

500 young sturgeon released into Saginaw River system

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Five hundred young sturgeon were released at four locations into the Saginaw River system last week as part of an ongoing effort by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Michigan State

University to rebuild the giant fish's population.

The sturgeons came from the Black Lake Stream Side Rearing Facility in Onaway, a facility opened by the DNR and MSU that supplies hatcheries all over the state. Each August, sturgeons are also released into the Black River, Mullett Lake in Cheboygan County, and the Boardman River in Grand Traverse County, the DNR and MSU said in a [news](#) release Wednesday.

Researchers, graduate students and undergraduates catch newly hatched sturgeons in the spring and raise them until August, the news release said. Over the three months, the sturgeons grow from less than 1 inch to 7 inches in length. They are then tagged with passive integrated transponders similar to pet microchips and released into rivers around the state.

Illegal harvesting of sturgeons has contributed to significant population loss and brought the giant fish to the brink of extinction in the Great Lakes. Industrialization and dams also contributed to [habitat loss](#) and blocked sturgeon from reaching their spawning grounds.

Now all harvested lake sturgeons must be reported to the DNR and anglers are limited to one lake sturgeon harvest per year, according to the 2024 Michigan Fishing Regulations. Lake sturgeon fishing also is limited to certain bodies of water, and various size requirements for catch and release.

In Black Lake harvest season is only five days, starting on the first Saturday in February, the news release said. Licensed anglers are allowed to harvest six sturgeon each and tribal nations are also allowed six.

Rearing sturgeons in the Black Lake facility gives the fish a better

chance of surviving when released, MSU Professor Emeritus Kim Scribner said. Due to their small size, newly hatched sturgeons in the wild often become meals for other predators and few survive to adulthood.

"A lot of things eat sturgeon eggs and sturgeon babies all the way through that first year of life," Scribner said. "The mortality rate is extremely high."

The population of adult sturgeons in Black Lake has doubled thanks to the hatchery and stocking efforts, the news release said. The end goal is for the lake sturgeon population to be self-sufficient even if they are fished recreationally every year, Ed Baker, manager for the DNR Marquette Fisheries Research Station, said in the news release. Research on sturgeons and their care has helped improve the rearing and stocking program over time, the news release said.

"The hatchery is providing a more healthy, robust crop of sturgeons that are able to survive with higher probabilities," Scribner said. "That all came about through research at the facility."

On average, sturgeons live between 50 and 100 years and can grow between 4 and 6 feet long. Some have lived for up to 150 years, reaching 8 feet in length, and weighing 300 pounds, according to Michigan Sea Grant, a research, education, and outreach program with the University of Michigan, MSU, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Other Michigan sturgeon populations, like those in the Detroit and St. Clair Rivers are holding strong at roughly 30,000 fish, despite a history of industrialization, the Detroit News previously reported. The rivers are home to the largest lake [sturgeon](#) population in the Great Lakes.

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