

## 2004 Lake Sturgeon Committee Strategic Action Plan- Summit

### **Lake Sturgeon Goal:**

Self-sustaining lake sturgeon populations throughout the Great Lakes, with economic benefits from recreation, fishing, and Native American use, and ecological benefit to the Great Lakes fish community.

**Objective:** Self-sustaining lake sturgeon populations will be shown to be recovering throughout their range in each of the Great Lakes when 20 year classes of spawning age fish are present and reproducing in the systems. Since the age at first spawning may be 20+ years old, the duration for the recovery should be approximately 50 years.

The mission of the Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem Team Lake Sturgeon Committee is to involve and coordinate lake sturgeon restoration and rehabilitation activities of all programs to the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service and to provide sound science, coordination, and assistance to our partners so that they will be aware of the challenges facing lake sturgeon restoration and the current conditions of stocks and spawning populations and working together we are able to obtain more resources to accomplish specific restoration goals through stock assessment, necessary protection, habitat protection/restoration, fish passage, pollution control, education, stocking and invasive species controls, resulting ultimately in self-sustaining lake sturgeon populations throughout the Great Lakes, with economic benefits from recreation, fishing, and Native American use, and ecological benefit to the Great Lakes fish community.

### **Accomplishments:**

#### **Great Lakes Fishery Trust Lake Sturgeon Meeting**

The lake sturgeon committee worked in FY2002 to develop a Great Lakes basin wide coordination meeting. Funds for the meeting were provided by the Great Lakes Fishery Trust. The purpose for the meeting is to provide an annual forum to foster communication and exchange of information relating to the study, management, and restoration of lake sturgeon in the Great Lakes basin, to address priority research and assessment needs, and to address selected emerging issues. Additionally the group addressed priority research and assessment needs, and selected emerging issues-consideration of stocking to restore populations, survey techniques for determining status. The meeting was attended by 114 people. Major topics covered in the presentation day included status overviews, stocking activities, genetics, juvenile and adult assessments and biology, survival, habitat, and database development. This was the first of 3 such meetings that will occur over the next few years. Funding was provided by the GLFT, along with a good bit of FWS and other agency in-kind match in the form of our time in planning and holding these meetings. Proceedings from the 2002 meeting are available now on the Great Lakes Lake Sturgeon Website. The next coordination meeting is planned for November 2004.

#### **Lake Sturgeon Tributary Inventory**

The Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem Team Lake Sturgeon Committee continued to make progress on the web-based lake sturgeon database and GIS map. This project will create a unified, interactive web-based GIS map and meta-database of Great Lakes lake sturgeon information important to researchers and managers. The database will enhance the existing map and database developed for the 2000 Great Lakes Fishery Trust Lake Sturgeon Workshop. The long-term objective of the project is to compile the available lake sturgeon data sources to help focus restoration and research activities on priority lake sturgeon waters. A draft version of this project was completed in June, and additional funding has been secured through the Great Lakes Fishery Trust to expand and upgrade the project.

### **Commercial Fishers Monitoring**

The Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem Team Lake Sturgeon Committee received FY 2002 and 2003 flex funding from Regions 3 & 5 to expand their lake sturgeon work to include the collection of information on sturgeon captured by commercial fishers in the Great Lakes. The funding for this proposal will provide the commercial fishers with training and equipment to gather data from lake sturgeon that will assist biologists in determining the number and distribution of sturgeon, determine sturgeon movement patterns in the Great Lakes, and compile critical data on sturgeon growth and reproduction. This project is an opportunity for biologists to work cooperatively with an important stakeholder group -- commercial fishers from four of the Great Lakes.

### **Lake Sturgeon Plastomounts**

The lake sturgeon committee chair worked with Fish and Wildlife Service Offices in Regions 3 and 5 to coordinate ordering of lake sturgeon plastomounts. Lake sturgeon were provided by Genoa National Fish Hatchery. These plastomounts are expected to be utilized as an important outreach tool.

### **Lake Sturgeon Brochures**

The lake sturgeon committee chair worked with Fish and Wildlife Service Offices in Regions 3 and 5 to coordinate ordering of lake sturgeon brochures (about 12,000), which have been distributed. Region 3 is now working to get the lake sturgeon brochure added to the Washington order list, for greater distribution and availability. A download pdf file of the brochure is available at the Great Lakes Lake Sturgeon Web Site

### **Great Lakes Lake Sturgeon Web Site**

Biologist Anjie Bowen revised the Great Lakes Lake Sturgeon Web Site ([midwest.fws.gov/sturgeon](http://midwest.fws.gov/sturgeon)) in April, 2003. Cooperators were contacted to provide updated information. The page coordinates international, federal, state, and university lake sturgeon activities in the Great Lakes basin and serves as the primary site for disseminating lake sturgeon information. Funding to update and maintain the page was provided through Flex Funds.

