

# Lake Sturgeon Research



## Background

Contemporaries of dinosaurs, lake sturgeon have remained unchanged for millions of years. Once abundant in the shallows of the Great Lakes, these ancient fish look like fossils sprung to life.

A resident of the Great Lakes for 10,000 years, the lake sturgeon is more than a holdover from the distant past--- it is a barometer of the health and diversity of the entire Great Lakes ecosystem.

Today lake sturgeon inhabit large river and lake systems throughout the Great Lakes, Mississippi River and Hudson Bay drainages.

## Identification:

Lake sturgeon are most readily identified by their uneven tail, long torpedo shape and bony plates along the back and sides.

The lake sturgeon's scales are primitive and the lake sturgeon possesses sensory whiskers (barbels) and an extendable mouth on the underside of their snout.

Many lake sturgeon have been tagged by researchers. Please check the dorsal fin and gill area for a plastic or metal tag and record the numbers.

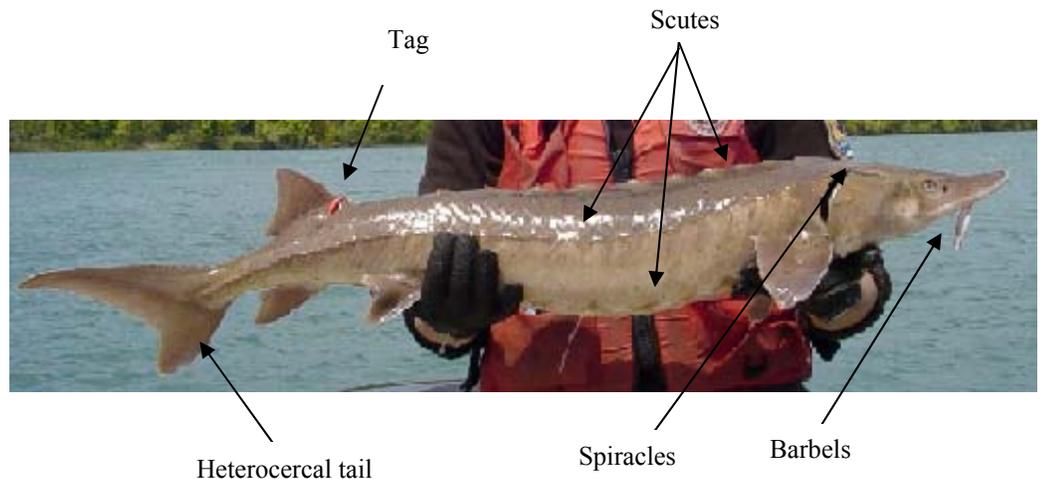
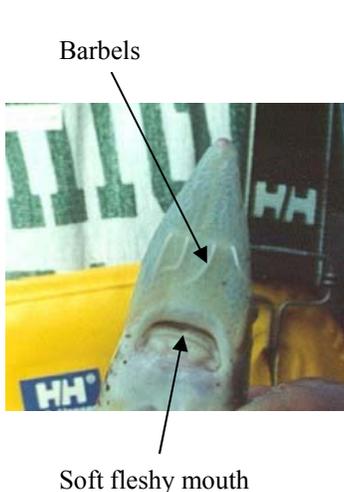
## Genesee River Lake Sturgeon:

- 1900 juvenile lake sturgeon have been stocked by the NYS-DEC in the Genesee River below the Lower Falls from 2003 to 2004. These fish were stocked as part of an experiment to determine if the lower Genesee River is suitable habitat for lake sturgeon.
- This project is part of a larger NYS-DEC program that also includes the St. Regis River, Oswegatchie River, Black Lake, and Oneida Lake. This species is classified as threatened and they are to be released when caught by anglers.
- If you do catch a sturgeon, please let us know! Form on back.



## Survey Information:

- Captured sturgeon will be weighted, measured, marked with a numbered yellow tag through the dorsal fin, and released. The tags have the project phone number.
- Netting will be done to assess the use by lake sturgeon of the nursery area from the river mouth to Lower Falls. Assessments will be done once a month (May to October in 2005) for 4 nights per month.
- The nets marked with buoys attached to the ends (pictured below) will be set at possible sturgeon habitat sites along the Genesee River and checked the following morning. Project contact information is marked on the buoys.
- We request that the buoys and the nets be left undisturbed.



**Reasons To Be Concerned**

Native Americans revered the lake sturgeon as an important part of their culture that provided the community with food, oil, leather and other staples. However early commercial fishermen (before 1850) slaughtered lake sturgeon as a nuisance fish that destroyed fishing nets targeted at other species.

By the mid to late 1800's, the economic value of the lake sturgeon was recognized and a targeted commercial fishery intensified. By 1900 commercial catches began to decline quickly as the population of lake sturgeon plummeted.

Because the lake sturgeon has a slow growth rate, late age of maturity and intermittent spawning, commercial harvests began to exceed the rate of replacement by reproduction.

In addition, other factors influenced the decline of these fish. Essential spawning habitat was destroyed or made unavailable to lake sturgeon as more and more dams were built and more pollution runoff was introduced into the system.

Lake sturgeon populations that remain in the Great Lakes today represent only a tiny fraction of their former number. The lake sturgeon is listed as a threatened species in 19 of the 20 states it inhabits and is recognized by the American Fisheries Society as threatened throughout North America. Lake sturgeon are now protected in most waters of the Great Lakes with closed seasons, size limits, harvest quotas and gear restrictions.



Eric Hirst  
  
Local angler with young sturgeon.

**What Can You Do?**

You too can help protect the lake sturgeon! Here are a few ways you can help protect this species:

- Sponsor a lake sturgeon tank! Educational fish tanks set up in classrooms encourage children to appreciate and take care of our natural resources. This is an ideal way to educate young people for the future.
- Help purchase tags and other essential equipment used to monitor and learn more about the lake sturgeon. The more information we get, the closer we will come to understanding this species and help improve its success in the lakes.
- Release any lake sturgeon you catch and report those who poach to the DEC.
- Help prevent the spread of invasive species and diseases by cleaning all your recreational equipment and using clean ballast technology.
- Sponsor a watershed restoration project or volunteer your time to educate others, raise funds or help out hands on in the field. Every little effort can help improve the environment and the lake sturgeon's chance in the wild.

**For More Information Contact:**

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Watertown, NY 13601



**Report Your Lake Sturgeon!**  
Fax this form to one of the researchers listed in the left column.

Date Caught \_\_\_\_\_

Length \_\_\_\_\_

Tag Number \_\_\_\_\_

Description of Location  
\_\_\_\_\_

