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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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NOAA Considers Listing Atlantic Sturgeon as Endangered or Threatened
Agency accepting public comment

NOAA's Fisheries Service today announced that it will consider listing Atlantic sturgeon as threatened or endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act. The agency received a petition from the Natural Resources Defense Council in October 2009, requesting that the species be listed throughout its range.

NOAA has been evaluating the need to list the species since 2007, when a formal status review was completed for the species by a team of biologists from NOAA, the U.S. Geological Survey, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The latest status review, which identified five Atlantic sturgeon populations off the U.S. East Coast, found that the most significant threats to the species' continued survival were unintended catch, vessel strikes, poor water quality, lack of regulatory mechanisms for protecting the fish, and dredging. It also recommended that specific sturgeon populations centered in the New York Bight, Chesapeake Bay and off the Carolinas should be listed, but made no particular recommendation on listing those in the Gulf of Maine and the south Atlantic.

Along with today's action accepting the petition to list this species, NOAA is soliciting any new information about the status of these populations that may have been developed since the review was concluded in 2007.

Atlantic sturgeon are large, slow-growing, late-maturing, long-lived, estuary-dependent fish that are born and spawn in fresh water, and spend the majority of their lives in salt water. Historically, their range included most major estuary and river systems from Labrador to Florida. Atlantic sturgeon populations have been found in 35 U.S. rivers, and spawning is believed to occur in at least 20 of these.

Historic catch records indicate that these fish were once abundant, supporting important colonial fisheries. The first major U.S. commercial fishery for them developed in the late 19th century, when demand grew for sturgeon caviar. This lasted until the 1950s, with landings peaking in 1890. The commercial fishery collapsed in 1901 when landings were about 10 percent of the peak, declining to even less later. Catching the fish was prohibited in 1998 by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, and it is currently illegal to fish for, catch or keep Atlantic sturgeon from U.S. waters.

An Endangered Species listing would increase protection for the sturgeon by making it illegal to "take" (harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, collect, or attempt to do these things) the species, in addition to the current prohibition on catching it. Similar prohibitions usually extend to threatened species.

You may submit comments, information or data, identified by the Regulation Identifier Number (RIN), 0648-XT28, by any of the following methods:

Electronic Submissions: Submit all electronic public comments via the Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. Mail: Assistant Regional Administrator,

Protected Resources Division, NOAA Fisheries, Northeast Regional Office, 55 Great Republic Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930 (for Atlantic sturgeon populations occurring in the Northeast); or Assistant Regional Administrator, Protected Resources Division, NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Regional Office, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, FL 33701 (for Atlantic sturgeon populations occurring in the Southeast). Facsimile (fax): 978-281-9394 (for Atlantic sturgeon populations occurring in the Northeast); 727-824-5309 (for Atlantic sturgeon populations occurring in the Southeast).

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