmitters in the lower Columbia River, 2008-2015.

Site fidelity was calculated for both males and females as the maximum proportion of time spent at specific receiver locations (unique rkm) or within larger river zones in the lower Columbia River, between January 2008 and January 2016. Males and females spent 0.66 ± 0.18 and 0.64 ± 0.22 of their time at unique receiver locations, respectively (Table 19). When site fidelity was calculated by river zone, the amount of time increased, to 0.89 ± 0.15 and 0.87 ± 0.18 for males and females respectively (Table 19).

Table 19. The maximum proportion of time (mean ± SD) spent by adult White Sturgeon (male and female) at specific receiver locations (unique river kilometers, rkm) or within larger river zones in the lower Columbia River, between January 2008 and January 2016. River zones represent 11.2 rkm increments starting from Hugh L. Keenleyside Dam extending downstream to the US Border. Data are summarized as the proportion of total detections recorded at receiver locations (n=24) and within the larger river zone (n=5).

		Maximum Proportion of Total Detections	
Sex	N	By RKM	By Zone
Both	100	0.65 ± 0.20	0.88 ± 0.17
Male	48	0.66 ± 0.18	0.89 ± 0.15
Female	51	0.64 ± 0.22	0.87 ± 0.18

Residency to river zones was examined by the proportion of time spent by individual adult White Sturgeon (male, n=48; female, n=51) detected within 5 river zones of the lower Columbia River, Canada. Individuals were assigned to one of four categories representing the proportion of their detections recorded within each zone. Categories were organized by proportional increments of 0.25.

Individuals with site fidelity ≥0.75 for a given river zone were assigned as residents of that zone. A total of 79 individuals were assigned residency of a zone (Table 20; Figure 14). Residency was highest in zone 1, with 44 individuals (22 males and 22 females) spending greater than 0.75 of their time in this zone.

Table 20. The proportion of time spent by individual adult White Sturgeon (male, n=48; female, n=51) within 5 river zones of the lower Columbia River, Canada. Individuals were assigned to one of four categories representing the proportion of their detections recorded within each zone. Categories were based on proportional increments of 0.25. Site fidelity to a river zone was assigned to individual's detected ≥0.75 of the time within that zone (bolded). River zones represent 11.2 rkm increments starting from Hugh L. Keenleyside Dam extending downstream to the US Border.

Sex	Proportion of Detections	River Zone				
		1	2	3	4	5
Combined	0.00 - 0.24	42	79	95	89	82
Combined	0.25 - 0.49	6	5	2	2	2
Combined	0.50 - 0.74	8	3	1	2	3
Combined	0.75 - 1.00	**44**	**13**	**2**	**7**	**13**
Male	0.00 - 0.24	20	36	46	43	41
Male	0.25 - 0.49	1	3	0	1	1
Male	0.50 - 0.74	5	1	1	1	1
Male	0.75 - 1.00	**22**	**8**	**1**	**3**	**5**
Female	0.00 - 0.24	21	43	48	45	40
Female	0.25 - 0.49	5	2	2	1	1
Female	0.50 - 0.74	3	2	0	1	2
Female	0.75 - 1.00	**22**	**4**	**1**	**4**	**8**

