



Great Lakes Fishery Commission

ESTABLISHED BY CONVENTION BETWEEN CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES TO IMPROVE AND PERPETUATE FISHERY RESOURCES

For Immediate Release
July 7, 2008

Contact: Marc Gaden
734-662-3209 x 14
734-417-8012 (c)

ONTARIO'S NEW LAKE STURGEON INITIATIVE DESIGNED TO REHABILITATE A NATIVE SPECIES, STOP ILLEGAL TRAFFICKING

ANN ARBOR, MI—The Great Lakes Fishery Commission today expressed its support for Ontario's efforts to rehabilitate native lake sturgeon and halt illegal trafficking of recreationally caught fish. This measure complements Ontario's commitment to restoring other key native species in the Great Lakes including American eel, Atlantic salmon, lake trout, and bloaters. Lake sturgeon have declined precipitously during the last century and large-scale efforts—including habitat enhancement, spawning bed creation, stocking, and improved access to spawning areas—are underway throughout the Great Lakes basin to restore this once-abundant species. Ontario's announcement last week, to restrict its recreational sturgeon fishery to catch-and-release and to prohibit any recreational fishing for sturgeon in the Mississagi River, signals the province's intent to protect sturgeon from further decline, given its status in Ontario as a species of special concern. Ontario's efforts are also designed to curb the illegal trade of sturgeon and sturgeon products like caviar, a practice that has grown in recent years and could threaten rehabilitation of the species. The commission stated its strong support for Ontario's intent to consult stakeholders and Aboriginal people to develop a long-term, province-wide management strategy that will address issues affecting the sustainability of sturgeon populations.

Lake sturgeon are a valued part of the native fish community of the Great Lakes. The species is the largest and longest-lived fish in the Great Lakes, with some growing to as large as eight feet (2.5 meters) and weighing more than 300 pounds (150 kg). Sturgeon can live for more than 100 years, though they are slow-growing and do not spawn until a mature age, often as old as 20 or 30 years. Their slow

growth and relatively late maturation made them vulnerable to overharvest. Indeed, degradation of river systems where sturgeon reproduce, overfishing, sea lamprey predation, and illegal trade of sturgeon and caviar have taken their toll on sturgeon. Sturgeon are the target of concerted restoration efforts in every Great Lake.

“Ontario’s action to reduce sturgeon mortality is a major step forward in the binational effort to protect and restore this native species,” said commission chair Michael Hansen, a professor at the University of Wisconsin—Stevens Point. “Federal, provincial, state, and tribal governments know that strong measures are needed to protect sturgeon and advance recovery. Moreover, the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, and agencies throughout the basin, have made it a priority to implement and encourage measures that will ensure that native species are not lost from the Great Lakes. Ontario’s announcement about lake sturgeon complements its programs to restore other important native species like American eel, Atlantic salmon, lake trout, and bloaters.”

“The law enforcement community is particularly pleased with Ontario’s initiative,” said David Bennett of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, chair of the binational Law Enforcement Committee. “Being on the front lines of conservation, law enforcement officers have observed illegal practices involving poaching and caviar trafficking. Law enforcement officers—from both sides of the border and from all federal, provincial, state, and tribal agencies—have called for more consistent regulations throughout the basin and for enhanced law enforcement across boundaries. By allowing recreational fishing for sturgeon, but prohibiting possession—that is, by restricting the fishery to catch-and-release—Ontario has improved the ability of law enforcement agencies throughout the basin to detect unlawful sturgeon trade and to take actions that are appropriate to protect this species.”

*The **Great Lakes Fishery Commission** is an international organization established by the United States and Canada through the 1954 Convention on Great Lakes Fisheries. The commission has the responsibility to support fisheries research, control the invasive sea lamprey in the Great Lakes, and facilitate implementation of A Joint Strategic Plan for Management of Great Lakes Fisheries, a provincial, state, and tribal fisheries management agreement. The **Law Enforcement Committee** comprises federal, provincial, state, and tribal law enforcement officers who meet regularly to share information, plan combined enforcement activities, and execute shared strategies. The committee is convened pursuant to the Joint Strategic Plan. For more information about the commission and the Joint Strategic Plan, visit www.glfc.int.*