

Restoration of Lake Sturgeon in the Detroit River

Lake sturgeon are native to the Detroit River and present there in low numbers. Initial studies of these remnant sturgeon revealed the population was healthy, few in number, and mostly of sub-adults (2-22 years old) up to 6 feet long.



Nate Caswell of Central Michigan University with 130lb female

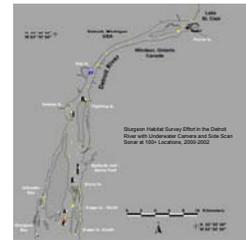
From 1999 to 2001, telemetry studies showed that lake sturgeon occupy off-channel areas around Fighting Island and spawn at one site in deep water off Zug Island on coal cinders.



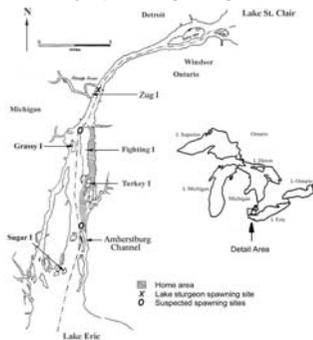
Assessment fishing for lake sturgeon in the DTR has captured only 86 fish but includes fish of all ages and sizes.



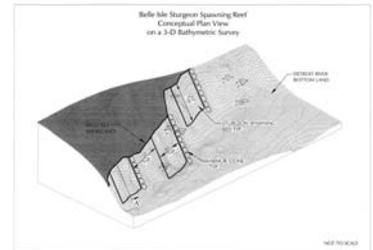
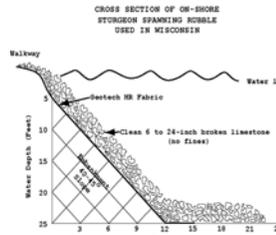
Scientific surveys revealed that lake sturgeon reproduction in the Detroit River is limited by the small amount of available spawning habitat.



Research indicates that historic, reputed lake sturgeon spawning sites near Grassy Island, Sugar Island, and Sturgeon Bar can likely be restored for use by spawning sturgeon.



In addition, areas exist in the Detroit River where requirements of spawning lake sturgeon can be met and habitat can be created to enhance sturgeon spawning success. In some cases, creation of sturgeon spawning habitat can be part of projects to replace shoreline structures.



Fortunately, proven steps to successfully enhance lake sturgeon populations that were developed in Wisconsin can be applied to boost sturgeon abundance in the DTR. These steps are:

- 1) Scientific Management (harvest controls, conservation plan, standardized population assessment)
- 2) Protection of spawning adult sturgeon by volunteer Sturgeon Guarding Program in collaboration with Law Enforcement
- 3) Creation and protection of sturgeon habitat
- 4) Progressive Public Involvement



Application of these steps to the remnant lake sturgeon population in the Detroit River will increase their abundance and, with time, provide enough sturgeon to sustain a sport fishery and possibly a commercial fishery for lake sturgeon in the IWR. There are opportunities for industry, sportsmen groups, and natural resource organizations to help with sturgeon restoration in the Refuge. We can all play a role in making this a reality!



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