

THE LAKE STURGEON



Once so abundant they were considered a nuisance species, Lake Sturgeon populations in the Ottawa River have been in decline since the late 1800s.



SUMMARY Lake Sturgeon (*Acipenser fulvescens*), Canada's largest freshwater fish species, are migrating benthivores* that play an important role in the survival of the Hickorynut (an endangered species of freshwater mussel) with Lake Sturgeon acting as the host fish for the larval stage of the mussel. Though populations of Lake Sturgeon were historically abundant in the Ottawa River, once their economic value was discovered, commercial fishing, beginning in the mid 19th to early 20th century, led to dramatic declines in Lake Sturgeon numbers.

Despite declines in Lake Sturgeon populations, it has limited protections in the Ottawa River. As of June 30, 2008 the Lake Sturgeon has been categorized as Special Concern under Ontario's Endangered Species Act, and as of July 1st of the same year, anglers in Ontario are no longer able to keep any Lake Sturgeon they catch. While not listed in Quebec, the Lake Sturgeon is classified as "likely to be designated as a threatened or vulnerable species". Federally, Ottawa River Lake Sturgeon are considered to be threatened (following the 2017 COSEWIC assessment), however they are not listed on Canada's Species at Risk Act.

Did You Know?

Lake Sturgeon are sometimes referred to as a dinosaur fish as the species is prehistoric with links to the Lower Jurassic period (approximately 2 million years ago)

**a benthivore feeds predominantly on aquatic invertebrates*

THREATS to the LAKE STURGEON

1. Construction of large scale hydroelectric dams on the Ottawa River starting in the mid 20th century has had a significant impact on Lake Sturgeon habitat, survival, and has largely inhibited their access to historical spawning sites.
2. Pollution, habitat and water quality degradation, climate change and the introduction of invasive species (which can have a wide range of effects on ecosystem and food web structure).

Lake Sturgeon's vulnerability to these stressors is compounded by a number of their life traits including a late age of reproductive maturity and periodic spawning, as well as slow growth rates, long life expectancy and low adult mortality, which all contribute to slow population growth.

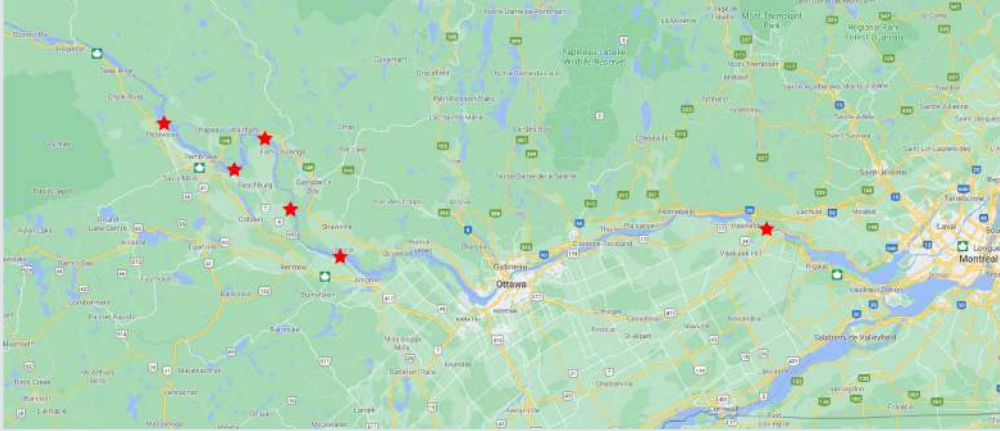


YOU CAN HELP!

1. Maintain healthy shorelines that contribute to decreased run-off helps conserve Lake Sturgeon habitat and preserve water quality.
2. Wash our boats when moving them from one waterbody to the next to avoid the spread of invasive species.
3. Anglers can help maintain Lake Sturgeon numbers by practicing catch and release if they happen to hook a Lake Sturgeon.

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WHERE ARE THEY?



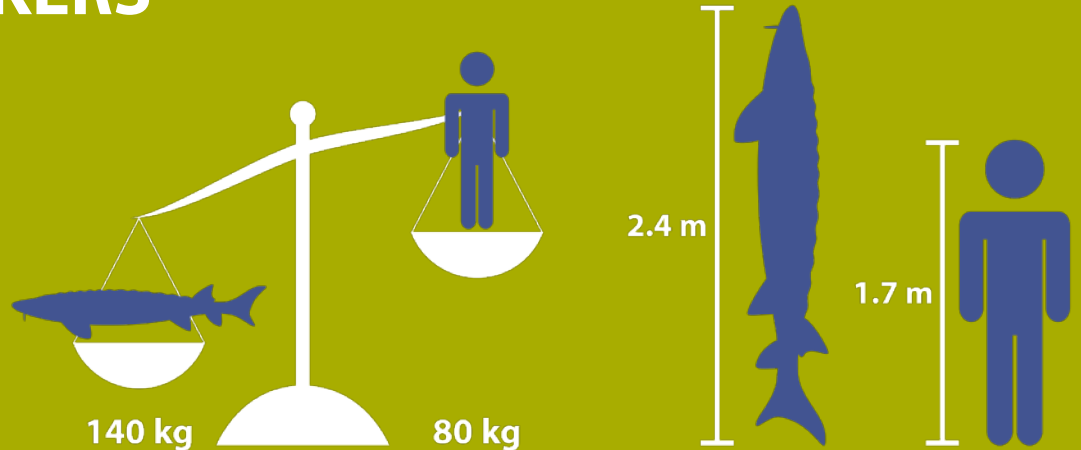
In the Ottawa River watershed, Lake Sturgeon can be found in Lac Allumette, Lower Lac Allumette, Lac Coulonge, Lac Dollard des Ormeaux, Lac du Rocher Fendu, and Lac des Chats.

Lake Sturgeon migrate between May and June, over rubble substrate, to the shallow rapids where they spawn. During migration periods, Lake Sturgeon have been known to travel up to 400 km to reach spawning grounds.

RECORD BREAKERS

The oldest Lake Sturgeon found was 154 years old caught in Lake of the Woods.

The largest one ever found weighed 140 kg and measured 2.4 m, and was caught at Batchawana Bay, Lake Superior.



Largest lake sturgeon ever found compared to average Canadian human male

CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Lake Sturgeon have long been a part of Indigenous Canadian culture where they hold strong nutritional, spiritual and material importance.

Lake sturgeon were often traded between First Nations people and Europeans who used the gelatinous substance called isinglass found in the sturgeon's swim bladder for preserves and to clarify beer.



In the Spring Algonquin fishermen would fish for Lake Sturgeon at their spawning beds near falls and rapids. Algonquin birchbark canoes have long been praised for their ability to travel and carry heavy loads in the often treacherous waters of the Great Lakes and their tributaries.

Photo: Barry Sarazin

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