### **Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem Team Leads Effort to Standardize Great Lakes Lake Sturgeon Genetics**

Through the Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem Team, Lake Sturgeon Committee is leading an effort to coordinate and standardize lake sturgeon genetics activities in the Great Lakes Basin. In order to better guide lake sturgeon restoration and enhancement efforts in the Great Lakes, resource managers need a better understanding of the genetic structure among populations. The Service is leading a cooperative effort for future basin-wide research, where some funding has been secured. Additional funds are needed for sample collection, stock structure analysis, and preparing a basin-wide management plan. The comprehensive project proposal remains a collaborative effort among and between natural resource agencies and geneticists.

### **Great Lakes Basin Lake Sturgeon Rehabilitation Plan**

During FY2004, the Lake Sturgeon Committee will reinvigorate efforts to develop a Great Lakes Basin lake sturgeon rehabilitation plan. The Committee identified the need for this plan in 1997 and began initial work in 2000. The plan will require considerable time to complete; however, when implemented, this plan will better define the Service's role in lake sturgeon restoration across the Great Lakes basin.

**Needs:** 1) To continue and enhance those projects for which accomplishments are described above, and to initiate new rehabilitation activities, offices need stable, long-term funding. The reliance on soft funds does not facilitate a consistent, effective program.

We have a real and excellent opportunity for success because lake sturgeon are charismatic megafauna, we do have opportunities to improve their population status with ( **these projects are not cheap e.g. dam removal, spawning reef construction**) relatively cheap habitat/passage projects (**cheap relative to multimillion dollar hatchery facilities, deepwater and/or remote controlled research vessels, and the cost of listing/delisting this species**), we can get the public and congressionals involved (with) hands-on watch/adopt/friends groups, we have done an excellent job at outreach and education, and the public is aware of the species through our outreach efforts, incidental catches, and news reports.

**Requesting specific action:** Recognition of need to support and rank highly lake sturgeon projects for FONS and other funding opportunities. The committee will continue to report on our successes to the RO staff and continue to submit proposals for new/continuing projects.

2) Continued discussion within the Service and with partners agencies and institutions that lead to a biologically sound and ecologically responsible decision matrix that will guide the use of stocking to rehabilitate lake sturgeon populations.

**Requesting specific action:** RO representation at next coordination meeting, focused workshop on this use of stocking as a management tool for lake sturgeon. The committee will continue the dialogue within the Service and with our partners and extend the invitation to the RO staff.

### Lake Sturgeon Committee Logic Model Components

#### Resources:

GLBET LAS committee members- their time, expertise, grant \$, and equipment,  
RO staff- time, expertise, base \$,  
Agency Partners and Commercial fishers- their equipment, \$, time, experience,  
Rich and other members of GLBET, GLNPO,

#### Activities:

field surveys and associated lab work,  
data analysis and report writing  
habitat improvement/ restoration  
projects  
meetings/education events "outreach"  
among researchers, with stakeholders,  
commercial fishers, or with  
congressionals  
public outreach- website, local events  
Coordination and planning basinwide-  
with partners (i.e. GLFC)  
Fish Passage issues  
Genetics

**Stocking- our role here needs examination- already looking at genetics issues and need to survey more wild stocks to base future decisions on use of this tool and need for our hatcheries etc.—this issue is controversial and there is not yet consensus for use or not use USFWS needs to be requested by states and tribes to participate Hatchery capacity?- Neosho, Genoa-full, Pittsford-would like to develop capacity**

#### Outputs:

Reports-commercial report, binational report, genetics report  
Management/rehabilitation plans  
tagged fish,  
habitat restored,  
Spawning sites identified  
Genetic mapping completed  
LAS website, brochure, local outreach events  
Coordination meetings  
GL Strategy reporting completed  
SOLEC reports for indicators on lake sturgeon restoration

**Short-term (immediate) outcomes:**

stakeholders educated- business, industry, sports persons, conservationists,  
congressionals aware of results/issues and implications

**Mid-term outcomes:**

environmentally responsible business practices,  
catch and release of LAS,  
environmentally responsible land use  
more funds to help with these outcomes from stakeholders with money and congress  
greater awareness of current conditions of stocks, knowledge of current spawning populations

**(Goal) Long-term outcomes:**

fishable self-sustaining lake sturgeon populations throughout the Great Lakes, with economic  
benefits from recreation and fishing related jobs, and Native American harvest

**Audience:**

Congress  
Partners

**Thought Questions:**

“So, what can we do for you?”

Answer: Here’s where we want to go..., here’s what we need you to do (or help us with)  
now..., in one year..., in five years....

“What can USFWS do that no one else can do?”

Answers to these questions need to be tied to measurable things that the audience cares about  
such as #’s of people who fish, # of acres of habitat in need of restoration, real changes in the  
ecosystem. The brainstorm ideas also need to be optimistic, big thinking, outside the box, so that  
we can come up with the *best* realistic ideas to pass on at the summit meeting.