Volume 13 Issue 1

# Sturgeon General


Cheboygan 4-H on Sturgeon Guard

Brenda Archambo

## Winter 2012 issue



## Sturgeon Guarding Program

### *Camping Incentives*

In a concerted effort to maintain 24/7 coverage on the river to protect the spawning sturgeon, Sturgeon For Tomorrow is developing a Sturgeon Guarding Program (SGP) Camping Incentives Initiative to encourage sturgeon guards to set-up camp along the river, and to serve as sturgeon ambassadors to ensure a smooth transition of arriving and departing sturgeon guards.

Campers/Ambassador Incentives
The greatest need is for campers/ambassadors to greet guards arriving in shifts, distribute hats, and explain the roles and expectations of the Sturgeon Guarding Program.

Three to six nights of camping/ambassadors receive:

- A one year honorary (free) SFT membership.
- A 4x4 sturgeon decal (to put on a camper trailer/automobile.
- One signature sturgeon lapel pin.
- SGP Hat
- Identification vest

Seven + nights camping/ambassadors receive:

- Free, complimentary dinner(s) at Annual SFT Banquet, including banquet recognition.
- A one year honorary (free) SFT membership.
- A 4x4 sturgeon decal (to put on a camper trailer/automobile.
- One signature sturgeon lapel pin.
- SGP Hat
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Contact Mark and Ann Feldhauser
Volunteer Coordinators
feldhausers@gmail.com
(906) 346-9511 Home

## 2011 Field Season Summary

**By John Bauman**
**Research Technologist,**
**Michigan State University**

The 2011 Black Lake research season began in early April when Michigan State University (MSU) and Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) researchers spotted a four foot lake sturgeon ascending the Upper Black River near the Sturgeon for Tomorrow Site B guarding area. Although individuals were spotted in the river during the early and later periods of April, spawning did not commence until early May.

On May 3rd of 2011, ten individual lake sturgeon were captured between regions above Site B to below Site C. The first capture was a 5.9 foot female lake sturgeon weighing approximately 115 pounds. Early spring flooding likely postponed spawning activity nearly one and a half weeks compared to 2010.

**A total of 230 lake sturgeon were captured throughout the spawning season** which ran from early May to mid-June. Gametes were collected from spawning lake sturgeon (10 female, 20 male) and were transported to the Streamside rearing facility for fertilization and rearing. In total, there have been 783 uniquely marked individual lake sturgeon captured in the Upper Black River since 2001.

Aside from those individuals hatched from eggs, researchers also captured wild larval lake sturgeon as they dispersed downstream.

Previous research has found that these wild larvae represent the best stock source genetically, so these larvae are captured and brought back to the Streamside Rearing Facility in an effort to enhance survival of this unique stock source.

This year, larval sampling began on May 13th and ran until June 22nd. Throughout the spawning and larval drift period the river water level was consistently higher than in previous years. This likely enabled spawning adults to reach spawning areas that typically (in the last ten years) were unavailable due to low water level (e.g., near the hydroelectric facility). As a result, researchers **captured nearly 10,000 dispersing larvae during** evening larval drift surveys. These high flow events may have benefitted larval production in the river. However, as larvae dispersed they may have been forced out of nursery areas by the high flow sooner than normal which is reflected in our night visual assessment summary. During early August, MSU, MDNR, and tribal researchers conducted assessments in the Black River in an attempt to monitor natural recruitment of young-of-the-year lake sturgeon. This year, zero young-of-the-year lake sturgeon were captured during these assessments, compared to 28 that were captured last year. Although no young-of-the-year were captured, three one-year-old lake sturgeon were captured. These one-year-old sturgeon were all part of last year's stocking event, indicated by scanning for coded wire tags.


John Bauman


John Bauman

This year on August 20th total of **2,252 larvae were marked and released into the Black River.** Additionally, **197 and 206 individuals were marked and released into Burt and Mullett Lakes, respectively**.

We would like to thank all of you for your assistance on the river and your support during the off-season.

## Sturgeon Research Workshop for Educators

**By: Steve Stewart**


Fourteen educators from ten different schools convened at the COSEE Great Lakes Sturgeon Research Workshop for Educators in Onaway, Michigan, to learn about lake sturgeon research, exploring educational linkages and opportunities related to this incredible and charismatic fish. Educators gained new knowledge through research presentations, fisheries -related curriculum and resources, and networked with agencies and community partners directly involved with sturgeon work.