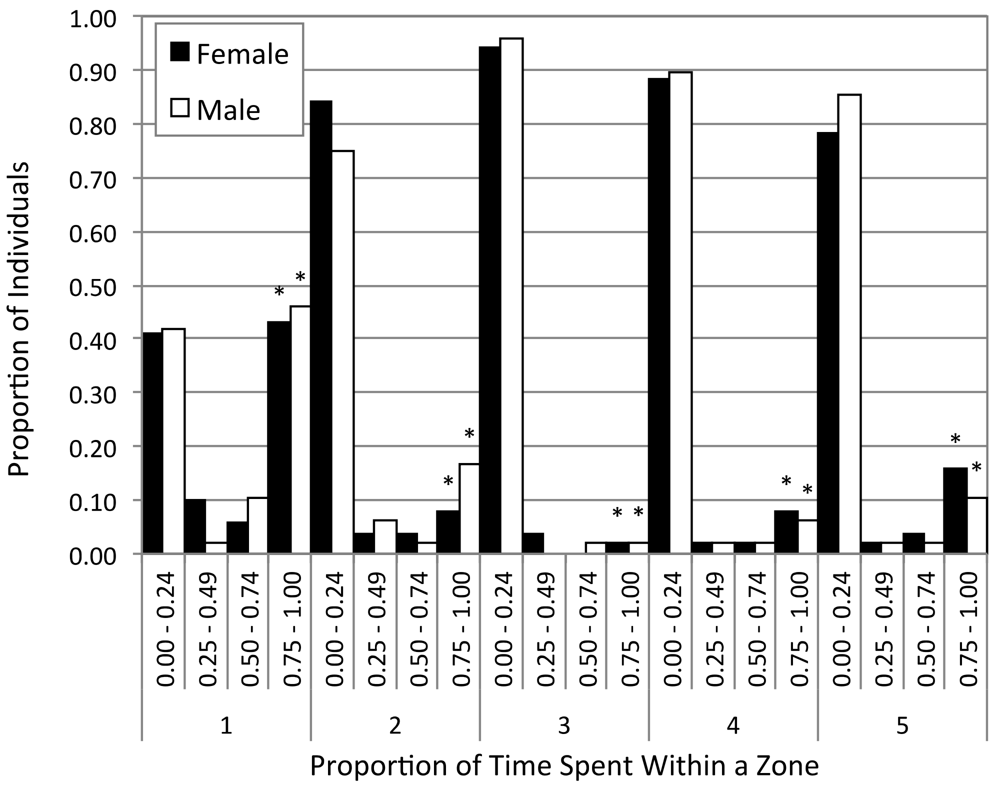

Figure 14. The proportion of acoustically tagged male (n=48) and female (n=51) adult White Sturgeon detected within each sampling zone of the lower Columbia River, Canada. Individuals were assigned to one of four categories representing the proportion of their detections recorded within each zone. Categories were based on proportional increments of 0.25. Site fidelity to a river zone was assigned to individual's detected ≥0.75 of the time within that zone and is marked with an asterisk for comparison. River zones represent 11.2 rkm increments starting from Hugh L. Keenleyside Dam extending downstream to the US Border.

In 2015, 12 adults (8 males, 4 females; Figure 15) were identified for suspected spawn related movements. The highest proportion of adults identified at a suspected spawning location was detected at rkm 26.0 and 56.0 (0.33). The majority of males were detected at rkm 26.0 (0.38) and rkm 56.0 (0.25). Female detections were distributed between rkm 56.0 (0.50), rkm 26.0 (0.25) and rkm 16.9 (0.25)

Of the two adults suspected for spawning related movements residing in the Upper section (rkm 0.1 to rkm 10.5) one migrated downstream to the Middle section (rkm 10.6 to rkm 29) and one remained in the Upper section during suspected spawn related movements (Table 21). A large proportion of individuals detected in the Middle section tended to remain within the middle section for spawn related movements (proportion of 0.42; Table 21) with the remaining fish migrating downstream to the Lower sections (rkm 30 to rkm 56.0). Lower section residency fish either remained or migrated to the Middle section during spawn related movements (Table 21). Spawning related distance travelled was highest for fish migrating to the Lower Section (30.5 ± 17.3 km) in relation to fish migrating to the Upper (1.5 km) and Middle (6.6 ± 3.0 km) sections (Table 22). Time spent on the suspected spawning grounds was greater within the Upper section (62.2 days) than the Middle (34.2 ± 19.5 days) and Lower (30.0 ± 18.0 days) sections (Table 22).

