

# Rare Animals of Louisiana



## Gulf Sturgeon

*Acipenser oxyrinchus desotoi*

**Rarity Rank:** S1S2/G3T2

|        | 1         | 2 | 3    | 4 | 5      |
|--------|-----------|---|------|---|--------|
| State  |           |   |      |   |        |
| Global |           |   |      |   |        |
|        | imperiled |   | rare |   | secure |



U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service

### Identification:

- Large, primitive, relatively stocky, cylindrical fish
- Head elongated and wedge-shaped
- Four fleshy barbels in front of the mouth, which are positioned on the underside of the head
- Five rows of bony plates on each side with a prominent dorsal ridge
- Tail fin 2-lobed, with upper lobe longest
- Spiracle above each eye
- Light to dark brown above, pale below
- Adult specimens range between 1.8 to 2.4 m total length and may weigh as much as 100 kg

### Habitat:

All saltwater habitats, except during the spawning season when it is found in major rivers that empty into the Gulf of Mexico

### Food habits:

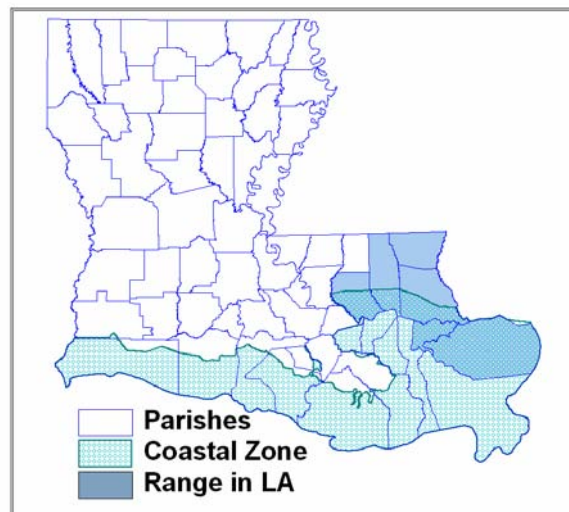
Bottom feeders and primary prey items include insects, crustaceans, mollusks, annelids (worms), and small fishes

### Range:

- This species consists of 2 recognized subspecies, *A. o. oxyrinchus*, which ranges from Labrador to northeastern Florida, and *A. o. desotoi*, which is found from the Mississippi River delta east to Suwannee River, Florida
- In Louisiana, most records of the Gulf sturgeon have been in the Pearl, Bogue Chitto and Tchefuncte rivers in St. Tammany and Washington parishes, although it is likely to be found in any large river in the Lake Pontchartrain drainage

### Reproduction:

- Species is anadromus, meaning it breeds in fresh water, then returns to salt water
- Mature between 10 and 28 years of age and may live up to 60 years
- Spawning occurs between late winter and early spring in major rivers
- A female may lay as many as 25 million eggs during the spawning season



Range based on occurrences in Natural Heritage database

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- Young descend to the Gulf at about 4 years of age and may wander up to 1500 km from the natal stream (place where born) before returning to spawn

## **Threats:**

- Incidental catch in trammel and gill nets may be the single most important threat
- Harvest of adults for meat and eggs (caviar) has been the principle cause of the decline
- Habitat alteration, especially the construction of dams, which limits access to the spawning areas
- Continued modification of rivers by constructing dams or dredging, which affects habitat quality and availability

## **Beneficial Management Practices:**

- Currently protected from harvest throughout its range
- River modification must take into account effects on sturgeon
- The use of TEDS (turtle exclusion devices) on shrimp trawls may reduce incidental catch
- Studies are underway to determine the status, distribution and movements of this species in Louisiana

## **LA River Basins:**

Pearl, Pontchartrain



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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For more information, please visit our Web pages at

[www.wlf.louisiana.gov/experience/naturalheritage](http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/experience/naturalheritage) or call 225-765-2811

[www.BTNEP.org](http://www.BTNEP.org) or 1-800-259-0869