



Ottawa RIVERKEEPER®
SENTINELLE Outaouais

Fish At Risk

There are 9 fish species currently at risk of extinction in the Ottawa River. You can help these species recover by following best practices and fishing regulations.



Photo: Tim Haxton

The lake sturgeon is one of 9 species at risk in the Ottawa River.

There are over 85 species of fish that inhabit the Ottawa River, many of which are unique to Ontario and Quebec. Some of these fish prefer fast moving waters, while others lay low in slower moving tributaries. No matter where fish reside, all are affected by ongoing urban and hydroelectric development along our river. This development has left a number of our species at risk of extinction.

Fish are particularly vulnerable to development and pollution in the Ottawa River because they spend their lives in the water. The construction of many dams on our river has reduced the ability for many fish species to migrate to traditional spawning and feeding areas. There are 19 dams along the river and none currently have fish passages. Ongoing shoreline development doesn't help either, as many fish species rely on natural shorelines for spawning.

You can help by looking out for species at risk and following best practices and fishing regulations. Fish are a large part of the river's biodiversity and serve as a food source for many other animals, including people. With so many threats on the river, every step we make to reduce pollution and protect our shorelines makes a difference for our aquatic friends. Help keep our river fishable!

Did you know?

Fish such as the American Eel traditionally travel between the Ottawa River and the Atlantic ocean to spawn.

Defending the Ottawa River. Protecting our Communities.

À la défense de la rivière des Outaouais. Pour la protection de nos communautés.



Species of fish at risk in the Ottawa River

At risk in:
Ontario 
Quebec 



River Redhorse 
Moxostoma carinatum

Age: up to 40 yrs

This redhorse loves the fast moving waters of the Ottawa River.



Eastern Sand Darter 
Ammocrypta pellucida

Age: up to 3 yrs

Coloured perfectly to camouflage into the sandy bottom it inhabits.

AMERICAN EEL

Anguilla rostrata 
Age: up to 50 yrs

Born in the ocean, the American Eel travels up the Ottawa River, then returns to the Atlantic Ocean to spawn. However dams make this impossible, so populations are dwindling.

Did you know?

Eel were once so abundant that they stopped a windmill turbine at Chaudiere Falls.



SILVER LAMPREY

Ichthyomyzon unicuspis 
Age: up to 8 yrs

This parasitic fish spends its adult life latching on to host fish like the Lake Sturgeon, feeding on flesh and body fluids.



Did you know?

Lampreys have been used by First Nations for food and medicine for over 10,000 years.



Northern Brook Lamprey

Ichthyomyzon fossor 
Age: up to 8 yrs

One of the only non-parasitic lampreys, this lamprey used to be sold as fishing bait.



Channel Darter 
Percina copelandi

Age: up to 5 yrs

This sensitive species is threatened by shoreline destruction along the Ottawa River.



Bridle Shiner 
Notropis bifrenatus

Age: up to 2 yrs

This shiner spends its life burrowed in aquatic weeds, vegetation.



Cutlip Minnow 
Exoglossum maxillingua

Age: up to 5 yrs

Male minnows build nests in the riverbottom to attract females

LAKE STURGEON

Acipenser fulvescens 
Age: over 100 yrs

The largest of Canada's freshwater species, the sturgeon can reach the length of a car! Overharvesting triggered the species' decline, but now dams stand in the way.

Did you know?

The oldest recorded age of a Lake Sturgeon is 155 years old.



0m 0,5m 1m 1,5m 2m

These adult fish are drawn to scale, however some may get even larger such as the Lake Sturgeon.

How You Can Help

- ✓ If you catch a fish that is at risk, handle it gently and release it back into the water.
- ✓ Follow provincial fishing regulations and be sure to have a valid fishing license.
- ✓ If you live by the water, keep a buffer of natural vegetation by the shore to reduce pollution.
- ✓ Properly dispose of hazardous household chemicals and medication.
- ✓ Opt for non-toxic products whenever possible. For more information, see our other fact sheet on river-friendly personal care.