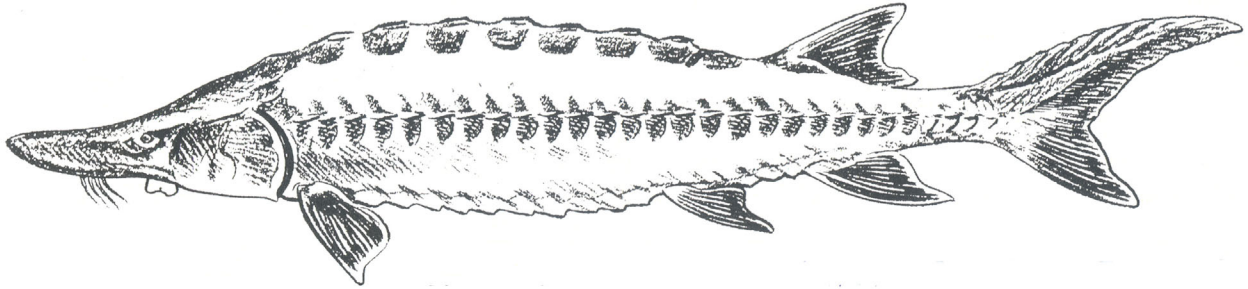


Gulf sturgeon Facts

Common name: Gulf sturgeon

Scientific name: *Acipenser oxyrinchus desotoi*



Appearance: Gulf sturgeon have rows of armored plates along their sides and back, called scutes. Gulf sturgeon have a vacuum like mouth, a long snout and whiskers, called barbels. Sturgeon typically range in color from a light neutral color to dark brown and have a white under belly. Gulf sturgeon can grow to 8 feet long, and weigh 200 pounds.

Ancestry: Sturgeons are an ancient group of fish dating back about 200 million years to the age of dinosaurs. Gulf sturgeon are a subspecies of Atlantic sturgeon. Worldwide there are 27 sturgeon species and two closely related species of paddle fish.

Range: Gulf sturgeon can be found in coastal rivers of the Gulf of Mexico from the Suwannee River, Fla., to the Pearl River, La.

Habitat: The rivers where sturgeon live contain high levels of tannic acid that make the water appear darker in color. Sturgeon spawn near the headwater of rivers, and spend the summer in the mid to lower river.

Diet: Gulf sturgeon siphon their food, which includes tiny bottom-dwelling sea invertebrates, crustaceans, and marine worms. Gulf sturgeon do not feed while in rivers because searching for food requires excessive amounts of energy needed for spawning.

Young: As juveniles all sturgeon are bottom feeders. The jaws of three species of Atlantic sturgeon change as they age to allow them to have a fish diet. The three species include White, Beluga and Kaluga sturgeon.

Growth: Gulf sturgeon live about 25 years. In the fall when sturgeon are in the Gulf of Mexico, they experience a substantial weight gain, followed by a weight loss during the summer. Gulf sturgeon can jump six feet out of the water.

Reproduction: Gulf sturgeon are anadromous, migrating upriver from the Gulf of Mexico in the springtime to spawn. Sturgeon cannot reproduce until they are between 8 and 12 years old. The noise sturgeon make during spawning is similar to a creaky door hinge.

Status: Gulf sturgeon were listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act in 1991, when populations declined after a century of fishing for meat and caviar. It is illegal to catch and kill sturgeon.

Major Threats: Gulf sturgeon are endangered by dams, pollution, poaching, and habitat loss. The species is now protected against fishing.

USGS Research: Coastal Ecology & Conservation scientists and collaborators are working to understand and restore sturgeon populations and conserve its habitats in Florida rivers and the Gulf of Mexico.