

PALLID STURGEON (*Scaphirhynchus albus*)

Description

The pallid sturgeon like other members of the sturgeon family typically lacks scales. Instead, bony plates called scutes protect them. Other characteristics of sturgeons include an elongated snout, toothless mouth, four barbels or whiskers behind the mouth, and a light brown color with a whitish belly. Pallid sturgeons have a longer and sharper snout, smaller eye, and are lighter in color than other sturgeons. It also lacks bony plates on the belly and the outer two barbels are set behind the inner two barbels. Pallid sturgeons can attain sizes of 85 pounds but rarely exceed 6-8 pounds in Nebraska. Feeds opportunistically on aquatic insects, crustaceans, mollusks, annelids, eggs of other fishes, and sometimes other fishes.

Distribution

The pallid sturgeon is known only to occur in the Missouri River, the Mississippi River downstream of the Missouri River, and the lower Yellowstone River. In Nebraska, the pallid sturgeon inhabits the Missouri River and the lower Platte River below Fremont.

Habitat

Pallid Sturgeons require large, turbid, free-flowing riverine habitat with rocky or sandy substrate. They are well adapted to feeding on the bottom and inhabit areas of swifter water than does the related but smaller shovelnose sturgeon

Status

Global: G2-Imperiled. Federally Endangered. State Endangered. Nebraska: S1-Critically Imperiled. The species is threatened through habitat modification such as channelization and damming activities. Apparent lack of natural reproduction, commercial harvests, and hybridization in parts of its range is also detrimental to this species. Range was much reduced by dams in the upper Missouri River; habitat changes and barriers have resulted in limited natural recruitment and continuing declines in wild populations. Construction and operation of large dams and river channelization have eliminated and degraded preferred habitat. Habitat changes have severely reduced or eliminated successful reproduction. The low level of natural recruitment is a major concern and impediment to recovery.

Management

Little research has been done to obtain information on the habitat requirement needs of this species at different life stages. Information on pallid sturgeon habitat and spawning areas is needed. It is necessary to identify and implement measures to eliminate or significantly reduce illegal and accidental harvest. Update the Recovery Plan (USFWS 1993) to include the most recent information regarding genetics, distribution, life history, abundance and trends, threats, and conservation measures. Information about population structure and potential for introgression with shovelnose sturgeon is critical for management and recovery programs.

More Information

http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/missouririver/moriver_pallidsturgeon.htm

<http://ecos.fws.gov/speciesProfile/profile/speciesProfile.action?sPCODE=E06X>