



Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network
The Conservation Fund
P.O. Box 734
Bay City, MI 48707
www.saginawbaywin.org

News Release

For Immediate Release: October 29, 2021

Contact:

Michael Kelly- Director, Great Lakes Office
The Conservation Fund – Saginaw Bay WIN Program
989-501-9909
mkelly@conservationfund.org

Saginaw Bay Region’s Sturgeon Restoration Effort Surpasses 4,000 Fish Stocked into Local Rivers

Identified as a state-threatened species, a broad partnership of agencies, organizations, communities and the public are working to bring this important fish species back in the Saginaw Bay watershed

Program partners have announced an important new milestone in the effort to restore the Saginaw Bay region’s sturgeon population: Since 2017 partners have stocked 4055 fish, including an additional 728 this fall. These fish have been released into the Cass, Tittabawassee, Flint, and Shiawassee Rivers.

According to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) sturgeon were extirpated from the Saginaw system early in the last century due to habitat loss, pollution and over harvest. Today, the species has what is considered to be a nonspawning “remnant” population. Globally, sturgeon date back more than 130 million years, far longer than most dinosaur populations. Lake sturgeon are nearshore fish that live at water depths of 15-30 feet. They feed along lake bottoms, eating a variety of small animals including snails, crustaceans, aquatic insects, mussels, and small fish. Most lake sturgeon caught today weigh between 30-100 pounds and grow to 3-6 feet in length. Lake sturgeon live longer than any other fish species in Michigan. Male lake sturgeon live an average of 55 years. Females live 80-150 years. Despite their long lives, sturgeon are slow to mature. It takes about 15 years for male lake sturgeon to reach reproductive maturity and 20-25 years for females.

In the Saginaw Bay region, a broad partnership that includes the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network, Michigan Sea Grant, The Conservation Fund, Sturgeon for Tomorrow, Michigan State University and others are working together to bring the population back. Sturgeon released into the Saginaw system are reared at the Michigan DNR’s Black Lake hatchery, and the Federal hatchery in Genoa, Wisconsin.

“This is an extremely exciting milestone in this long-term effort to bring this keystone species back from the brink of extinction”, said Michael Kelly of The Conservation Fund and Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network. “We know the effort is working, because while they cannot be targeted, there have been several incidental catches of the stocked fish by anglers fishing for walleye and other species along the Saginaw River tributaries. This one of the great restoration success stories in all of the Great Lakes” continued Kelly. “We look forward to continued commitment by partners and the public to both the reintroduction project and river restoration”.

“While this is a very long-term effort, the sturgeon reintroduction is already successful because it was preceded by strong community support to improve the overall habitat and health of the river”, said Randy Claramunt, MDNR Fisheries Division, Lake Huron Basin Coordinator.

“Stocking Lake Sturgeon (and efforts at their restoration in general) is like planting a tree. They are so long lived, it’s really a gift we are giving to future generations of anglers and citizens. We may not be around to see the full fruits of our efforts” said David Fielder Ph.D, MDNR Fisheries Research Biologist.

“To our knowledge, the only natural reproduction of Lake Sturgeon in Michigan waters of Lake Huron comes from the St. Marys River area and the Upper St. Clair River. Stocking sturgeon into the Saginaw River watershed introduces a population into an area more centered in Lake Huron. As a result, we are hopeful this reintroduction effort plays a pivotal role in restoring Lake Sturgeon in Lake Huron. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is excited to be a part of this project and looks forward to continued collaboration with project partners to restore Lake Sturgeon in the Saginaw River watershed” said Justin Chiotti, Fisheries Biologist, U.S Fish and Wildlife Service.

“The lake sturgeon restoration is about more than the species itself. Lake sturgeon need clean water of suitable temperatures, a variety of habitats for their different life stages, and rivers with unimpeded passage to their spawning grounds. The sturgeon releases allow us to highlight and celebrate the good conditions of the river and instill community pride in their local rivers”, said Jeff Jolley Ph.D, MDNR Saginaw Bay Fisheries Unit Supervisor.

“The collaboration among and between partners to restore Michigan’s threatened lake sturgeon is absolutely refreshing. In addition to addressing lake sturgeon rehabilitation and recovery, our Sturgeon in the Classroom program is robust and has proven to educate and engage students statewide toward conservation stewardship and advocacy” Brenda Archambo, President, Sturgeon For Tomorrow- Black Lake Chapter

Learn more about the sturgeon restoration effort at www.saginawbaysturgeon.org.



The Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network (WIN) is a collaborative, community driven quality of life initiative created by a variety of environmental, business and community interests in 1996. WIN was formed to create a more sustainable future for all who live, work and play within the 22-county Saginaw Bay watershed. One of the ways in which WIN accomplishes this objective is by providing financial support to projects that link the economic, environmental and social needs of the region. Key WIN funding partners include: Bay Area Community Foundation, Consumers Energy Foundation, Harry A. and Margaret D. Towsley Foundation, Midland Area Community Foundation, Rollin M. Gerstacker Foundation, Saginaw Community Foundation, The Dow Chemical Company Foundation, The Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow Foundation, S.C. Johnson Fund, the Cook Family Foundation, the C.S. Mott Foundation and the Saginaw Bay Foundation. Since its inception, WIN has awarded in excess of \$6 million to more than 300 projects across the region. More information on WIN is available at www.saginawbaywin.org or by calling 989.892.9171.