

**WHITE STURGEON MANAGEMENT PLAN**  
**WELLS HYDROELECTRIC PROJECT**  
**FERC PROJECT NO. 2149**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The White Sturgeon Management Plan (WSMP) is one of six Aquatic Resource Management Plans contained within the Aquatic Settlement Agreement (Agreement). Collectively, these six Aquatic Resource Management Plans are critical to direct implementation of Protection, Mitigation, and Enhancement measures (PMEs) during the term of the new license and, together with the Wells Anadromous Fish Agreement and Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) will function as the Water Quality Attainment Plan (WQAP) in support of the Clean Water Act Section 401 Water Quality Certification for the Wells Hydroelectric Project (Project).

To ensure active stakeholder participation and support, the Public Utility District No. 1 of Douglas County (Douglas) developed all of the resource management plans in close coordination with agency and tribal natural resource managers (Aquatic Settlement Work Group or Aquatic SWG). During the development of this plan, the Aquatic SWG focused on developing management priorities for resources potentially impacted by Project operations. Members of the Aquatic SWG include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology), Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation (Colville), the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Indian Nation (Yakama), and Douglas.

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) was invited to participate in the development of Aquatic Resource Management Plans, but declined because its interests are currently satisfied by the measures within the HCP.

The goal of the WSMP is to increase the white sturgeon (*Acipenser transmontanus*) population in the Wells Reservoir to a level that can be supported by the available habitat and characterized by a diverse age structure consisting of multiple cohorts (juvenile and adult). In addition, the WSMP is intended to support spawning, rearing and migration as identified by the aquatic life designated use under WAC 173-201A in the Washington state water quality standards. Based upon the information available as of December 2006, the Aquatic SWG determined that an assessment of Project effects on white sturgeon was not practical given sturgeon life history characteristics and the limited number of fish estimated to exist in the Project. Therefore, the Aquatic SWG concluded that resource measures related to white sturgeon should focus on population protection and enhancement by means of supplementation as an initial step in order to increase the number of fish within the Wells Reservoir. In addition to the initial supplementation activities, implementation of a monitoring and evaluation program shall be conducted to accurately assess natural recruitment, juvenile habitat use, emigration rates, carrying capacity, and the potential for natural reproduction so as to inform the scope of a future, longer-term supplementation strategy. All objectives were developed in order to meet the WSMP goal. The PMEs presented within the WSMP are designed to meet the following objectives:

Objective 1: Supplement the white sturgeon population in order to address Project effects, including impediments to migration and associated bottlenecks in spawning and recruitment;

Objective 2: Determine the effectiveness of the supplementation activities through a monitoring and evaluation program;

Objective 3: Determine the potential for natural reproduction in the Wells Reservoir in order to appropriately inform the scope of future supplementation activities;

Objective 4: Adaptively manage the supplementation program as warranted by the monitoring results;

Objective 5: Evaluate whether there is biological merit to providing safe and efficient adult upstream passage;

Objective 6: Identify white sturgeon educational opportunities that coincide with WSMP activities.

This WSMP is intended to be compatible with other white sturgeon management plans in the Columbia River mainstem. Furthermore, this management plan is intended to be not inconsistent with other management strategies and recovery goals of federal, state and tribal natural resource management agencies. The WSMP is not intended to be a harvest management plan and does not create or supersede jurisdiction over fisheries management decisions made by the responsible fishery agencies and tribes. However, the WSMP activities are expected to ultimately support appropriate and reasonable harvest opportunities consistent with the goals of the responsible fishery agencies and tribes and designated use for harvest under WAC 173-201A identified in the Washington state water quality standards. Should the responsible fishery agencies and tribes determine that there is an ongoing harvestable surplus of sturgeon in the Wells Reservoir, then this indicates significant progress toward achievement of the goals and objectives of this plan.

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The White Sturgeon Management Plan (WSMP) is one of six Aquatic Resource Management Plans contained within the Aquatic Settlement Agreement (Agreement). Collectively, these six Aquatic Resource Management Plans are critical to direct implementation of Protection, Mitigation, and Enhancement measures (PMEs) during the term of the new license and, together with the Wells Anadromous Fish Agreement and Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) will function as the Water Quality Attainment Plan (WQAP) in support of the Clean Water Act Section 401 Water Quality Certification for the Wells Hydroelectric Project (Project).

To ensure active stakeholder participation and support, the Public Utility District No. 1 of Douglas County (Douglas) developed all of the resource management plans in close coordination with agency and tribal natural resource managers (Aquatic Settlement Work Group or Aquatic SWG). During the development of this plan, the Aquatic SWG focused on developing management priorities for resources potentially impacted by Project operations. Entities invited to participate in the Aquatic SWG include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology), Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation (Colville), the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Indian Nation (Yakama), and Douglas.

The WSMP will direct implementation of measures to protect against and mitigate for potential Project impacts on white sturgeon (*Acipenser transmontanus*). To ensure active stakeholder involvement and support, Douglas developed this plan, along with the other aquatic management plans, in close coordination with the members of the Aquatic SWG.

