

# A “tail” of two cities

Rivers that burgeon with sturgeon – and those that don’t

by Dave Gibson

Hydroelectricity provides almost seventy percent of Seattle and Washington State’s power. The cheap clean energy has benefitted millions of people, but has come at great expense to salmon, sturgeon, and the ecosystem that is connected to them. Overfishing since the turn of the 20th century for the prized fish and dams built on the Columbia and Snake River systems have decimated their numbers from historic levels in the United States. Subsequent fish ladders installed around dams have bolstered salmon numbers, but sturgeon, normally a bottom-dwelling species, continue to struggle; unable to complete their upstream migration from the ocean to freshwater spawning grounds. A considerable portion of white sturgeon is now landlocked with the breeding areas disturbed by fluctuating flows and unnatural water temperatures.

In British Columbia, Canada, most rivers run as they always have; unimpeded by manmade



DAVE GIBSON

Bob Gibson (right) takes a break from sturgeon fishing long enough to hook this beautiful chum salmon.

structures that would otherwise disrupt a cycle that has been successful for eons. From Vancouver northward, the Fraser River and its tributaries still hold strong populations of white sturgeon. In 1993 the province instituted a zero-harvest policy of sturgeon for all sport fishermen excluding native peoples. Twenty-two years later, the outcome has been extraordinary, resulting in a healthy fishery where anglers can expect to catch several of the Mesozoic Era behemoths in a day averaging between 4 and 7 feet long. On a recent trip

with my father to Chilliwack, BC, we each wrested to shore 7 ft. 200 pounders above the confluence of the Harrison and Fraser Rivers. The world record for these largest of North American freshwater fishes came from the Fraser and measured 12 feet, 4 inches, estimated to be 1,100 lbs. and 100 years old. Feeding on crayfish, clams, mussels, eels, small fish, aquatic invertebrates, and various amphipods such as sea fleas, the real bonanza for the white sturgeon is realized in the summer and fall when dead spawned-out

salmon accumulate on the river-bottoms.

To book a Canadian guided stur-

geon charter, call 604-845-9893 or go to [www.BentRods.ca](http://www.BentRods.ca).



BOB GIBSON

Dave Gibson (right) and guide Rod Toth pose with an average-sized 6 ft. 125 lb. white sturgeon.

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