Under the guidance of Dr. Kim Scribner and his Michigan State University Department of Fisheries and Wildlife research team, teachers learned about sturgeon research and literally got their feet-wet during hands-on experiences, as they:

-Got up close and personal with sturgeon while touring the streamside sturgeon rearing and research facility on the Black River;

-Explored river habitats while conducting a stream habitat assessment and monitoring activity; and

-Waded the river at night with nets in a juvenile sturgeon assessment effort.

Workshops were presented in conjunction with the Michigan DNR, Michigan Sea Grant, COSEE Great Lakes, and the Northeast Michigan Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative.

Contributing program partners included Sturgeon for Tomorrow (Black Lake Chapter), Huron Pines, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Michigan DNR Fisheries Division.

Other partners in the workshop led by Dr. Scribner were: John Bauman, Research Technician at MSU's Department of Fisheries and Wildlife, Brenda Archambo - Sturgeon for Tomorrow, Anjie Bowen - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, David Smith and Joe Jarecki, Huron Pines, Board of Directors

# From the President

***Brenda Archambo***

## *Stewardship*

Greetings from Black Lake! I sit here a few days into 2012 overlooking the lake on a sunny, 45 degree day and I find it uncanny there is little ice and snow cover. Times are definitely changing!

As you read through the following pages I hope you will be inspired by the advancements made in lake sturgeon recovery. Please know your support of Sturgeon For Tomorrow (SFT) programming has played an active role and your natural resource stewardship is making a difference!

Our programs emphasize stewardship through collaborative planning and management of resources with agencies, universities, organizations, communities, and others to engage actively in the prevention of loss of this species and its habitats, and facilitate its recovery in the interest of long-term sustainability.

We are given responsibility for resources that encompass both self and organizational factors. Self-stewardship is made up of the resources we are born with and develop over time: our talents, aspirations, and the time and energy we have to accomplish our responsibilities. Organizational stewardship is made up of the resources we are given charge of by the organization and its members.

Leaders who practice stewardship effectively make a conscious decision to serve their members through the organization's mission. We aspire to create a legacy for future generations by leveraging all the resources available and investing them in our mission; to assist fisheries managers in the rehabilitation of lake sturgeon.

THANK YOU to all of our members, supporters and collaborators for your stewardship and sustained commitment! You are the very fabric of our success, and we are sincerely grateful! As we endeavor to move through life in a manner that leaves the world a better place than we found it, our children and grand children (future stewards) will be thankful we did. And the majestic lake sturgeon will live on knowing they have allies in 'the people of the sturgeon'.

May you all have a joyful, healthy and abundant 2012!

**Note: As of this writing the February Black Lake Sturgeon Season is being negotiated between the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and the Indian Tribes relative to the Inland Consent Decree. Please see the enclosed insert for further details.**

*Brenda Archambo*

### *Welcome Kevin Prediger*

My wife, Dee and I moved to Indian River in 1984. For the next 27 years we made it our home and raised our two daughters here as well.

I have always been an avid fisherman and have a passion for the beautiful lakes that surround us.

I have been on the Mullett Lake Area Preservation Society (M.A.P.S.) board for approximately 3 years and welcome the opportunity to serve on the SFT Board.

### *Welcome Gary Stranaly*

Gary was born in Detroit, Michigan and moved to Black Lake when he was 8 years old. Gary graduated from Cheboygan High School and went to college at the United States Air Force Academy, and holds a Geology Major from Western Michigan University. Gary conducted one year of coastal research with professor R.A. Davis. Gary is married to Georgette and has four children, two dogs, three cats, and forty-four chickens. "As a sportsman, I don't like to fish, I like to catch fish", said Gary. Gary wrangled himself onto the sturgeon netting crew, enhancing the sturgeon population. "What a fascinating, challenging and fun endeavor."

### *THANK YOU ELLIE*

Please join us in thanking Ellie Wilson for 13 years of service on the SFT Board of Directors. Ellie has been a catalyst for organizational growth in membership, programming, volunteering, strategy and fun! Please accept our sincere thankfulness for your volunteer service!

Wisdom is knowing what to do next; virtue is doing it. Ellie is obviously both wise and virtuous. We never could have asked for a more dedicated conservationist and *words cannot express how grateful we are for our friendship. It has been a pleasure and a privilege serving SFT with you.*

Ellie and her husband Doug now winter in Florida and we wish them the very best, always!

