

# Atlantic Sturgeon

*Acipenser oxyrinchus* (St. Lawrence and Maritimes Populations)



DRAWING BY DUANE TAVNER

## Species Description

The Atlantic Sturgeon is a heavily-armoured, elongated fish with five rows of bony plates (scutes). It can grow to over 4 m in length. It has four barbels (whisker-like organs) in front of its mouth. Its snout (rostrum) is flattened below and relatively long. It has 25-30 anal fin rays, 38-46 dorsal fin rays, and an extended upper tail lobe. It usually has a brassy-tan to brown green back and a white belly, with thick, rough, leathery skin.



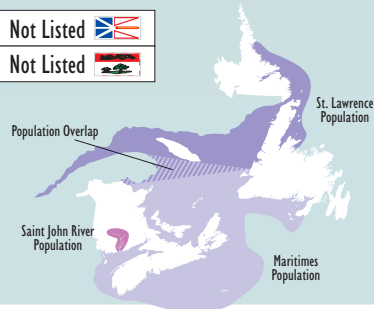
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<b>STATUS</b>	Threatened 	Not Listed 
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Found from the Ungava Bay south to Florida. In Canada, it has only been confirmed to spawn in the Saint John River (NB) and the St. Lawrence River (Québec).

## Habitat

The Atlantic Sturgeon lives in rivers, estuaries, bays and the ocean. It matures in saltwater and spawns and spends its juvenile stage in the freshwater of larger rivers. Spawning occurs in river sections with a high flow rate and a gravelly or rocky bottom substrate, and also below waterfalls and in deep pools over a hard-surfaced substrate. Spawning is known to occur in the Saint John River, and suspected in a few other larger rivers in the Maritimes and Labrador.



© CHRISTOPHER COAK, FLYCOP  
Lower Saint John River



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Vast ocean waters

These bottom-dwelling fish are often seen by fishers along the coast or in larger rivers or estuaries.

## Interesting Points

- The largest reported Atlantic Sturgeon was caught in the Saint John River in 1924, and was 4.6 m long and weighed 365 kg (over 800 lbs)!
- A moratorium on fishing this species has been in place in the USA since 1998; a small commercial fishery still occurs in the Saint John River.
- Atlantic Sturgeons live on a diet of crustaceans, worms, and mollusks.



Atlantic Sturgeons just outside a weir in the Bay of Fundy

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## Similar Species

### Shortnose Sturgeon:

Snout much shorter and less tapered; mouth is wider (> 60% of body width); skin smooth and slippery; 19-22 anal fin rays and 19-22 dorsal fin rays; usually shorter than 1 m; often occurring in the same river habitat, although this species is rarely observed in the sea.



Snouts and mouths

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## Threats to Survival

- Overexploitation from commercial fishing historically lowered Atlantic Sturgeon populations.
- Habitat alteration due to large dams, which result in turbine-related mortalities and affect availability and quality of spawning habitat.
- Bycatch in gaspereau and shad fisheries.
- Toxins or other pollutants that significantly reduce river water quality.
- Introduction of harmful exotic fish species and diseases.



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Sturgeon killed by dam turbine

## How You Can Help

For fishers in the Maritime Provinces: follow all fishing regulations established by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans as outlined in angling summaries which are available from your provincial government. If you catch this species, release any specimen shorter than 120 cm immediately and report your sighting. Catching sturgeons in June when they are spawning is prohibited.



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Release any sturgeons shorter than 120 cm

## Contacts, Information, & Sighting Reports

**Contact:** DFO Species at Risk 1-866-891-0771

**Info:** [www.sararegistry.gc.ca](http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca), [www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/species-especes](http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/species-especes)

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