The Aquatic SWG agrees on the need to develop a plan for the long-term management of white sturgeon in the Project. This management plan summarizes the relevant resource issues and background (Section 2), identifies the goal and objectives of the plan (Section 3), and describes the relevant PMEs (Section 4) for white sturgeon during the term of the new license.

## **2.0 BACKGROUND**

### **2.1 White Sturgeon Biology**

White sturgeon are the largest of all North American freshwater fish. They are found in marine waters and freshwaters of rivers along the Pacific coast from Monterey, California to Cook Inlet in northwestern Alaska (Wydoski and Whitney 2003). Significant populations of the Pacific Coast appear to be restricted to three locations: the Sacramento, Fraser, and Columbia rivers (Lane 1991). White sturgeon are distributed throughout the U.S. portion of the Columbia River and in many of its larger tributaries. Historically, white sturgeon migrated throughout the mainstem Columbia River from the estuary to the headwaters, although passage was probably limited at times by large rapids and falls (Brannon and Setter 1992).

White sturgeon are long-lived fish, with fin ray analysis documenting fish over 100 years in age (Beamesderfer et al. 1995). This anadromous species has been reported to reach a length of 20 feet and a weight of 1,800 pounds (Wydoski and Whitney 2003). In the Columbia River, white sturgeon spawn in the spring between April and July. Only a small percentage of adult white sturgeon in the Columbia River spawn in a given year. Intervals between spawning have been estimated to be between 3 and 11 years. White sturgeon deposit eggs through broadcast spawning at water temperatures between 10 and 18°C. Mature white sturgeon commonly produce between 100,000 and 300,000 eggs, but larger fish may produce up to 3 million eggs (Wydoski and Whitney 2003). Spawning and egg incubation in the Columbia River occur in the swiftest water available (2.6-9.2 feet per second) at depths between 13.1 and 65.6 feet over cobble, boulder, and bedrock substrates (Wydoski and Whitney 2003). In mainstem Columbia River reservoirs, spawning occurred within 5 miles downstream of the mainstem dams. Eggs hatch in approximately 7 days at 15°C.

Columbia River white sturgeon are reported to have declined in numbers because of numerous factors, including obstruction of migration by mainstem hydroelectric dams, altered stream flows, altered hydrologic regimes, altered temperature regimes, reduced spawning habitat, and over harvest (van der Leeuw et al. 2006; Wydoski and Whitney 2003). Variations in population characteristics also have been attributed to differences in exploitation rates and recruitment success, access to marine food resources, and suitability of hydrologic conditions and available habitats (Devore et al. 1995). During the 1800s, prior to construction of mainstem hydroelectric dams on the Columbia River, white sturgeon were in great demand for their caviar and smoked flesh. In 1892, during the peak of commercial harvest activities, approximately 2.5 million kilograms of white sturgeon were harvested (Wydoski and Whitney 2003). Regulations of the white sturgeon fishery began with a 4-foot minimum size limit established in 1899. Several regulations were established from 1899 to 2000 to manage the fishery in the lower Columbia River, although, effective recovery efforts did not begin until spawners were protected in the 1950s (Wydoski and Whitney 2003).

Beginning in the 1930s, with the construction of Rock Island, Grand Coulee, and Bonneville dams, migration was disrupted because white sturgeon generally do not pass upstream through fishways that were built for salmon, although they do pass downstream through dams (Lepla et al. 2001). Construction of hydroelectric projects in the mid-Columbia River Basin, such as Priest Rapids, Wanapum, Rock Island, Rocky Reach, and Wells has also affected the upstream movement of white sturgeon. Current populations in the Columbia River basin can be divided into three groups: fish below the Bonneville Dam, with access to the ocean; fish isolated functionally, but not genetically, between dams; and fish in several large tributaries. However, the population dynamics and factors regulating production of white sturgeon within isolated populations in the mid-Columbia River reservoirs such as the Rocky Reach and Wells reservoirs are not well understood.

## **2.2 White Sturgeon Management and Recovery Efforts**

Management programs to protect and restore white sturgeon in the Kootenai River and the upper Columbia River are on-going and have provided a relevant framework for the development of a white sturgeon management plan in the Wells Reservoir. The Kootenai and upper Columbia sturgeon recovery efforts have also provided a good technical framework for implementing a sturgeon management plan. The strategies and activities outlined in these aforementioned management programs have provided important information, which has been used to develop an effective WSMP.

### **2.2.1 Kootenai River White Sturgeon Recovery**

In the early 1990s following concerns that white sturgeon populations were decreasing due to near total recruitment failure, a detailed monitoring program was instituted by the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) to provide more information on white sturgeon species status in the Kootenai River system. In 1994, the USFWS listed the Kootenai stock of white sturgeon as an endangered species, which introduced a higher level of management and control by various authorities in the drainage and region. A Recovery Team was established to provide technical direction regarding hatchery supplementation efforts. A final Kootenai White Sturgeon Recovery Plan was signed by the USFWS in 1999.