# 2011 Burt Lake Sturgeon Survey

Ed Baker

**By: Edward A. Baker, Ph.D.**
**Fisheries Research Biologist**
**Michigan Dept. of Natural Resources**
**Marquette Fisheries Station**

The Michigan DNR and Michigan State University conducted a large-mesh gillnet survey of Burt Lake during July, 2011. The purpose of the survey was to gain insight into sturgeon distribution and abundance within the lake. Overall, the number of sturgeon captured was low compared to similar survey efforts in Black Lake. The total number of unique fish captured was 108. In comparison, a three week survey effort in Black Lake in 2007 captured a total of 194 lake sturgeon.

Since 2003 the DNR and Michigan State University, along with Sturgeon for Tomorrow, Tower Kleber, and others, have worked cooperatively to rear and stock lake sturgeon into Burt Lake. With the exception of fish stocked in 2005, lake sturgeon stocked in Burt Lake since 2003 have been tagged with a coded wire tag. We used a coded wire tag detector during the survey to check captured fish for the presence of a coded wire tag. Most captured fish were relatively small, and either carried a coded wire tag, had deformed fins indicative of hatchery origin, or both. A few large adult fish were captured in Burt Lake. Fish were captured throughout Burt Lake but most were captured in the eastern portion of the lake in the area known as Sturgeon Bay. We sampled locations throughout the lake but did not sample water less than 4.5 m deep (15 ft) due to gear restrictions. There were no lake sturgeon mortalities during the survey.

During the course of the survey we recaptured 3 fish which allows a calculation of lake sturgeon abundance. We used a closed-captures multiple-mark multiple-recapture estimator to estimate population abundance and the resulting estimate of lake sturgeon population size in Burt Lake is 1,535 (95% CI=587-4,362).

The lake sturgeon population in Burt Lake is made up of almost entirely relatively small and immature stocked fish. Of the 108 unique individuals captured only about 10 fish were large enough to potentially be naturally produced fish. However, it is possible that these fish were also stocked because Burt Lake was stocked with lake sturgeon in the 1980's. Genetic analysis of tissue samples collected during the survey should confirm the origin (hatchery vs. wild) of the fish captured.

On 12 July we measured the dissolved oxygen and water temperature profile. The water temperature was 23.8° C (74.8° F) at the surface and very gradually declined to 17.5° C (63.5° F) on bottom in 14 m (46 ft) of water. The dissolved oxygen concentration was 8.9 mg/l at the surface and was 7.25 mg/l at the bottom.

We recaptured one fish that had been captured and tagged during the initial 2009 Burt Lake gillnet survey. The fish was 38.6 in when captured in 2009 and was 42.3 in when recaptured, an increase of 3.7 in. All of the captured fish appeared healthy and robust which indicates there is abundant food for lake sturgeon in Burt Lake.

## January in Membership Renewal Month ~ JOIN US!

**Please join us in our efforts to secure a brighter future for the iconic lake Sturgeon.**

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 monitoring, Advocacy as well as supporting the development of a NEW Interpretive-Stewardship Program.

**A membership envelope is enclosed.**

**Or**

**Renew online**

www.sturgeonfortomorrow.org/membership-registration.php


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## Plastic responses of lake sturgeon to different environmental conditions

**Kari Dammerman**

Human disturbances have altered natural environments and disrupted selection regimes across all biological scales. Organisms likely respond to human changes through modifications in the genetic composition of populations and through phenotypic and/or behavioral plasticity. We examined whether plasticity in larval behavior (timing and distance of larval dispersal), phenotype (body size, shape) and physiology (yolk sac utilization) would vary among families when exposed to different environments. Additionally, we were also interested in examining whether developmental plasticity would be affected by the environmental conditions experienced during each earlier developmental stages. The experiments were conducted within the upper Black River where fertilized eggs from several families were allowed to incubate in river sections characterized by different temperature and flow conditions. Upon hatch, individuals were photographed to measure body size and size and time to hatch was compared between families across the sites. Fertilized eggs from multiple families were exposed to one of three flow treatments (high, low, and variable) within our stream-side facility. Upon hatch, individuals were photographed to quantify body size and placed in individual chambers within raceways to measure growth. Results showing variability among families and across developmental stages is of importance to predict potential long-term consequences of human-modified environments including climate change to juvenile survival and population levels of natural recruitment.

