

The Sturgeon General

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Black River Sturgeon Guard – Camping on the river



By Ann Feldhauser
Volunteer Coordinator,
Sturgeon Guarding Program

The evening campfire lit a small area surrounding our campsite. The whip-poor-will began his nightly vespers, calling out over the Black River valley. Far off in the distance, coyotes sang a rousing chorus.

Staring into the crackling fire, we could also hear the gurgling of the Black River as it rushed around logs and rocks below our campsite. Some evenings there would be the occasional splash, generated by an anxious sturgeon seeking its spawning ground. It was always a very

sensual, relaxing time of the day, as my husband and I sat guard over the mighty sturgeon of the Black River. Mark and I were often fairly silent on those evenings, sitting side by side, letting the night sounds conduct the conversation.



Each spring, Brenda Archambo and the Black Lake Sturgeon summon us from our lakeside home south of Marquette in the Upper Peninsula to Sites B and C on the banks above the Black River in northeastern Lower Pen-

insula, where we meet the first run of sturgeon entering the river to spawn. This usually occurs in late April, as the weather mellows, leaves begin to bud out and birds of all kinds flock back to Michigan to carry on their own spring rituals. Last year, we saw 24 bird species, and watched chickadees and nuthatches carving out tree nesting cavities within a few feet of our campfire ring.

It's a beautiful time of the year and perfect camping weather. We may stay up to two weeks there, camping, living comfortably in proximity to the River, the sturgeon and those who come to see this amazing fish.

Continued on page 5

2010 Field Season Summary

By John Bauman
Research Technologist, Michigan State University

The 2010 Black Lake research season began on April 14th when Michigan State University and Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment researchers captured a six foot, 130 pound female lake sturgeon ascending the Upper Black River near the Sturgeon for Tomorrow Site C guarding location. This was an early start compared to previous years, yet the adult sampling period continued into June with the last sighting of a sturgeon in the river being recorded on June 7th.

The one-day record of fish captured this year exceeded 30 individuals. **A total of 219 adult**

lake sturgeon were captured this year, which includes **61 newly captured fish**. Gametes were collected from spawning lake sturgeon (10 Female, 20 Male) and were transported to the **Stream Side Rearing Facility** for fertilization and rearing. In total there have been **820 unique individual lake sturgeon captured** in the Upper Black River since 2001.

In addition to hatchery propagation, **wild larval lake sturgeon were captured as they drifted downstream**, after having utilized their yolk-sac reserves while incubating in the interstitial spaces on the river-bottom. These wild larvae represent the best stock source genetically, so all captured larvae are brought back to the Stream Side Rearing Facility in an

effort to enhance survival. This year, larval drift sampling began on May 13th and ran until there were two consecutive unsuccessful capture nights, which this year was on June 30th. Efforts to collect the wild sturgeon larvae proved to be difficult due to the high variability in water level this spring. During the early spawning period adult lake sturgeon were likely unable to reach preferred spawning habitat due to low flow, which resulted in over 70% of the spawning occurring in the downstream reaches which contain less than suitable spawning habitat.

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SFT President Brenda Archambo accepts the 2009 O.B. Eustis Environmental Award for Outstanding Service to Northeast Michigan at Huron Pines Annual Meeting in February.



John Bauman

From the President...Collaboration is the key to success



**Brenda Archambo
President**

Far and away the best prize that life has to offer is the chance to work hard at work worth doing.
~Theodore Roosevelt

"The first steps toward stewardship are awareness, appreciation, and the selfish desire to have the things around for our kids to see. Presumably the unselfish motives will follow as we wise up."

~ Barbara Kingsolver

I love the change of seasons. The cold and snow have settled in as I pause to write. I am mindful of how inspiring and sacred the holidays are...especially following autumn's colorful splendor, the traditions of deer season, summer on our great waters, and the anticipation of watching spring come to life.

Together, we have inspired enthusiastic stewardship and gained new knowledge about restoring the threatened lake sturgeon and their habitats. I am honored to have served this organization and share with you our many successes.

Since starting our movement in 1995, we have voluntarily implemented multiple sturgeon recovery programs. Thank you all for your investments in securing a better future for the majestic lake sturgeon. The sturgeon was crying out for help. We arose, banded together, and have proven "we the people" can in fact make a difference.

Yet, because the slow growing,

late maturing, and long lived sturgeon can live to be 150 years old, we have more to accomplish to restore the iconic lake sturgeon. In like manner, when reflecting upon the successes of our past, our vision for the future is sure to be filled with adventure, excitement and robust collaboration.

Collaboration among and between numerous public-private stakeholders have taken intentional leadership, people working together on key issues and problems with a sound strategic agenda. Finding ways to leverage resources and revenues through more effective collaboration have redefined everything. Collaboration involves doing something together in a manner that creates new strategic and economic value.

Please join me in thanking all collaborators for sustaining the movement - the Michigan DNRE, Michigan State University, Tower-Kleber Limited Partnership, Huron Pines, SFT Board, volunteer coordinators, members, contributors and regional stakeholders! We also wel-

come and anticipate increased participation among the five, 1836 Tribes as we plan and implement future programming.