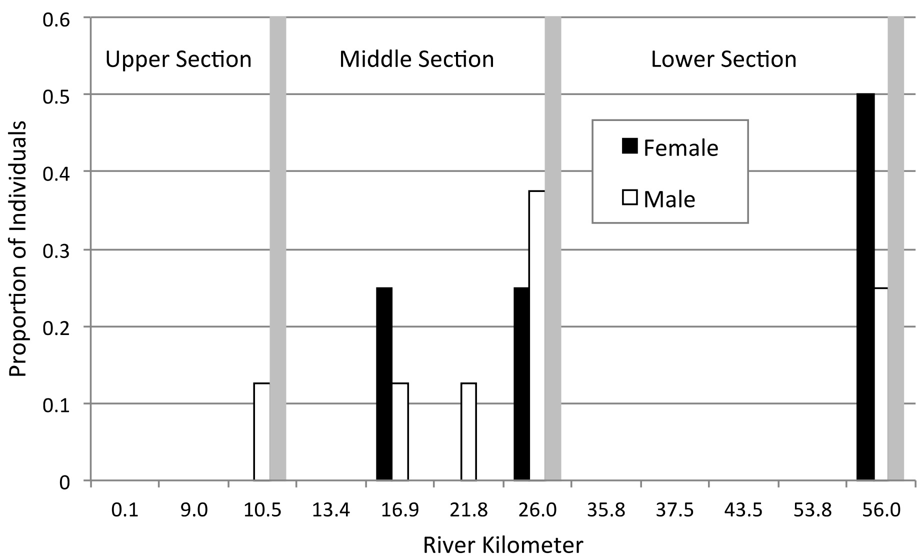

Figure 15. Proportion of detections by river kilometer (rkm) of acoustically tagged female (n=4) and male (n=8) White Sturgeon identified for suspected spawn related movements in the lower Columbia River (LCR) in 2015. The LCR was divided into three sections including: Upper (HLK [rkm 0.1] to Kootenay River Confluence [rkm 10.5]), Middle (downstream Kootenay River Confluence to Birchbank [rkm 29]), and Lower (downstream Birchbank to Waneta [rkm 56.0]).

Table 21. The proportion by river section of adult White Sturgeon (n=12) implanted with acoustic transmitters identified for suspected spawn related movements in the lower Columbia River (LCR) in 2015. The LCR was divided into three sections including: Upper (HLK [river kilometer 0.1; rkm] to Kootenay River Confluence [rkm 10.5]), Middle (downstream Kootenay River Confluence to Birchbank [rkm 29]), and Lower (downstream Birchbank to Waneta [rkm 56.0]).

Suspected Residency	Suspected Spawning Site n (proportion)		
	Upper	Middle	Lower
Upper	**1 (0.08)**	**1 (0.08)**	0 (0.00)
Middle	0 (0.00)	**5 (0.42)**	3 (0.25)
Lower	0 (0.00)	**1 (0.08)**	**1 (0.08)**

Table 22. Mean (± SD) distance travelled (km), travel time (days), and total time on site (days) for suspected spawn related movements of adult White Sturgeon implanted with acoustic tags in the lower Columbia River (LCR) in 2015. The LCR was divided into three sections including: Upper (HLK [river kilometer 0.1; rkm] to Kootenay River Confluence [rkm 10.5]), Middle (downstream Kootenay River Confluence to Birchbank [rkm 29]), and Lower (downstream Birchbank to Waneta [rkm 56.0]).

Suspected Spawning Site	n	Distance Travelled (km)	Travel Time (Days)	Time Spent on Site (Days)
Upper	1	1.5 ± n/a	0.0 ± n/a	62.2 ± n/a
Middle	7	6.6 ± 3.0	7.5 ± 10.5	34.2 ± 19.5
Lower	4	30.5 ± 17.3	6.8 ± 7.5	35.1 ± 5.3
Overall	12	14.1 ± 15.3	6.6 ± 8.9	30.0 ± 18.0

4.0 DISCUSSION

The primary objectives of this monitoring program were to describe adult White Sturgeon life history, biological, and population characteristics. Through the eighth year of this work, we have been successful in quantifying fish condition, estimating timing and duration of spawning, identifying environmental spawning cues, and describing spawning-related movements and habitat use of adult White Sturgeon in the LCR. Further, this program was responsible for the collection of sexually mature White Sturgeon to use as broodstock and rearing naturally produced offspring collected from the wild for the Conservation Aquaculture Program. Data collection will continue in the following years to provide an estimate of population abundance, growth rates, age class structure, and survival rates, all of which will be used in recovery planning going forward. Outstanding issues identified by the WUP Fisheries Technical Committee (FTC) during the creation of the Columbia Water Use Plan, as provided in the ToR for this program, are described and addressed in Table 23.

Table 23. Outstanding issues identified by the WUP Fisheries Technical Committee (FTC) in the Terms of Reference for this monitoring program.