Kootenai white sturgeon recovery efforts consist of a multi-faceted approach aimed at improving survival at various life history stages. Coordinated flow releases during spring are a major habitat restoration focus designed to increase natural recruitment, although currently it is difficult to assess the relationship between flows and recruitment success (USFWS 1999). Directed stocking programs, which address genetic concerns, stocking rates, and fish size at release, have also been implemented to boost juvenile sturgeon in the Kootenai system. The Kootenai Tribe of Idaho in collaboration with the Kootenay Trout Hatchery (KTH) in Canada are primarily responsible for producing high-quality juvenile white sturgeon for the directed stocking program. Information collected from annual monitoring activities, which assess survival, growth rates, and natural spawning success, allow for an adaptive management approach with regards to the stocking program.

### **2.2.2 Upper Columbia River White Sturgeon Recovery**

In 2002, a bi-national Recovery Team, termed the Upper Columbia White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative (UCWSRI) finalized the Upper Columbia White Sturgeon Recovery Plan in response to concerns that the transboundary white sturgeon population residing between Hugh L. Keenleyside Dam and Grand Coulee Dam consists of an aging and declining population with extremely limited recruitment. The Recovery Team, consisting of technical representatives from Federal, Provincial, and State resource management agencies and from Canadian and U.S. tribes, directs the recovery program.

Due to near total recruitment failure over the past two decades, a decision was made early in the recovery planning process to move immediately to development of a hatchery program to produce juvenile sturgeon for stocking (UCWSRI 2002). The breeding plan (Kincaid 1993) developed for the Kootenai sturgeon program was used as a model for the upper Columbia

sturgeon. Rearing of all fish for the stocking program occurs at the KTH. Similar to the Kootenai recovery strategy, a juvenile index monitoring program to assess growth, survival, health, distribution, and relative abundance of released juveniles shall provide information essential to monitoring the upper Columbia sturgeon population and the success of the hatchery stocking program.

### **2.2.3 Rocky Reach White Sturgeon Management Plan**

The relicensing process for the Rocky Reach Hydroelectric Project brought fisheries agencies, tribes, and interested parties together in a Natural Resources Working Group (NRWG) that provided an opportunity for comprehensive review of current and future management priorities for fish resources potentially impacted by ongoing Project operations (Chelan PUD 2005). In 2004 and 2005, NRWG members collaborated on the development of goals and objectives to manage the white sturgeon population within the Rocky Reach Project boundary under the new license. Based upon the information collected from white sturgeon field studies implemented by Chelan PUD in 2001 and 2002, a white sturgeon management plan was developed to promote population growth of sturgeon to a level commensurate with the available habitat. The Rocky Reach management plan measures include the implementation of a white sturgeon supplementation program, a monitoring program to determine population characteristics, and tracking surveys to determine movements and to assess potential spawning locations.

### **2.2.4 Priest Rapids Project White Sturgeon Management Plan**

As part of the Priest Rapids Project relicensing, white sturgeon populations were investigated in the Priest Rapids and Wanapum reservoirs from 1999 to 2003. Results of the study have assisted in identifying a framework for the future development and implementation of a Priest Rapids Project White Sturgeon Management Plan. Biological objectives associated with this management plan consist of increasing white sturgeon populations to a level commensurate with available habitat through a supplementation program and the implementation of a monitoring program to determine population characteristics such as natural recruitment, spawning, rearing, growth, survival, and rates of emigration.

## **2.3 Project White Sturgeon Study**

Since little information existed on the status of white sturgeon populations in the mid-Columbia, Chelan, Grant, and Douglas PUDs each initiated studies of white sturgeon to support their current or upcoming relicensing processes. The information gathered from these studies was intended to provide basic white sturgeon life history information, distribution, and current population sizes in the mid-Columbia River Basin. Additionally, study results provided the foundation for the development of appropriate management goals and objectives.

From 2001-2003, Douglas implemented a study to examine the white sturgeon population within the Project. Prior to the implementation of this study, little information on white sturgeon was available for the Wells Reservoir. WDFW catch record card returns for 1993 and 1994 indicate that legal size white sturgeon were present in the Wells Reservoir (Brad James, WDFW, pers. comm.). Additionally, information from previous studies in reservoirs upstream and downstream supported the existence of a population. The primary objectives of the study were to provide

basic information on the population abundance, age structure, size, and growth of Project white sturgeon; analyze movements of white sturgeon within the Reservoir; and compare the data collected during this study with data collected during assessments at other projects (Jerald 2007).

During the summers of 2001 and 2002, setlines were deployed in the Wells Reservoir. Sturgeon captured on setlines were measured, marked with passive integrated transponder (PIT) tags and with scute markings. Additionally, a select number of captured fish were fitted with radio-transmitters to track movements and had pectoral fin rays removed for age analysis using standard methodologies (Beamesderfer et al. 1989).

