

LAKE STURGEON (*Acipenser fulvescens*)**Description**

The lake sturgeon, like other members of the sturgeon family, typically lacks scales. Instead, bony plates called scutes protect them. Other characteristics include an elongated snout, toothless mouth, four barbels or whiskers behind the mouth. They are a light brown color with a whitish belly. Lake sturgeons differ from other sturgeons by having a relatively conical or rounded snout, unfringed barbels, and no caudal filament on the upper lobe. Lake sturgeons are usually larger than other sturgeon species often reaching 100 pounds. They feed largely on leeches, snails, small clams, and other small invertebrates obtained mostly from the bottoms.

Distribution

Historically in Nebraska, lake sturgeon was abundant in both the Missouri and Platte rivers. The fish are now limited to the Missouri River and the lower reaches of its major tributaries. In Nebraska, the lake sturgeon inhabits the Missouri River drainage.

Habitat

Primary habitat is the bottoms of large, clean, freshwater rivers and lakes. Lake sturgeon is usually found in large, free-flowing rivers with rocky or sandy substrate. Lake sturgeons are found most often at depths of 5-10 meters (COSEWIC 2006), but larger fish occasionally have been taken at depths of up to 43 meters.

Status

Global: G3-Vulnerable. Federally a Species of Concern. State Threatened. Nebraska: S1-Critically Imperiled. The species is threatened through habitat modification, apparent lack of natural reproduction, commercial harvest, and hybridization in parts of its range. Lake sturgeon has a very slow growth rate and do not spawn until 20 years of age. This greatly affects their vulnerability to harvest and habitat changes. Historically abundant and widespread in rivers and lakes from southern Canada to the southeastern U.S.; now much reduced in distribution and abundance as a result of historical overfishing, dams, and water pollution; many populations continue to be negatively affected by physical barriers to migration, loss and degradation of spawning and nursery areas, and (in some areas) fishing pressures or illegal harvest, but major declines have largely ceased, and populations have stabilized (at relatively low abundance levels) or increased in some areas, in part as a result of substantial ongoing recovery efforts.

Management

To date, no research has been done to obtain information on the needs of this species at different life stages or on its habitat requirements. Measures need to be taken to determine the lake sturgeons habitat and spawning areas. Lake sturgeon is a slow-growing, late-maturing (15-26 years) species that spawns intermittently (once every 4-6 years); depleted populations, even if protected, may take many years to recover. On the other hand, individuals are very long lived, so populations sometimes can persist for decades and recover once suitable conditions (e.g., for spawning) are restored. Management of the aquatic habitat along with research on early-life stages is necessary in reviving populations.

More Information

<http://www.fws.gov/midwest/sturgeon/biology.htm>

<http://ecos.fws.gov/speciesProfile/profile/speciesProfile.action?spcode=E04X>