

STURGEON CHUB (*Macrhybopsis gelida*)

Description

The sturgeon chub (*Macrhybopsis gelida*) is a slender minnow with small eyes and low ridges or keels on many scales of the back and sides. Lengths average 1.7 - 2.5 inches. The mouth is small and horizontal with a small, conical barbel in each corner. The long, flattened snout projects far beyond the upper lip. The relatively large tail fin has a pronounced notch. The back is light brown, thickly dusted with fine, dark specks. The sides are silvery and the belly is silvery-white. Pharyngeal teeth are 4-4. Probably feeds mostly on benthic invertebrates.

Distribution

Historically the sturgeon chub was found in the Missouri River, Bazille Creek, Platte River, Loup River, Elkhorn River, and Republican River. The sturgeon chub has been collected from 20 sites in Nebraska. Twelve of the sites are historic collections, with no records more recent than 1952. The remaining eight sites represent collections from 1977 to 1999. The recent collections are restricted to the Missouri River downstream of Ft. Calhoun and the lower Platte River downstream of Fremont.

Habitat

The sturgeon chub inhabits the open channels of medium to large turbid rivers and occurs in swift currents over a bottom of sand or fine gravel. The species is adapted both physically and behaviorally to the turbidity, flow regimes, and swift currents of these large river systems. There is some evidence to indicate that the species may move to shallower water associated with chutes and backwaters during its reproductive cycle. This type of habitat would provide cover and food for the young and would coincide with the high water or flood events when water would rise into old channels, chutes, and floodplain wetlands.

Status

Global: G3-Vulnerable. Federally not listed. State Endangered. Nebraska: S1-Critically Imperiled. Surveys of the Missouri River by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission from 1986-1990 recorded 1 sturgeon chub out of 32,354 fish sampled. From 1996 to 1998 the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission Fisheries division conducted numerous surveys of the Missouri River from Gavins Point Dam to Rulo. During this survey period only nine specimens of the sturgeon chub were collected. These were from one site, a floodplain restoration site south of Nebraska City. The small size of the remaining populations increases the possibility of loss of the remaining populations as a result of any human induced or natural catastrophic events. Historically occurred in the Mississippi, Missouri, and Yellowstone rivers and 30 tributaries of the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers; has declined in range and abundance, but recent surveys indicate that the species is more common and widespread than previously believed; threats from human-caused changes in river conditions have declined.

Management

Little research has been done to obtain information on the habitat requirement needs of this species at different life stages. There are good indications that wetland and floodplain restoration projects adjacent to large river systems are beneficial. Conducting mark and recapture studies to determine individual movement would be helpful in reviving populations.

More Information

<http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/fish/chubs/index.htm>

<http://ecos.fws.gov/speciesProfile/profile/speciesProfile.action?spcode=E05O>