Setline sampling took place over a two-year timeframe with a total of 129 setlines deployed and retrieved from throughout the reservoir. In total, 13 white sturgeon were captured during the 2-year study with the majority of the fish being captured in the Columbia River within five miles of the mouth of the Okanogan River. Twelve of the captured fish were PIT tagged. Subsequently, five recapture events were recorded for a total of 18 capture events during the mark-recapture period (one fish was recaptured twice). Population abundance was estimated to be  $31.35 \pm 17.51$ . The 95% confidence interval for sturgeon abundance was calculated to be CI (13 < N < 218). The results of the mark-recapture portion of the study indicated that the sturgeon population in the Wells Reservoir is small with a point estimate of 31 fish over 50 cm in length (Skalski and Townsend 2005).

The length of the 13 fish captured during the study ranged from 60-202 cm. Two of the fish were classified as juveniles (<90 cm fork length) while 11 were classified as sub-adults or adults. It is important to note that the capture methodology was not designed to provide accurate sampling of fish under 50 cm. Captured sturgeon ranged in age from 6 to 30 years old (based on 11 fish) demonstrating that all of these fish recruited to the Wells Reservoir after Wells Dam was completed in 1967 with strong year class recruitment between the years 1972 and 1978 and again between 1988 and 1996. The presence of fish within these age classes suggests that successful recruitment within or to the Wells Reservoir is occurring either through (1) spawning within the Wells Reservoir and/or (2) immigration into the Wells Reservoir from populations upstream. Two white sturgeon were captured in 2001 and subsequently recaptured in 2002 to provide limited growth rate information. One juvenile fish was measured at 65 cm (fork length) on July 11, 2001. The fish was again captured on September 26, 2002 and measured 87 cm. This represented a growth rate of 22 cm in 14 months, or 18.9 cm/year. One adult fish was captured on August 9, 2001 measuring 197 cm (fork length). The fish was subsequently captured on September 6, 2002 and measured 199 cm representing a 2 cm growth rate over approximately 13 months, or 1.85 cm/year (Jerald 2007). In October 2006, this fish was found dead along the shoreline of the Columbia River adjacent to the mouth of the Okanogan River. At that time, biologists measured the fish at 228.5 cm representing a 29.5 cm increase in length over a four year period or an average of 7.4 cm of growth per year.

A total of six white sturgeon were fitted with radio-tags and monitored throughout the study period using mobile and fixed telemetry. Telemetry data along with setline capture data verify that white sturgeon congregate in the Columbia River near the Okanogan River confluence during the summer, fall, and winter months with none of the six fish being detected downstream from Brewster (RM 530) or upstream of Park Island (RM 538). Very little movement of tagged



sturgeon was observed during winter months. In the spring of 2002, one of the five mature fish radio-tagged made an upstream migration into the Okanogan River and two different radio-tagged mature sized sturgeon made movements into the Okanogan River during 2003.

In general, the results of the white sturgeon study in the Wells Reservoir were similar to the results of a study conducted in the neighboring Rocky Reach Reservoir in 2001-2002 (Chelan PUD 2005). Results indicate that the Wells Reservoir adult sturgeon population is estimated from 13-217 fish. These results are similar to the Rocky Reach assessment which estimated numbers of sturgeon from 50-115 fish. Both studies captured similar numbers of sturgeon using similar amounts of effort and similar capture techniques (Rocky Reach=18 sturgeon, Wells=13 sturgeon). Radio-telemetry data from both studies suggest that very little activity occurs during the overwintering period. Wells Reservoir sturgeon ranged in age from 6 to 30 years old while Rocky Reach sturgeon ranged in age from 7 to 50 years old. Both studies suggest that some recruitment into each population is occurring given the presence of juvenile fish in their respective reservoirs (Chelan PUD 2005; Jerald 2007).

### **3.0 GOAL AND OBJECTIVES**

The goal of the WSMP is to increase the white sturgeon population in the Wells Reservoir to a level that can be supported by the available habitat and characterized by a diverse age structure consisting of multiple cohorts (juvenile and adult). In addition, the WSMP is intended to support spawning, rearing and migration as identified by the aquatic life designated use under WAC 173-201A in the Washington state water quality standards. Based upon the available information, the Aquatic SWG agreed that a rigorous and reliable assessment of ongoing Project effects on white sturgeon was not practical given sturgeon life history characteristics and the limited number of fish estimated to exist in the Wells Reservoir. Therefore, the Aquatic SWG concluded that efforts should focus, initially, on supplementation efforts to increase the population within the Wells Reservoir in order to address Project effects. Once the population numbers have been increased to a level that can be studied, as determined by the Aquatic SWG, Douglas shall implement a monitoring and evaluation program to accurately assess natural recruitment, juvenile habitat use, emigration rates, carrying capacity, and the potential for natural reproduction so as to inform the scope of a future, long-term supplementation strategy. The PME's of the WSMP are designed to meet the following objectives:

Objective 1: Supplement the white sturgeon population in order to address Project effects, including impediments to migration and associated bottlenecks in spawning and recruitment;

Objective 2: Determine the effectiveness of the supplementation activities through a monitoring and evaluation program;

Objective 3: Determine the potential for natural reproduction in the Wells Reservoir in order to appropriately inform the scope of future supplementation activities;

Objective 4: Adaptively manage the supplementation program as warranted by the monitoring results and in consultation with the Aquatic SWG;

Objective 5: Evaluate whether there is biological merit to providing safe and efficient adult upstream passage;

Objective 6: Identify white sturgeon educational opportunities that coincide with WSMP activities.