Leadership guru Dr. John C. Maxwell said, "Success is knowing your purpose in life, growing to reach your maximum potential, and sowing seeds that benefit others". I believe this statement mirrors our movement.

Thank you for your sustained commitment. May the coming years prosper you all.

I look forward to seeing you on the river.

NOTE: Black Lake Sturgeon Season starts Feb. 5 and runs through Feb. 9 or when the sturgeon quota is reached. Pending an amendment to Fisheries Order-240, the quota for Black Lake in 2011 potentially will be six sturgeon for recreational anglers, and six sturgeon shared between the five, 1836 tribes. As our population continues to increase, harvest can be expanded (or contracted) based upon best management practices.

January Membership Renewals ~ New Members Welcome: JOIN US!

Membership Investment



Your membership is VITAL to support the many important programs provided through SFT.

Valuable work is ongoing with the Sturgeon Guarding Program, Guided Tours, Outreach and Education, Collaborative Research, Hatchery Operations, Habitat Improvement, Advocacy as well as developing a NEW Interpretive Program and facility.

Please join us in our effort to secure an even brighter future for the majestic lake sturgeon!

On behalf of the Board of Directors, THANK YOU for your continued support. Your memberships and contributions are important and very much appreciated.

Renew online www.sturgeonfortomorrow.org/membership-registration.php

Sturgeon For Tomorrow will earn a donation every time you search the internet or shop online! TRY IT!



Please renew your membership today.

A membership envelope is enclosed.

Contributions are tax deductible.

Sturgeon For Tomorrow accepts contributions, memorials and honorariums for special occasions including birthdays, anniversaries, and special tributes. Please join us in thanking the following donors for their generous gifts.

All gifts are tax deductible.

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CONTACT US!

President
Brenda Archambo
231-625-2776

Vice President
Bob Bonner
989-733-8781

Treasurer
Vacant

Secretary
Kathy Bezotte
989-785-4231

Director
Gil Archambo
231-625-2776

Director
Ellie Wilson
231-625-8148

Director
Jason Woiderski
231-420-7853

Volunteer Coordinator
Ann Wilson-Feldhauser
906-346-9511

For news and events

www.sturgeonfortomorrow.org

1604 N. Black River Road
Cheboygan, MI 49721
231-625-2776

2010 Mullett Lake Lake Sturgeon Survey Summary *excerpts from 08/26/10 report by Edward A. Baker, PhD DNRE*

The Michigan DNRE and Michigan State University conducted a large-mesh gillnet survey of Mullett Lake during July, 2010. The purpose of the survey was to gain insight into sturgeon distribution and abundance within the lake. The total number of unique fish captured was 70.

Most captured fish were relatively small and either carried a coded wire tag, had deformed fins indicative of hatchery origin, or both. Fish were captured throughout Mullett Lake but most were

captured in the north end. Locations sampled were from 15-35 feet deep due to gear restrictions. Genetic analysis of tissue samples collected during the survey should confirm the origin (hatchery vs. wild) of the fish captured.

One fish that was recaptured had been captured and tagged during the initial 2009 Mullett Lake gillnet survey. The fish was 33.5 inches when captured in 2009 and was 40.2 in. when recaptured, an increase of 6.7 in. This growth rate is

high relative to other lake sturgeon populations and indicates there is abundant food for lake sturgeon in Mullett Lake.

During the course of the survey, three fish were recaptured which allows a calculation of lake sturgeon abundance. A closed-captures multiple-mark multiple-recapture estimator to estimate population abundance and the resulting estimate of lake sturgeon population size in Mullett Lake is 701.



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Dedicated to the future of our sturgeon



Effort to protect lake sturgeon continues to grow roots

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As part of a collaborative effort, stream-bank erosion control projects focused on protecting lake sturgeon in the Black River now depend on healthy roots and leaves of native plants.

Since 2007, four severe erosion sites along the Black River have been stabilized using "softer" approaches, which predominantly use live and dead plant material. The goal was to minimize erosion to stop unhealthy amounts of sand from entering the Black River. Sand can have a detrimental effect on spawning habitat used by sturgeon and other fish.

At each site, human foot traffic prevented the establishment of new plants that would normally hold the soil in place on these tall, steeply sloped banks. So the first step was to use split-rail fencing and the placement of trees and brush to manage the human influence.

At the rope swing site, quite a bit of earth-moving was done, including the creation of a berm to control stormwater. Whole trees were placed on the bank to slow any movement of sand and to block access while new plants grow.

Over 700 ft. of river bank was stabilized using cedar terraces, soil, seed, mulch and stone. More than 3,500 native perennials were planted to jumpstart the healing of the banks with live, healthy plants.

In 2010, the scope of the project continued to broaden. This included an assessment of the amount and condition of habitats available to adult and juvenile sturgeon. Using those findings, we increased spawning substrate by 3240 sq ft at Site C by adding field stone to the river bottom. Furthermore, food and materials were provided to the hatchery for the 2010 season.

