

North American Green Sturgeon

Key Threats

Green sturgeon are an ancient species with their origins stretching back 220 million years to the time of the dinosaurs. Affectionately called 'river dinosaurs' for their age and size, green sturgeon may live up to 70 years, reaching over 6 feet and 350 pounds. They eat benthic invertebrates, small fish, and lamprey. In river systems, when a green sturgeon dies, nitrogen and phosphorus released through decomposition improves vegetation and the health of benthic organisms.

California's Sacramento River is the only continuous spawning habitat for sDPS green sturgeon. Juveniles rear in the river and estuary. As adults, they travel up and down the coast from Baja California to Alaska's Bering Sea. In 2006, sDPS green sturgeon from the Sacramento, Feather, and Yuba rivers were listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). It is illegal to catch or possess green sturgeon.



Sturgeon spawn from April to July in the Upper Sacramento, Feather, and Yuba Rivers in cool, deep pools with strong current.

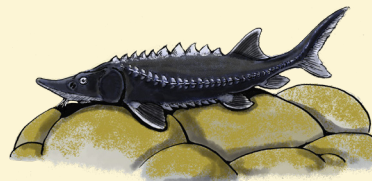
The sturgeon release their eggs, which are sticky and adhere to the gravel.

Eggs hatch within 10 days. Newly hatched fish remain among the gravel, feeding and growing.



After 45 days the juveniles emerge and slowly move downstream, reaching the San Francisco-San Joaquin Delta.

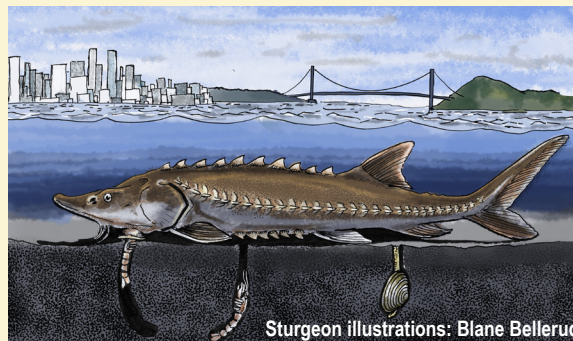
Subadults grow in the Delta and San Francisco Bay, feeding on clams and shrimp.



Green sturgeon sexually mature at 15 years old and return from the ocean to natal rivers to spawn every 3 to 5 years. Some hold in the river year-round while most exit the river after spawning.

Green Sturgeon Life Cycle

At about 5 years, the sturgeon move out to the ocean and travel up and down the coast, living in bays and estuaries from the Bering Sea to Baja California.



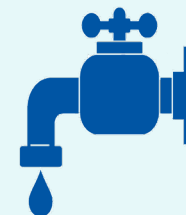
Sturgeon illustrations: Blane Bellerud



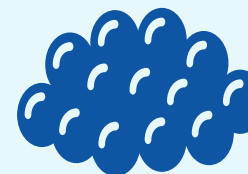
Dams, weirs, and ineffective fish passage facilities prevent sturgeon from moving freely upstream to spawning habitat or downstream to the ocean.

Habitat degradation and loss due to poor water quality, reduced flows, and high temperatures.

Runoff from roadways and properties pollute waterways damaging fish health and habitat. Green sturgeon are especially sensitive to contaminants such as selenium and pesticides.



Poaching of mature sturgeon for eggs or meat has a huge negative effect on the population. Green sturgeon reach sexual maturity around age 15 and may only spawn every 3-5 years. Losing mature adults from such a long lived, slow maturing species can lead to population collapse.



Climate change reduces the quantity and quality of freshwater and ocean habitat.

Misidentification as white sturgeon: Green and white sturgeon can look similar from above the water.



While it is legal to fish for white sturgeon year-round with a Sturgeon Fishing Report Card, green sturgeon that are accidentally caught must be immediately released unharmed.



Learn more about identifying sturgeon here:

<https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Fishes/Sturgeon>

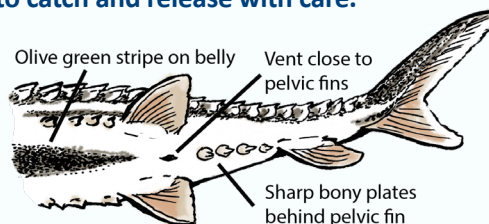


A suite of recovery actions were identified by NOAA Fisheries in collaboration with state, federal, Tribal, and other partners to protect the ancient green sturgeon.

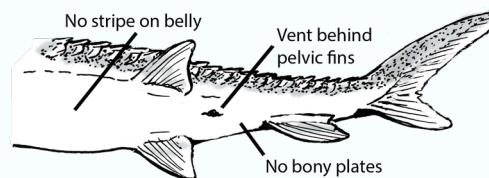
- Remove or decrease impediments that block access to spawning grounds, including dams and weirs.
- Protect spawning habitat from channelization, dredging, water quality changes, and other alterations.
- Improve flows and temperature in the Sacramento and San Joaquin River watershed and the Delta.
- Monitor all life stages throughout the Sacramento and San Joaquin River watershed.

Know how to identify a green sturgeon.
If you accidentally hook a green sturgeon be prepared to catch and release with care.

Green sturgeon underside



White sturgeon underside



Learn more:
<https://fisheries.noaa.gov/species/green-sturgeon>

Southern Distinct Population Segment (sDPS) of North American Green Sturgeon

Acipenser medirostris

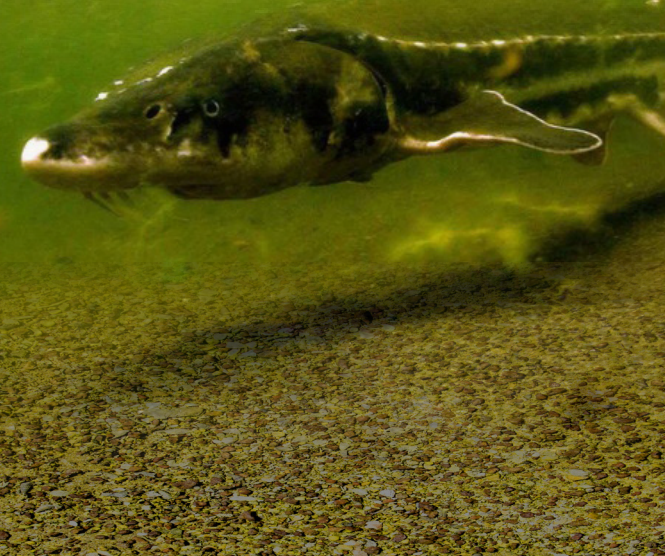


Photo: Adult green sturgeon by Thomas Dunklin

Map Key

- Notable location
- ▲ Dam
- City
- ➡ Green Sturgeon spawning range based on egg collection
- 🌊 San Francisco Bay Delta