# Supplemental MSU Sturgeon Research

## Comparative growth and survival of wild larval lake sturgeon exposed to different forage types

**Bill Oeming**

Bill Oeming is a recent (May 2011) graduate of Michigan State University. He graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Fisheries and Wildlife with a concentration in water sciences. Bill's experiment was designed to examine whether wild lake sturgeon larvae captured during the period of dispersal from spawning areas had already begun feeding on natural food sources in the stream and thus would prefer natural foods during rearing as opposed to common hatchery diets; primarily brine shrimp. During the larval period wild lake sturgeon experience high rates of mortality after hatching from eggs due to unknown environmental or physiological causes. Bill conducted an experiment examining the survival and growth rates of wild-caught larval Lake Sturgeon from the Black River using different food and aquaria density treatments in the rearing facility. The project's goal was to make recommendations for prescribing feeding and rearing conditions for wild-caught larval Lake Sturgeon to increase survival within the rearing facility and thus meet or even exceed Lake Sturgeon stocking expectations for surrounding water bodies in the future.

## Biotic and abiotic predictors of lake sturgeon egg abundance

**Ryan Young**

Ryan Young is a recent Michigan State University graduate in Fisheries & Wildlife. Ryan assisted with a research project investigating the effects of stream physical and biological components (notably macroinvertebrate communities) on sturgeon egg deposition and survival in spawning areas. Lake sturgeon spawn in large groups and eggs are broadcast over large areas of stream. During incubation, lake sturgeon eggs are exposed to harsh environmental conditions resulting in significant mortality. During this experiment Ryan measured fine-scale environmental and biological characteristics of the stream including water depth, water velocity, substrate size, as well as the abundance and diversity of aquatic insects that may prey on eggs. The project's goal was to measure ecological predictors of egg location, abundance, and survival.

## Three days post-hatch migration of larval lake sturgeon in variable substrate environments.

**Ryan Hastings** is a native of Cary, Illinois and is a graduate of Eastern Illinois University. Ryan graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Biology. This was Ryan's second year working on the Black Lake sturgeon project. During this experiment Ryan measured distances larval lake sturgeon traveled after hatch in an artificial stream established at a stream-side research facility operated by Michigan State University and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. The goal was to determine whether larvae exhibit preferences for substrate type (small gravel, large gravel, sand). Immediately following hatch, free-swimming larval lake sturgeon burrow into suitable substrate for protection from predators and for space as they utilize yolk energy reserves to develop to a condition where they are feeding and can maneuver in streams. However, human-caused changes in stream substrates such as increased sedimentation has reduced the amount and distribution of suitable substrates. We suspect that these changes have affected larval development and survival. Preliminary results revealed that distances traveled in the artificial stream was dependent upon substrate type. Information gathered from this experiment will allow managers to determine if current spawning sites chosen by spawning adults offers suitable habitat for hatched larvae or whether larvae would disperse to find suitable substrate, thereby increasing changes of mortality.

# Photo Gallery

Cameron M. with his "Dinosaur Fish"

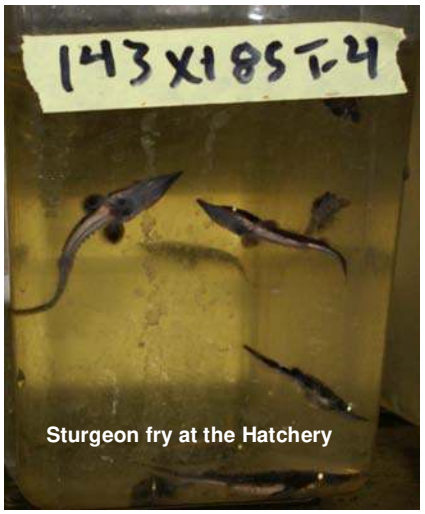
Sturgeon Guard

Sturgeon Guard

Sturgeon Exhibit at Indian River Library

Black River Sturgeon Release

Black River Sturgeon Viewing Tour




Sturgeon fry at the Hatchery

## Hatchery Tours


## SFT Scholarships

The SFT Fisheries, Wildlife or Natural Resources Scholarships are designed to provide tangible encouragement and public recognition for academic achievement or community service for students with a course of study in the field of Fisheries, Wildlife or Natural Resources conservation.

The goal of these scholarships is to further the objectives of SFT by rewarding and promoting the education and development of future fisheries professionals.

SFT Vice President Bob Bonner (left) presents a $500.00 scholarship to Luke Kaiser (right) from Lake Superior State University.


SFT Board member Jason Woiderski (right) presents a $500.00 scholarship to Alisha Anderson (left) from Inland lakes High School.

