



Sturgeon Fishing 101 - The Basics

Residents of the Lower Mainland have it all: inflated real estate home prices, Pacific Ocean waterfront, alpine mountains surrounding our vistas, and the potential to swim in the ocean and ski on a glacier the very same day. These attributes are not lost on me, however, I always feel most people overlook the greatest advantage to living where we do - our proximity to the Fraser River. Yes it's a muddy, industrial hub. In reality though, it's a pathway to the interior for migrating Salmon and Steelhead, as well as a great litmus test for the health of our ecology. It is also home to one of North America's largest freshwater fish, the White Sturgeon. These fish are an evolutionary marvel, as they remain relatively unchanged for the last 135 million years. How could a fish, that has survived for so long, possibly be enticed by an angler's presentation? Read on...



I've got a good Bass rod, that'll work right?

NO. NO. NO. If you're going to tackle (pun intended) these behemoths, pay them the respect they deserve. Use gear that will minimize the impact on the fish and your wallet. The rod used by many guides is the 8' Shimano Technium. It has great action, and a strong back bone. The reel you choose will largely depend on your budget, but it will need to hold a few hundred yards of heavy line. A commonly used reel for Sturgeon is a Shimano TLD 20. This is a "lever drag" style reel. Load this reel up with 150lb Power Pro mainline, and use a 130lb braided leader, and you're good to go.

For tackle, you'll put the mainline through a large snap swivel (which will snap onto your weight), followed by 3 or 4 large trout beads and then a large barrel swivel. Now attach a 24" - 36" leader with a size 9 BARBLESS hook, and you're ready for battle.

Where to Fish?

This is more in the general sense, because you'll find Sturgeon from the mouth of the Fraser River, to north of Prince George. If you're fishing from shore, your options are somewhat limited. You'll need slower water, and ideally it will have a depth of at least 20'. Stay away from shale banks, or areas with visible debris on the shore. Your weight needs to rest on the bottom, so snags will make for a frustrating, unproductive day. If you have the luxury of a boat, use a depth sounder to find contour along the bottom. Sturgeon like to minimize their effort to stay in one place, so behind contour is a natural starting point. For example, anchor in 15' of water just above a 20' hole. Deep pools can also be productive, but it can be challenging to keep the boat stationary in large back eddies. Finding water that holds Sturgeon is an art that is never mastered, only practiced.

Recently, the provincial government identified known Sturgeon spawning areas, and instilled a voluntary closure program on the Fraser River. These closures are in May - June and are identified in the BC Freshwater Fishing Synopsis, so check for area closures before you fish.



My dad caught one using a rotten chicken...

... and given the right circumstances, you could probably catch a steelhead using a hunk of cheese. Bait is the main difference between a day of multiple fish and not having a bite. Sturgeon haven't made it this far without knowing the food that *should* be in the river at any given time. In spring, you'll have the best success with Eulachon, Lamprey, Pike Minnow and dew worms. In Summer, you'll need roe, Lamprey, Pike Minnow and fresh Salmon parts (bellies, gills, heads, etc). In the fall, use fresh roe, fresh Salmon parts, and the dreaded "stink bait". This consists of the most hideous, rotten smelling Salmon your stomach can handle. It's a staple for these culinary elitists.



Fish On!

It is a common misconception that Sturgeon are dead weight once hooked. They go on multiple runs, jump, roll and use the current of the river to their advantage. When you have these tools in the arsenal of a 9 foot - 500 lb fish, you'd better be battle-ready. Depending on the size of the fish, you may need to pull up the anchor in your boat to chase it. If you're fishing from shore, you may need to draw a line in the sand and break your line before you lose it all. The "Better Handling Practices" as found in the BC Freshwater Fishing Synopsis says to bring in the fish as quickly as possible to reduce the stress on it. It also states to not lift anything over 60" out of the water. Before undertaking a Sturgeon trip, you should consult these handling practices, and abide by them.



Size Matters

It is not uncommon to achieve a 72" fish for an experienced angler or guide. However, they get much larger. The Fraser River Sturgeon Conservation Society began a tagging program that records the location and size of fish caught by guides and volunteers. This data has shown multiple 11'+ fish caught every year. Some are fish that have never been tagged previously, which is a great indication that the species is doing well.

If we can maintain a healthy ecosystem in the Fraser River, and continue to promote better practices when angling for and handling these fish, we should be able to enjoy their mystique for another 135 million years.