Long-term success of the project lies in public understanding of how erosion impacts sturgeon and respect for the completed work. To help with that, we will be placing large, full-color, interpretive signs on site. The signs highlight project details, sturgeon biology, impacts caused by human activities, and how we can all help. Look for the new signs during Sturgeon Guard 2011.

Project partners include the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environ-

ment, Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Great Lakes Commission, Michigan State University, Huron Pines AmeriCorps, Huron Pines, and Sturgeon For Tomorrow.

Finally, the incredible amount of volunteer participation in this project demands attention. It was integral to getting things done. In the past 3 years over 100 volunteers from numerous organizations joined the effort. Whether during organized events, or when visitors would happen upon our crew, people consistently jumped in to help.

To those volunteers, "Thank you." By participating, you now have a firm understanding of why the project was chosen and completed, but I hope you also take ownership and pride in the accomplishments. Please help us in continuing to promote and maintain all of our work on this great project.

For more information, please contact Patrick Ertel, Huron Pines Project Manager, at patrick@huronpines.org.

Our role as sturgeon guards is simple enough. Each day we greet the volunteers who have signed up to come help us patrol the river, keeping watch over the spawning fish. We also meet with the biologists, who come to the river every day, don wetsuits and waders, grab nets and computer chips, then search the river for sturgeon to capture, tag, and catalog. They update us on how many fish have been tagged or seen and what the action plan for the day might be. As the word spreads that the fish are in the river, more and more of those curious to see such an amazing thing as a sturgeon find their way into Sites B and C, where we greet and update them on the most recent sturgeon news.

Families, senior citizens, horseback riders and spring turkey hunters are among those who come to witness it for themselves. They are all keenly interested in seeing and hearing about the sturgeon, and one of our roles is to provide them with accurate information. Educating the public about sturgeon is a key element in the future survival of the species, so we ensure that each visitor is greeted individually and their questions answered to the best of our ability.

Along the way, we make new friends. Now with two years on the river behind us, we know many volunteers by name. They bring us baked goods, update us on news

and events, tell stories, and graciously invite us to participate in local happenings.

We share an initial common interest in protecting the sturgeon, but it soon becomes much more. Out of that bond forged by a fish, many more are made, and our lives are forever changed.

Now, we look forward to seeing our friends again come spring and share in the camaraderie that comes with doing something right for the resource.

Mark and I see great benefit from being on the river for an extended period of time, so **we are encouraging others to set up camp there anytime during the month of May and gain similar experiences.**

It is a satisfying way to give back to the resource as well as build a new element into your lives. If you have a small camper and a generator, there are lots of great places to set up camp. The same goes for tenting. It's free, easy, and relaxing, but most important, it's your presence on the river, 24/7, that will deter illegal activity directed at the vulnerable spawning sturgeon. Come and set up for two or three days, or longer as your schedule permits.



Talk with the volunteers and sightseers, meet the biologists and MDNRE Conservation Officers who will be your frequent companions, make new friends and gain new insights.

We ask those who might be interested to contact

us directly so we can answer any questions about camping on the Black River as part of the Sturgeon Patrol. We have found that staying on the river for an extended time is a rewarding experience, one that we would like to share with others.

So, please, come and camp along the Black River. Relax by your campfire, listen to the night sounds and witness the spectacular run of sturgeon in the Black River first hand. There is no experience like it anywhere else in Michigan, and it's something that will benefit you and the sturgeon forever.

For more information and a camping chat, contact Mark and Ann Feldhauser at 906-346-9511 or 906-201-2484.

2010 Field Season Summary (continued from page 1)

As a result, egg and larval offspring survival was likely lower and is reflected in our 2010 drift sampling results. Also, several days later in the drift sampling period, high flow prevented access to the drift sample site and larval collection was postponed. Despite obstacles, **a total of 2,242 larval lake sturgeon were captured this year** with over 700 of those having been captured on one sampling night.

This year marks the second year of operation of the new stream side rearing facility located near Tower-Kleber dam. There are hurdles when dealing with a new operational rearing facility, especially when geared towards rearing a species like lake sturgeon (a fish with a naturally high mortality rate during the early life stages). However, as research continues and new aquaculture techniques are adapted, researchers can improve hatchery survivability of this imperiled species.

As an example **on August 19th, over 4,000 juvenile lake sturgeon were released into the wild. This includes 3,250 that were released into the Upper Black River, and the remainder that**

2010 Stocking:	
-Black Lake	3,250
-Mullett Lake	375
-Burt Lake	375

were divided evenly and released into Burt and Mullett Lakes.



We would like to thank everyone that visited and assisted us down by the river (Gary Stranely). We thank those that helped with equipment repair (Gill Archambo) and hatchery tours (Bob Bonner), as well as those that stopped by the facility to see the sturgeon. We thank Brenda Archambo for the great food and for all of the great media coverage we received during the field season. We also thank the Sturgeon for Tomorrow volunteers for their positive feedback (Ann and Mark Feldhauser, Kathy Bezotte). Special thanks to the Theisen, Gruss, Block, Fletcher, and Davis families.