

DEC advises anglers to be on the lookout for Lake Sturgeon in the Great Lakes and Oneida Lake

DEC is asking anglers to be aware of spawning lake sturgeon in tributaries of the Great Lakes, Finger Lakes and Oneida Lake. Last season DEC staff received numerous reports of lake sturgeon (*Acipenser fulvescens*) caught by anglers in Buffalo Harbor. Lake sturgeon are listed as a threatened species in New York, therefore, there is no open season for the fish and possession is prohibited. Anglers who unintentionally hook one should follow these practices to ensure that the fish are returned to the water unharmed:

- Avoid bringing the fish into the boat if possible
- Use pliers to remove the hook; sturgeon are almost always hooked in the mouth
- Always support the fish horizontally. Do not hold sturgeon in a vertical position by their head, gills, or tails, even for taking pictures
- Never touch their eyes or gills
- Minimize their time out of the water

Use caution when handling the fish as they have sharp scaly plates called scutes on their backs. Use gloves or a damp towel to avoid injury.

Anglers are much more likely to encounter sturgeon during the spring when the fish gather to spawn on clean gravel shoals and in stream rapids.

Lake sturgeon populations are recovering as a result of protection and stocking efforts by DEC. Since 1996, lake sturgeon have been periodically stocked by DEC into Black Lake, Cayuga Lake, the Genesee River, Oneida Lake, the Oswegatchie River, Raquette River, St. Lawrence River, and St. Regis River. Sturgeon are often tagged as part of ongoing research efforts by state and federal agencies. If you find a tagged sturgeon, please follow the reporting instructions on the tag or contact your regional DEC office for assistance.

Lake sturgeon are an ancient fish that first appeared during the Upper Cretaceous period 136 million years ago when dinosaurs still walked the earth. Lake sturgeon are one of three species of sturgeon native to New York. Lake Sturgeon are native to the Mississippi River Basin, Great Lakes Basin, and Hudson Bay region of North America. They are the largest fish native to the Great Lakes, growing up to 7 or more feet in length and achieving weights of up to 300 pounds. Male sturgeon live as long as 55 years and females live as long as 80 to 150 years.

Lake sturgeon were once abundant in New York, but commercial fishing, dam building and habitat loss decimated populations. Today they can still be found in Lake Erie, Niagara River, Lake Ontario, St. Lawrence River, Genesee River, Grasse River, Oswegatchie River, Black Lake, Lake Champlain, Cayuga Lake, Oneida Lake, Oneida River, Seneca River, Oswego River and Cayuga Canal.

Sturgeon sighting reports may be forwarded along to Dawn Dittman (ddittman@usgs.gov) or Doug Carlson (dmcarlso@gw.dec.state.ny.us).