

October 6, 2006

Mark Walker
Director of Public Affairs
Northwest Power & Conservation Council
851 SW 6th Avenue, Suite 1100
Portland, Oregon 97204-1348

Re: White sturgeon maturation study –principal investigator, Dr. Molly Webb

Dear Mr. Walker,

I am writing on behalf of the Upper Columbia White Sturgeon Technical Working Group as well as the Canadian National Recovery Team in regard to pending funding decisions by the NWPPC. As you are no doubt aware white sturgeon experience a number of challenges throughout the Columbia River Basin, with some populations experiencing little or no recruitment over many years. Within the Canadian portion of the basin the distinct populations units in the transboundary sections of the Kootenay/i and Columbia Rivers have recently been federally listed as endangered under the Canadian Species at Risk Act. The various parties involved in recovery implementation encourage the funding projects throughout the watershed that provide broadly applicable results.

Given the particular challenges presented by studying white sturgeon, such as the cost of studies and their duration, strategic coordination is certainly desirable. Ongoing communication amongst sturgeon researchers is supported by gatherings such as the recent sturgeon summit, though I understand that the outcomes of that work were not available to help support your decisions. That is unfortunate, since that sort of planning document provides the best means to prioritize studies with system wide applicability. I encourage completion of the sturgeon summit report as soon as possible, to assist not only the NWPPC but also our research and recovery efforts in Canada.

One particular study that I am aware of and which would definitely provide information applicable throughout the basin, is a study being proposed by Dr. Molly Webb. The last three years of this study will provide information on the spawning interval of this species, which is an uncertainty present for all white sturgeon populations. The lack of information on this aspect of white sturgeon biology attests to the challenges obtaining it. Dr. Webb's study is uniquely placed to study this aspect of white sturgeon biology, since the lower section of the Columbia River is the only location within the basin where such a study can be reasonably undertaken. Given that her work is has already been underway for a number of years, the lack of other studies addressing interspawning interval, and the relatively low expense of gathering the remaining data, it seems very important that this study should be completed. I certainly do not hesitate in saying that this study will provide important information for conservation and management of white sturgeon in the Canadian portion of the basin. Hopefully there is some means by which the NWPPC may be able to provide funding to support this project.

As indicated above we have been undertaking recovery planning activities in British Columbia as well. If these exercises can be of any further use to you in the prioritization of funding for white sturgeon please do not hesitate to contact me.

Best regards,

Steve McAdam
Chair, Upper Columbia White Sturgeon Technical Working Group
Chair, National White Sturgeon Technical Coordinating Committee