

SPECIES AT RISK ACT FAILS AGAIN: WHITE STURGEON LEFT OFF LIST

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE—JUNE 14, 2006--Sierra Club of Canada, BC Chapter, and Watershed Watch Salmon Society today accused the federal government of ignoring science in its decision not to protect endangered white sturgeon in the lower Fraser River.

Two Fraser River populations of white sturgeon, listed as endangered by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC), were not included among the 42 new animals, plants and fish given legal protection June 12 under the federal Species at Risk Act (SARA).

“The decision not to protect white sturgeon shows that short-term economic interests once again triumph over species survival and our ability to ensure a sustainable resource for future generations,” said Dr. Colin Campbell, marine campaign coordinator for the Sierra Club of Canada, BC Chapter. “This is the same strategy that led the Atlantic Cod to their present state of demise.”

Dr. Craig Orr, Executive Director of Watershed Watch, called the failure to protect Lower Fraser white sturgeon “a betrayal of public interest.” “Federal Environment Minister Rona Ambrose and federal Fisheries Minister Loyola Hearn are refusing to give an endangered species the legal protection it needs.”

B.C.’s endangered Cultus and Sakinaw sockeye salmon and upper Fraser Coho salmon were previously rejected from the legal protection of SARA. “The ducks have now lined up with the rejection of Lower Fraser white sturgeon,” said Orr. “We are far more likely to protect species that have little economic value.”

Despite Ambrose’s assertion that affording legal protection to the white sturgeon would have a negative impact on the sports fishery, the Fraser River Sturgeon Conservation Society maintains that “the benefits of SARA, partnered with the benefits of the recreational fishery, provide the best, realistic pathway toward white sturgeon stock recovery and protection.”

Since the November 2003, COSEWIC designation of Lower Fraser white sturgeon as endangered, the Fraser River Sturgeon Conservation Society reports that populations have declined a further 22 percent.

“Such a rate of decline demands intervention—and the best opportunity has been rejected,” said Campbell.

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