FTC Outstanding Issue	Current Status
As the annual average number of spawning days at Waneta Eddy appears small relative to the adult population size and the approximate female reproductive cycle, this adult monitoring program may identify additional spawning sites.	After collecting early life history data for the first several years of the program, spawning days are not viewed as a reliable indicator of the adult breeding population, given uncertainties in how efficient the methodology is when comparing among years. This inefficiency is driven by annual changes in hydrology and uncertainties regarding the exact geographical locations where spawning (i.e., release of eggs) occurs. This is true even for spawning sites where large amounts of data have been collected (Waneta). Genetic analyses has identified >100 adults spawning annually in the Canadian portion of the Columbia River (Jay et al. 2014), with additional adults spawning at two locations downstream. There are now 5 known spawning sites in the transboundary section of the Columbia River.
Changes in movement and spawning behaviour in response to management responses (relative to the baseline established through this monitoring program) may reveal that additional spawning sites (and sub populations) exist in the LCR.	Additional spawning sites have been identified through analysis of adult movements (e.g., ALH spawning area in 2010) and through the collection of larvae downstream from suspected locations (e.g., Kinnaird 2007 to current). Currently, known spawning sites in Canada are being monitored annually and spawning related movements are evaluated in order to identify any further locations.
Baseline information acquired through this monitoring program may verify that the abundance of adult White Sturgeon in the LCR will not be adversely affected by management response measures.	Revised abundance estimates for wild adult White Sturgeon are being conducted through the entire transboundary reach under a new stock assessment program, with a revised population estimate expected by 2017. This estimate will be used as a baseline for recovery planning moving forward.
Of equal importance to the maintenance of the remaining White Sturgeon population; are there sufficient adults to continue the Conservation Aquaculture Program?	An aquaculture program that centers on using wild collected eggs and larvae was developed in 2014 based on results from previous year's genetic analyses. This is currently the sole source of offspring collected for stocking purposes in order to meet long-term genetic goals for the population. This revised aquaculture program has resulted in suspending the traditional broodstock program going forward. As of 2014, 175 individual adults (97 males and 78 females)

FTC Outstanding Issue	Current Status
	have contributed to the Conservation Aquaculture Program. Based on capture records and genetic studies completed to date, there are enough mature wild adults at large to revisit the Conservation Aquaculture Program if needed. However, it is important to note that the success of the Conservation Aquaculture Program has resulted in a strong presence of juvenile age classes, many of which are captured during assessments for broodstock. This has reduced efficiency of the broodstock program and as a result, significant sampling effort is required to only partially meet broodstock goals (10 males and 10 females).

4.1 Streamside Incubation Facility

A key component of the recovery program for LCR White Sturgeon has been the supplementation of the existing wild population through the release of hatchery produced and reared juvenile White Sturgeon (Hildebrand and Parsley 2013). The program was initiated in 2001 through the annual capture of broodstock and the original goals of the conservation aquaculture program were to:

I. Prevent extirpation of the LCR White Sturgeon.

II. Retain genetic diversity of the existing wild adults.

Since the Conservation Aquaculture Program was initiated, 136,914 hatchery-reared juvenile White Sturgeon have been released into the TRA from 2002 to 2014 (yearly releases ranging from 2,455 in 2014 to 21,603 in 2005). These juveniles are known to be in high abundance and objective 1 is considered by the UCWSRI to have largely to be met. As a result, the pilot streamside incubation facility was developed by the UCWSRI TWG to focus on retaining the genetic diversity of the existing wild adults while suitable numbers are still spawning. This was based on the results of genetic work by Jay et al. (2014). The main goals of the facility were ranked by TWG members to be:

1. Maximize genetic diversity [increase effective population size (N_e) and decrease relatedness (rxy)] of supplemental progeny compared to current aquaculture program by representing a larger proportion of wild spawning adults.

2. Rear supplemental progeny in a more natural rearing environment to reduce hatchery effects and provide for imprinting to a specific river location.

Results from the 2014 pilot year for the SIF were successful, with over 1,000 wild origin juveniles released into the LCR. The SIF was then implemented as the sole component of the conservation aquaculture program for the next several years. Collections of eggs and larvae were low in 2015, one of the driest years since regulation of the Columbia River began. While a larger numbers of eggs and larvae were not available in 2015 at the Canadian spawning sites, it should be noted that a significant number of wild feeding age larvae were collected downstream of Northport in the US and were raised for release into Lake Roosevelt.

4.2 Spawn Monitoring

For White Sturgeon throughout their range, it is generally thought that the spawning period is protracted and occurs in the late spring and early summer months (May to July) with specific timing dependent on environmental cues (e.g., temperature, flows; Parsley and Beckman 1994). In 2015, spawning was estimated to have only occurred for 10 days in June at Waneta and only a few days in early July near Kinnaird. Dispersing larvae were collected within the vicinity of Kinnaird; however, exact location of the spawning area remains unknown. The timing of spawning activity for both years is similar to past years, with the majority of estimated spawning days occurring on the descending limb of the hydrograph and at water temperatures above 14ºC (Golder 2012). However, the duration of spawning and the number of eggs and larvae collected was low. 2015 was one of the driest years on record since regulation of the Columbia River began, however it is not known if this influenced spawning given difficulties in sampling for early life stages of White Sturgeon.

