

Hydlo and FRIENDS unplugged

Why are sturgeon in the Rupert River such a big deal for Hydro?



Hydlo and Friends is a program broadcast by JBCCS. Its hosts, Luke MacLeod and Réal Courcelles, discuss various matters related to Hydro-Québec activities on Eeyou Istchee lands. Swapping their mike for a pen, they invite you to explore various aspects of the Eastmain-1-A/Sarcelle/Rupert project.

For a number of reasons. For one thing, the species is highly prized by the Crees. For another, sturgeon is sensitive to changes in breeding habitat. Furthermore, given that adult sturgeon in the rivers of Eeyou Istchee are over 30 years old by the time they spawn for the first time, and only spawn once every 5 to 9 years after that, it is advisable to take all necessary precautions. With this in mind, HQ/SEBJ is taking major steps to ensure that the species survives.

Closely monitored spawning grounds

The sturgeon spawning grounds along the Rupert River and in the diversion bays are being monitored to ensure their continued use in the spring. These include existing spawning grounds, particularly the large ones identified early on by Cree land users at Genawmee (KP216), Kaiapshemshii (KP280) and KP290 of the Rupert River, as well as the man-made ones created at the outlet of Mesgouez Lake (KP333), at KP290 below the new fish pass and at KP35 of the Misticawissich River.

How do we know if spawning is successful? Small mats called egg traps (see photo) are placed in the area

to “trap” sturgeon eggs, and to help assess the use of both natural and man-made spawning grounds. Each spawning ground will be monitored for three years.



An egg trap...trapping eggs!

Monitoring sturgeon larval drift

As of late May, sturgeon larval drift is also being monitored. Drift nets have been set below the spawning grounds at KP 216, KP 280 and KP 290 to catch larvae that have hatched just upstream. This makes it possible to estimate the number of larvae produced at these spawning grounds. In 2010, the spawning grounds on the Rupert River proved to be very productive, despite the exceptionally hot, dry conditions that prevailed that year.



Virginia Matoush, a Nemaska resident, helping to transport brood fish

From the hatchery to your plate

At the end of May, once the temperature of the water in the Rupert River reaches about 8 degrees, a team from Environnement Illimité started catching adult sturgeon. About 25 males and females caught at KP 280 are temporarily being kept where the females' eggs are extracted and fertilized.

The objective is to produce some 5,000 young-of-the-year, 6 to 10 cm long, to be released into the river between KP 110 and KP 170. Why this particular stretch? Because it is considered favourable habitat for sturgeon. HQ/SEBJ also wanted to give the population in the area a push.

Obviously, stocking 5,000 young-of-the-year now does not necessarily mean that there will be an equal number of adult fish in 30 years. It is impossible to know exactly how successful the stocking effort will be. According to a number of specialists, stocking 5,000 young-of-the-year could result in the survival of over a hundred mature sturgeons. One thing is certain, however; stocking does not replace the management of the resource.

The sturgeon farming and stocking program will end in 2012 with the closing of Eastmain workcamp.



Anna Swallow preparing a sturgeon at Old Nemaska



Freshly stocked sturgeon young-of-the-year