This WSMP is intended to be compatible with other white sturgeon management plans in the Columbia River mainstem. Furthermore, this management plan is intended to be not inconsistent with other management strategies and recovery goals of federal, state and tribal natural resource management agencies. The WSMP is not intended to be a harvest management plan and does not create or supersede jurisdiction over fisheries management decisions made by the responsible fishery agencies and tribes. However, the WSMP activities are expected to ultimately support appropriate and reasonable harvest opportunities consistent with the goals of the responsible fishery agencies and tribes and designated use for harvest under WAC 173-201A identified in the Washington state water quality standards. Should the responsible fishery agencies and tribes determine that there is an ongoing harvestable surplus of sturgeon in the Wells Reservoir, then this indicates significant progress toward achievement of the goals and objectives of this plan.

Douglas in consultation with the Aquatic SWG, developed the goal, objectives, and PMEs described in this section. The extent to which implementation of the proposed PMEs successfully achieve the WSMP goal and objectives identified shall be determined through the monitoring and evaluation program. Once the results of the monitoring and evaluation program have been considered, Douglas shall determine, in consultation with the Aquatic SWG, whether changes to the sturgeon stocking program are needed to meet the goals and objectives of the management plan.

The schedule for implementation of specific measures within the WSMP is based on the best information available at the time the Plan was developed. As new information becomes available, implementation of each activity may be adjusted through consultation with the Aquatic SWG.

#### **4.0 PROTECTION, MITIGATION AND ENHANCEMENT MEASURES**

In order to fulfill the goal and objectives described in Section 3.0, Douglas, in consultation with the ASWG, shall develop and implement a white sturgeon management program that includes PMEs. The Program shall be designed for implementation in two phases. Phase I of the PMEs shall be implemented during the first ten years of the new license and consist of supplementation, monitoring and evaluation activities. Results of Phase I PMEs will be used to inform the scope of continued PMEs during Phase II, which shall be implemented for the remainder of the new license.

Douglas, in consultation with the ASWG, shall initiate implementation of the following PME during the 50-year license term:

#### Phase I (Years 1-10)

- Development of a Brood Stock Collection and Breeding Plan (Year 1 and updated as determined by the Aquatic SWG, See Section 4.1.1);
- Brood Stock Collection (Years 1-4 and other years TBD by the Aquatic SWG, see Section 4.1.1);
- Juvenile Stocking (Years 2-5 and other years TBD by the Aquatic SWG, see Section 4.1.2);
- Index Monitoring Program (Years 3-5 and 2 more years prior to Year 10 TBD by the Aquatic SWG, see Section 4.2.1);
- Marked Fish Tracking (Years 3-5 and 2 more years prior to Year 10 TBD by the Aquatic SWG, see Section 4.2.2);
- Natural Reproduction Assessments (5 annual assessments over the license term, see Section 4.2.3)\*;

\* Natural reproduction assessments can be implemented over the term of the license (Phase I and Phase II) as determined by the Aquatic SWG.

#### Phase II (Years 11-50)

- Long-term juvenile stocking (stocking rate and frequency TBD by Aquatic SWG in Years 11-50, see Section 4.4.1);
- Supplementation Program Review (Years 11-50 TBD by the Aquatic SWG, see Section 4.4.2);
- Long-term Index Monitoring Program (Year 12 and once every 3-5 years thereafter TBD by the Aquatic SWG, see Section 4.4.3);
- Adult Passage Evaluation (Year 11 and once every 10 years thereafter, see Section 4.4)

As determined by the Aquatic SWG, appropriate educational opportunities coinciding with implementation of WSMP activities (Section 4.5) will be made available during the entire 50 year license term.

The following sections describe, in detail, the components, timing of implementation, and decision-making process of the PMEs to be conducted during Phase I and II of the white sturgeon management program.

## **4.1 Phase I Supplementation Program (Objective 1)**

### **4.1.1 Brood Stock Collection and Breeding Plan**

Due to the low numbers of sturgeon indicated by the 2001-2003 white sturgeon study and the need to increase genetic variation, there is a low probability that brood stock from only the Wells Reservoir can be utilized as the basis for supplementation activities. Consequently, other sources of fish must be considered in addition to capturing fish from Wells Reservoir to increase the white sturgeon population. Within one year of issuance of the new license Douglas shall prepare and implement a Brood Stock Collection and Breeding Plan, in consultation with the Aquatic SWG, which considers such factors as genetics and questions of imprinting, and are consistent with the goal and objectives of the WSMP and includes the level of detail provided in other existing white sturgeon breeding plans.

