



First Nations Stakeholders

Since time immemorial, the First Nations people lived in balance with their environment. The harvest of all species was done for subsistence and left no lasting detrimental impact on the web of life that had evolved here over time. Many First Nations peoples called the Fraser River watershed home. The seasonal cycle of life enriched those who moved with its rhythms. For many millennia the Coast Salish people lived symbiotically with their environment. Their material and non-material culture grew richly as they wove a delicate fabric of balance and harmony with that which gave them life. The white sturgeon was just one of many important threads in this fabric of life. It was just one of many animals deeply respected for their life giving qualities.

This amazing fish was used in many ways by the First Nations. See the chart below:

Sturgeon Part	Use by First Nations People
Oil	Medicinal purposes (heal mosquito bites)
	Lamp oil
	Tan / soften animal hides
	Mosquito repellent
Scutes	Needles for sewing
	Spearheads
	Piercing tools
	Arrowheads
Stomach lining	Drum coverings
Swim bladder	Dried, then filled with beads to make a children's rattle
	Pouch to store preserved food
Isinglass from the swim bladder	Glue for tools and pottery
	Ingredient in paint
	Waterproofing material
	Seal cracks in canoes
Meat	Food
	Traded for other goods
Fat	Boiled to make glue for bows and canoes

With the arrival of Euro-Canadians and the fur trade, the sustainable traditional subsistence economy was suddenly replaced by one characterized by commercial exploitation. The First Nations people saw their land and resources stripped away from their stewardship and they struggled in the face of systemic racist policies and marginalization. The reserve land holding system, rampant disease, political disenfranchisement, the residential school system and cultural genocide made their struggle for survival as difficult as that of the many species being decimated around them, the white sturgeon included.

Remarkably, the First Nations people have demonstrated a high level of resilience and persistence, enabling them to overcome these huge obstacles. Their culture is alive and well and they play a key role in the Fraser River Sturgeon Conservation Program. Since 1999, aboriginals have tagged or recaptured roughly 10% of the white sturgeon caught in this monitoring program. First Nations fishers have received training to reduce the harm done to sturgeon caught in gill nets. The aboriginal subsistence fishery targets salmon but white sturgeon are caught in these indiscriminate gill nets. Salmon continue to play a key role in the life of the First Nations people who live along the banks of the river. The harvest of salmon for subsistence and ceremonial purposes plays an important role in the economic and cultural well being of many First Nations groups in the Fraser River valley.

Some are critical of the gill net fishery and within the various groups vying for the declining salmon populations there is tension regarding why First Nations fishers are allowed to fish when others are denied that opportunity. Finding a way to balance the needs of First Nation, commercial and sports fishers is one of the greatest challenges facing those managing the Fraser and its resources. Salmon play a key role in the life cycle of the sturgeon and ensuring their survival is just as important as ensuring the survival of the white sturgeon. In addition, some First Nation groups are involved in the management of the gravel extraction business that takes place on their hereditary lands. Opponents of this activity see their role in this business as a contradiction of their traditional ways and argue that it harms white sturgeon habitat and sensitive rearing grounds for juvenile sturgeon.