SFT also sponsored a youth leader at **MUCC's 2011 Youth Camp.**


MUCC's Youth Camp introduces kids to the joys of the outdoors each summer. These week-long, overnight camps are designed to give kids an outdoors experience that will propel them into a lifetime of outdoors and conservation principles.

## Thank you for your contributions!

**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.**

***Building a Legacy!***

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**In Memory of Charles J. Cannon**
Charles Cannon Family

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Mary Janney

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John Tomlinson


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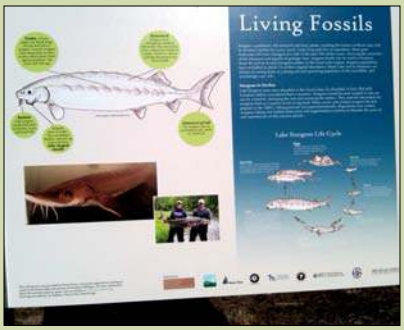
Todd Zeller, Great Lakes Taxidermy

## All signs point toward a project well done

Where sand formerly eroded into the Upper Black River and covered crucial sturgeon spawning sites, native plants now hold the streambank in place. From here, much of the success now lies in the hands of the public.

Visitors will now see educational signage before trying to catch a glimpse of the state-threatened lake sturgeon. Three signs were placed early this spring, one at each erosion site, to teach the visitors the importance of having healthy streambanks and how excessive erosion and sedimentation can negatively impact the river and the sturgeon many of them are there to view.


The topics on each sign vary, including the biology and life cycle of the sturgeon, streambank rehabilitation and erosion control, watersheds and their management and ways each visitor can help protect rivers, watersheds and the wildlife that depend on them.




**THANK YOU Patrick Ertel and Huron Pines for taking the lead on this project!**

*Please join us in thanking the following contributors who have given generously to support lake sturgeon recovery at our 13th Annual Banquet.*

*Our success is most certainly your success.*

*Thank you!*

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The McCall Sisters (Deb, Kathy & Brenda)

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Jason/Stacy Woiderski
Jay/Mary Kay Woiderski
Woodwinds Restaurant
Zany Kitchen
*And any one else regrettably omitted*

## Sturgeon For Tomorrow volunteers receive Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition from US Senator Debbie Stabenow.

Certificates were presented to Sturgeon Guarding Program volunteer coordinators and sturgeon ambassadors in recognition of their spirit of volunteerism and commitment to the improved quality of life for the people of the state of Michigan and to the conservation and protection of the state threatened lake sturgeon.

Sturgeon For Tomorrow President Brenda Archambo presents Certificates of Special Congressional Recognition from US Senator Debbie Stabenow to (from left) Bill and Sharon Church, Ann and Mark Feldhauser and Fran Hartle.

Bob Garner was honored for his long standing commitment and leadership role in raising public awareness of the iconic lake sturgeon and dedication to Sturgeon For Tomorrow.

Sturgeon For Tomorrow President Brenda Archambo presents Bob Garner with a Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition from US Senator Debbie Stabenow.

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**Sturgeon General** **Volume 13** Issue 1 WINTER 2012

## Did you know?

There are three Sturgeon For Tomorrow Chapters in Michigan;

The Black lake Chapter,
The Kalamazoo Chapter and our newest, the St. Clair-Detroit River Chapter.

Please check out their websites to learn how can get involved with other sturgeon programs across the state.

kzoosturgeon.org

stclairsturgeon.org

## Upcoming Events

**February**

4-8: Black Lake Sturgeon Season

Sturgeon Advisory Council Meeting

**April**

Register for Sturgeon Guarding Program

**May**

Sturgeon Guarding Program

Research: Netting, tagging and larval sampling

Hatchery up and running

**Aug**

Sturgeon Hatchery Tours, Sturgeon Releases: Date TBD

**Sept**

8: 14th Annual SFT Banquet, Cheboygan

**www. sturgeonfortomorrow.org**

### Sturgeon Book & Video

Sturgeon For Tomorrow, Onaway High School Environmental Science Class and Michigan Sea Grant are collaborating to publish our own ***Black Lake Lake Sturgeon book and video.***

This project is funded by the Great Lakes Stewardship initiative (GLSI).

Onaway, the ***Sturgeon Capitol of Michigan*** will be featured throughout, yet the ***majestic lake sturgeon*** takes the stage as we learn what makes this prehistoric fish worthy of our ways, what is being done to create a sustainable future, and ways you can connect with the movement to...

***Save The Sturgeon!***