Following is a prioritized list of juvenile fish source options that shall be incorporated into a Brood Stock Collection and Breeding Plan:

- Brood stock collected from the Wells Reservoir;
- Brood stock collected from nearby reservoirs (Priest Rapids, Wanapum, Rocky Reach, Rock Island);
- Brood stock collected from McNary Reservoir;
- Juvenile production from the Lake Roosevelt white sturgeon recovery effort;
- Brood stock collected from below Bonneville Dam in the lower Columbia River;
- Juveniles purchased from a commercial facility.

A white sturgeon supplementation program may include, but may not be limited to, the following implementation options (Not listed in a priority order):

- Build new or retrofit existing Douglas funded hatchery facilities to accommodate white sturgeon brood stock, egg incubation, and juvenile rearing;
- Development of a mid-Columbia hatchery facility funded by the three PUDs (Douglas, Chelan, and Grant) to accommodate various phases of white sturgeon supplementation; brood stock, egg incubation, and juvenile rearing;
- Direct release into the Wells Reservoir of juveniles produced via appropriate Breeding Plan criteria and reared at a commercial facility;
- Direct release into the Wells Reservoir juveniles or adults trapped and hauled from the lower Columbia River.

The initial source of brood stock shall be determined within the first year of issuance of the new license. Collection of brood stock shall occur consistent with the brood stock collection plan in years 1-4 of the new license. Any additional years during the Phase I program (first ten years of the new license) in which brood stock collection shall occur in order to facilitate additional juvenile stocking into the Wells Reservoir (Section 4.1.2) will be determined by the Aquatic SWG. The intent of brood stock collection is to use their progeny, if feasible, for future white sturgeon stocking activities in the Wells Reservoir. The brood stock collection plan shall be updated annually, or as otherwise recommended by Douglas in consultation with the ASWG, to incorporate new and appropriate information.

#### **4.1.2 Juvenile White Sturgeon Stocking**

Within two years following issuance of the new license, Douglas shall release up to 5,000 yearling white sturgeon into the Wells Reservoir annually for four consecutive years (20,000 fish total). Additional years and numbers of juvenile sturgeon to be stocked during Phase I will be determined by the Aquatic SWG and will not exceed 15,000 juvenile sturgeon (total of 35,000 juvenile sturgeon during Phase I). In consultation with the Aquatic SWG, yearling fish for release shall be acquired through one or more of the sources listed in priority order in Section 4.1.1 above, or through other measures identified by the Aquatic SWG. If juvenile sturgeon stocking deadlines cannot be achieved, the Aquatic SWG will determine alternative implementation measures that will be undertaken by Douglas (see Table 4.7-1, footnote 2).

Douglas shall ensure that all hatchery-reared juvenile white sturgeon released into the Wells Reservoir are marked with Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) tags and year-specific scute marks for monitoring purposes described in Section 4.2 of this plan. In order to allow for tracking of juvenile white sturgeon emigration described under Section 4.2.2, Douglas shall ensure that up to one percent (or a maximum of 50) of the juvenile white sturgeon released into the Wells Reservoir are large enough to allow implantation of an active tag prior to release. In addition, following the third year of supplementation (unless the Aquatic SWG determines more analysis is required), the Aquatic SWG may elect to release juveniles at an earlier or later life stage for the fourth year in order to compare success of fish released at varying life stages. For example, the Aquatic SWG may elect to have a proportion of the hatchery-reared juveniles released at differing size intervals (with the minimum size being that which permits PIT tagging), in order to monitor potential differences in survival and growth during future indexing periods.

#### **4.2 Phase I Monitoring and Evaluation Program (Objective 2)**

Douglas shall conduct a monitoring and evaluation program within the Wells Reservoir for the purpose of assessing the effectiveness of the supplementation activities described in Section 4.1 and outlined in Table 4.7-1. Monitoring shall include both an Index Monitoring Program (Section 4.2.1) and a Marked Fish Tracking Program (Section 4.2.2). Both of these studies will be used to collect life history and population dynamics information including rates of fish movements into and out of the Wells Reservoir and habitat use. Douglas shall also obtain updated information, when available, on other white sturgeon recovery programs (e.g., Upper Columbia River, Kootenai River, mid-Columbia PUDs), in order to improve the monitoring and evaluation program and refine its implementation. The results of this information will also inform supplementation, monitoring and evaluation activities during implementation of Phase II of the WSMP.