Determining capture efficiency of both egg and larval samples between gear types is important when identifying exact spawning locations of unknown areas. Egg mats have been consistently used at Waneta for the collection of White Sturgeon eggs since the spawning location was first described in 1993 (Hildebrand and Parsley 2013). At the upstream locations (ALH and Kinnaird), the use of drift nets has been more effective in collecting eggs or larvae (Table 4). For spawning areas where the exact geographical location is uncertain, drift nets are more effective as they can represent all areas upstream of the sampling location. Though egg mats are effective when the main areas of egg deposition have been identified, drift nets should be used primarily when attempting to assign a general location where spawning may be occurring. To address the objectives of this program as it relates to describing new spawning areas, it is recommended that use of egg mats be restricted to Waneta, and that drift nets are the primary technique used in areas where spawning locations are uncertain (e.g., Kinnaird).

4.3 Population Monitoring, Abundance, and Characteristics

Prior to 2013, the broodstock program served as the sole method of providing information on the biology of the population (e.g., length frequency, growth rates, population estimates). The systematic stock assessment program was initiated to address uncertainties in abundance and survival rate estimates of the LCR White Sturgeon population. Using life history and biological data collected using capture-mark-recapture methods, we will also be able to estimate growth rates across females, males, and immature fish (<150 cm fork length), fish condition, age class structuring, and density dependent responses. This information is required to inform management of LCR White Sturgeon population dynamics and assess trends within the population. It is expected that preliminary population estimates can be generated for the transboundary area starting in 2017 once data from Canada and US sampling efforts are combined.

4.4 Acoustic Tagging and Telemetry

White Sturgeon in the LCR tend to select deep, slow moving sections of the river which do not appear to be limited under the current operating regime. Adult movements are low and have been similar across all years evaluated with activity generally occurring during the summer months for assumed foraging or spawning. Adult male and female White Sturgeon spent 66 and 64% of their time at a single location, respectively. When movements were evaluated at a larger reach scale (11.2 rkm increments), residency to those areas increased to 89 and 87% for males and females, respectively. In 2015, White Sturgeon residing in the Middle (Kinnaird to Genelle) and Lower sections (Trail to Waneta) were observed migrating within the respective section of residency for suspected spawning related movements. This behavior is similar to observations made in previous years where suspected spawning related movements revealed that resident adults within the Upper river section tend to migrate to adjacent downstream spawning areas (Middle section). A small portion of adults monitored in this study exhibited putative spawning migrations to adjoining river areas indicating mixing of adults throughout the river

Though current results from the telemetry monitoring program reveal patterns of habitat use and possible spawning related movements, caution is advised when interpreting results, as the long-term movement patterns of White Sturgeon are poorly understood. Additional data through the duration of this program (10 years) are needed to address how the operation of the river may influence White Sturgeon habitat use or movements. At the present time, there are sufficient numbers of adults with active acoustic transmitters so additional telemetry tagging is not planned in the coming years. Data will continue to be collected in a systematic fashion using the longitudinal array of receivers in the LCR. An in-depth analysis incorporating a decade of movement data is planned for 2016-2017 to address this management question.

5.0 RECCOMENDATIONS

1. Drift nets maximize catch per unit effort of eggs and larvae from locations upstream of the sampling equipment and should continue to be used as the primary collection method in areas where the exact geographical boundary of the spawning location remains unknown (e.g., in the vicinity of Kinnaird).

    a. Egg mats should continue to be used at Waneta and HLK/ALH in the same consistent fashion as previous years sampling.

    b. Consider deploying additional drift net stations downstream of Kinnaird to help determine where larvae may be originating from.

2. Continue to collect tissue samples from offspring (larvae) at the different spawning areas and from wild juveniles and adults for future genetic analyses.

3. Evaluate a fine scale (< 1km intervals) acoustic array near Kinnaird to describe adult movements in this area during the spawning window. If possible, tag mature females (e.g., F4) with short-term tags (~6 month battery life).

    a. Additional range testing should be conducted throughout the LCR to describe detection probabilities for each unique receiver station.

4. Continue coordinated stock assessment program with US agencies to improve our confidence in the abundance of White Sturgeon in the transboundary reach.

    a. Developed models to estimate survival and abundance that can be updated annually as additional survey data are collected.

5. Development of a database that could store all life history data and telemetry data among researchers and industries.

6. Continue to evaluate and discuss the streamside incubation facility with UCWSRI partners.

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