

# White Sturgeon in the Gorge: The Latest News and What's to Come

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## Abstract

White sturgeons are endemic to the Pacific Coast of North America and found throughout most of the Columbia River basin. These large (> 600kg, >6 m), long-lived (>100y) cartilaginous fishes mature late (15-30 y) and exhibit an iteroparous spawning nature, unlike most anadromous salmonids. Females generally spawn every 2-5 years, males 1-3 years. Early life history is moderately known, as is diet, spawning requirements and diet. Growth rates are rapid with yearling fish reaching 30-40cm fork length. Juvenile growth rates average 2-8 cm/yr, although documented growth rate peaks near sexually maturity and then declines gradually. This protracted growth and slow rate of maturity makes management of white sturgeon particularly challenging as they are easily overharvested and take years to rebound from such events. Population structure for Bonneville, The Dalles, and John Day reservoirs is well documented and is key to maintaining population structure and viability while supporting tribal commercial and subsistence fisheries and a year round (partly catch and release) sport fisheries. Populations in the Columbia River basin exhibit a declining abundance with increasing distance from the Pacific Ocean relationship. Populations in the upper middle Columbia (upstream of Priest Rapids Dam) are quite small and exhibit an irregular populations structure. Recent FERC relicensing of these projects has included supplementation programs for these white sturgeon populations in an effort to restore a consistent age structure and eventually over time, self-sustaining populations.