#### **4.2.1 Index Monitoring Program**

Within three years following issuance of the New License, Douglas shall initiate a three-year index monitoring program (Years 3-5) for juvenile and adult sturgeon in the Wells Reservoir to determine age-class structure, survival rates, abundance, density, condition factor, growth rates, and to identify distribution and habitat selection of juvenile sturgeon. The indexing methods shall include using gillnets, set lines or other appropriate recapture methods for juveniles and adults.

As a component of the Phase I indexing program, Douglas shall capture and implant active tags in a portion of the juvenile and sexually mature adult sturgeon population found in the Wells Reservoir. This tagging effort shall be used to augment broodstock collection (Section 4.1.1), population level information and juvenile habitat use (Section 4.2.2) and natural reproduction potential (Section 4.2.3).

After the initial three-year indexing period (Years 3-5), Douglas shall conduct an additional two years of index monitoring in Phase I as determined by the Aquatic SWG. After year 9, an additional year of index monitoring would take place in year 12 and then every three to five years over the term of the new license (Phase II) to assess age-class structure, survival rates, abundance, condition factor, growth rates; identify distribution and habitat selection of juvenile sturgeon; and to inform the supplementation program strategy (see Table 4.7-1).

Frequency (every 3, 4 or 5 years) of implementation of a long-term index monitoring activities (after year 12) will be determined by the Aquatic SWG. Phase II index monitoring activities will not consist of implantation of active tags in captured individuals.

#### **4.2.2 Marked Fish Tracking Program**

Beginning in year three of the new license and continuing for three years (Years 3-5), Douglas shall conduct tracking surveys of the juvenile white sturgeon that were released with active tags as part of supplementation activities. This will require one percent of each of the annual classes of juvenile sturgeon (up to a maximum of 50 fish each year) released in years 2, 3, 4, and 5 to be reared large enough to implant an active tag for tracking purposes (See Table 4.7-1). The purpose of tracking active-tagged fish is to determine juvenile white sturgeon emigration rates out of the Wells Reservoir and habitat use within the Wells Reservoir.

Douglas shall repeat the tracking survey for two additional years during Phase I (see Table 4.7-1). The additional two years of surveys shall track: 1) active tags implanted in a percentage of juvenile fish from previous years of supplementation activities (dependent upon tag life) and 2) any juvenile and adult fish implanted with active tags during the last indexing period preceding the survey. Subsequent Phase I surveys are likely to coincide with the additional Phase I index monitoring and juvenile stocking activities.

### **4.2.3 Determining Natural Reproduction Potential (Objective 3)**

In years where environmental conditions are appropriate, Douglas shall track sexually mature adult sturgeon that were captured and implanted with active tags under Section 4.2.1 for the purpose of identifying potential spawning locations and determining natural reproduction potential. Appropriate environmental conditions may be determined by examining the following factors: water quality and quantity (i.e., flow, temperature, and turbidity), the presence of reproductively viable adults during index monitoring activities, and the status of maturity for supplemented fish. In years in which sexually mature adult sturgeon are tagged under Section 4.2.1, Douglas may also utilize egg collection mats in combination with tracking in areas of the Wells Reservoir for the purpose of identifying potential spawning locations and activity. Five surveys of natural reproduction using adult tracking and/or egg mat placement shall occur over the term of the new license. Several of these surveys are intended to be implemented during the latter part of the license in order to examine the natural reproductive potential of supplemented fish recruiting to sexual maturity. These activities will support the aquatic life designated use for spawning under WAC 173-201A in the Washington state water quality standards.

### **4.3 Phase II Supplementation and Monitoring Program (Objective 2 and 4)**

The information collected through activities described in Section 4.1-4.3 will provide insight into the population dynamics, habitat availability, and limiting factors that affect the natural population structure of white sturgeon within the Wells Reservoir. This information will inform supplementation, monitoring and evaluation activities during implementation of Phase II supplementation and monitoring activities in the WSMP for the duration of the new license term after year 10.

#### **4.3.1 Long-Term Juvenile White Sturgeon Stocking**

The number and frequency of yearlings released in Phase II of the white sturgeon supplementation program will range from 0 to 5,000 fish. Stocking rates shall be based on the results of the Phase I Monitoring and Evaluation Program (Section 4.2) and determination of carrying capacity (Section 4.3) and shall be consistent with the goal and objectives of the WSMP. The Phase II stocking rates can also be adjusted as determined by the Aquatic SWG (also see Table 4.7-1, footnotes 2 and 3).

#### **4.3.2 Supplementation Program Review**

Douglas shall compile information on other white sturgeon supplementation programs in the Columbia River Basin in order to assess whether the white sturgeon supplementation program being implemented at the Project is: (i) consistent and comparable with the technology and methods being implemented by other supplementation programs in the region; (ii) reasonable in cost and effective to implement at the Project; and (iii) consistent with the supplementation program goals and objectives. The supplementation program review will be conducted annually in coordination with the development of the annual report (Section 4.6).

