

News Release



Idaho Fish and Wildlife Office
1387 S. Vinnell Way, Room 368
Boise, Idaho, 83709
<http://www.fws.gov/idaho>

October 12, 2011

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Jason Flory, 509-893-8003, jason_flory@fws.gov

Fish and Wildlife Service Completes Review of Kootenai River White Sturgeon

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announced today that it has completed a five-year review of the Kootenai River population of white sturgeon (*Acipenser transmontanus*), an endangered fish that has been protected under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) since 1994.

With this review, the Service has concluded that Kootenai sturgeon are still at high risk of extinction, so they will remain classified as an ‘endangered’ species. In 2006, the Canadian government officially listed the Kootenai population in British Columbia as “endangered” under Canada’s Species at Risk Act (SARA).

The ESA requires the Service to review the status of all species included on the federal list of threatened and endangered species at least once every five years. The Service reviews the best available scientific information to ensure that protection under ESA for the listed species is still warranted. Five-year reviews include an assessment of population status and threats based on new information since the original listing, including peer-reviewed published literature, agency reports, monitoring data, recovery team reports, public databases and university theses. At the conclusion of a five-year review, the Service may propose to change the species’ listing classification or determine there will be no change in its listing status.

The Kootenai sturgeon are a unique headwater population that has been isolated from the ocean and other downstream Columbia River populations for over 10,000 years. The Kootenai River population occurs in Idaho, Montana and British Columbia, Canada, found in about 167 river miles of the Kootenai River from Kootenai Falls, Montana, below Libby Dam, downstream through Kootenay Lake and the Cora Linn Dam, and at the outflow from Kootenay Lake into British Columbia. In 2008, 18 miles of critical habitat along the Kootenai River were designated as critical habitat to protect migration and spawning habitat for the sturgeon.

A little smaller than their Columbia River counterparts, the Kootenai sturgeon spawn in colder water and are slower growing. They can be impacted by water quality, habitat loss, and variations in river flow. Fertilized egg and embryo survival is currently very low, resulting in few wild juvenile fish.

Brian Kelly, Idaho State Supervisor for the Service, said, “The Kootenai River white sturgeon is a good example of a species that will require creative approaches to recovery. Ongoing collaborative efforts, such as the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho’s hatchery augmentation program is an excellent example of such work. Although

efforts to increase the natural reproduction of wild sturgeon in upper river reaches have not yet produced the results we'd like to see, we believe collaborative partner efforts are significant steps." Kelly added, "It's necessary to recognize that river health is necessary to sustain the population. River restoration such as the Kootenai River Ecosystem Restoration Project will serve sturgeon recovery well into the future."

Kelly further noted, "The Service can not recover this endangered species alone. We applaud Kootenai River sturgeon recovery efforts of the Kootenai River White Sturgeon Recovery Team, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Bonneville Power Administration, the States' of Idaho and Montana, and the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho. We also recognize the great efforts of north Idaho's Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative (KVRI). Together with others, we believe we will make progress on sturgeon recovery."

The five-year review also recommends updating the Kootenai sturgeon Recovery Plan. Other actions that may benefit the fish include further research and monitoring. The Kootenai River white sturgeon five-year review will be posted online at <http://ecos/fws.gov>, search for: white sturgeon. It will also be available at <http://www.fws.gov/idaho>, or by contacting the Idaho Fish and Wildlife Office, Northern Idaho Field Office, 11103 East Montgomery Drive, Spokane Valley, WA 99206; 509-891-6839. For more information about the review or the species, please contact Jason Flory at 509-893-8003, jason_flory@fws.gov.

The ESA provides a critical safety net for America's native fish, wildlife and plants, and to date has prevented the extinction of hundreds of imperiled species across the nation, as well as promoting the recovery of many others. America's fish, wildlife and plant resources belong to all of us, and ensuring the health of imperiled species is a shared responsibility. We're working to actively engage conservation partners and the public in the search for improved and innovative ways to conserve and recover imperiled species. To learn more about the Endangered Species Program, go to <http://www.fws.gov/Endangered>.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.

-FWS-