### **4.3.3 Long-term Index Monitoring Program**

Beginning in Year Twelve of the new license and every 3 to 5 years thereafter for the duration of the new license, Douglas shall continue to conduct a Phase II Index Monitoring Study for juvenile and adult sturgeon in the Wells Reservoir. This program will be used to monitor age-class structure, survival rates, abundance, condition factor, growth rates, identify distribution and habitat selection of juvenile sturgeon, and may continue to support broodstock collection activities. The indexing methods will include using gillnets or other appropriate recapture methods for juveniles and set lines for adults and will not consist of actively tracking fish. Frequency (every 3, 4, or 5 years) of implementation of long-term index monitoring activities (after year 12) will be determined by the Aquatic SWG.

### **4.4 Evaluation and Implementation of Adult Passage Measures (Objective 5)**

In Year Eleven of the new license and every 10 years thereafter for the duration of the new license unless otherwise determined by the Aquatic SWG, the Aquatic SWG shall evaluate the biological merit to providing upstream passage for adult white sturgeon. The assessment of biological merit shall be determined by: (i) evaluating information gathered from monitoring and evaluation activities and determining whether there is significant biological benefit and need for upstream passage; (ii) the availability of reasonable and appropriate means to provide upstream passage; and (iii) consensus from all other operators of the mid-Columbia projects to implement adult upstream passage measures<sup>1</sup>. If all three criteria above are met, Douglas, in consultation with the Aquatic SWG shall develop adult passage measures that are consistent with measures being implemented by other mid-Columbia project operators.

### **4.5 Educational Opportunities Coinciding with WSMP Activities (Objective 6)**

Douglas, in consultation with the Aquatic SWG, shall identify appropriate WSMP activities as opportunities for education to local public entities such as schools, cities, fishing and recreation groups, and other interested local groups. WSMP activities that may be appropriate for public participation are hatchery tours, release of hatchery juveniles, and tagging of juveniles prior to release.

### **4.6 Reporting**

Douglas will provide a draft annual report to the Aquatic SWG summarizing the previous year's activities undertaken in accordance with the WSMP. The report will document all white sturgeon activities conducted within the Project. Furthermore, any decisions, statements of agreement, evaluations, or changes made pursuant to this WSMP will be included in the annual report. If significant activity was not conducted in a given year, Douglas will prepare a memorandum providing an explanation of the circumstances in lieu of the annual report.

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<sup>1</sup> The intent is to provide connectivity to the Hanford Reach white sturgeon population.



## 4.7 Implementation Schedule

Table 4.7-1 outlines an estimated long-term schedule of the activities described in Sections 4.1-4.4.

**Table 4.7-1 Project White Sturgeon Implementation Schedule**

New License Year	Brood Stock Plan and Collection <sup>1</sup>	Release Fish into Wells Reservoir <sup>2</sup>	Index Monitoring <sup>3</sup>	Tracking Marked Fish <sup>4</sup>	Natural Production Assessment <sup>5</sup>	Adult Passage Evaluation
PHASE I						
1	X				TBD	
2	X	X				
3	X	X	X	X	TBD	
4	X	X	X	X		
5	TBD	X	X	X		
6	TBD	TBD			TBD	
7	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD		
8	TBD	TBD				
9	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD		
10	TBD	TBD			TBD	
PHASE II <sup>6</sup>						
11	Level and frequency TBD	Level and frequency TBD				X <sup>7</sup>
12			X			
13-50			TBD		TBD	Every ten years after Year 11

<sup>1</sup>Douglas brood stock plan shall be completed within one year following this issuance of the new license. Brood stock collection activities will occur at a minimum in years 1-4 during the new license term. Additional years, during Phase I, will be determined by the Aquatic SWG. In Year 11 (Phase II), level and frequency of activity will be determined by the Aquatic SWG and will be based upon the level of long-term supplementation identified from monitoring results.

<sup>2</sup>No more than a total of 35,000 fish will be stocked in Phase I (Years 1-10). The Phase II supplementation program will be determined by the Aquatic SWG and consistent with the goal of the WSMP.

<sup>3</sup> Results of the index monitoring activities will be used to determine the scope of future supplementation activities. Index monitoring activities from year 12 through the remainder of the new license term will occur at a frequency of 3-5 years as determined by the Aquatic SWG.

<sup>4</sup> Active-tagged juvenile and adult sturgeon will be tracked to assess emigration, habitat use, and potential spawning locations. This activity will occur in years 3, 4, and 5. Two additional years will be determined by the Aquatic SWG but will likely be consistent with years in which index monitoring activities are implemented.

<sup>5</sup> Tracking of reproductively viable adult sturgeon in combination with deployment of egg collection mats to identify natural production in the Wells Reservoir during 5 separate years over the term of the new license based on flow conditions or other data as determined by the Aquatic SWG.

<sup>6</sup> Phase II activities will consist only of brood stock plan and collection, stocking activities, index monitoring, and potentially natural reproduction assessments for the remainder of the new license.

<sup>7</sup> Adult Passage Evaluations will occur in Year 11 and every 10 years thereafter for the term of the new license.

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