

FISH: INTERESTING SPECIES

ASK^{an} EXPERT
ABOUT THE MINNESOTA RIVER

What fish are living in the water of the Minnesota River and its many tributaries?

Species diversity is what fishery experts and citizens alike point to as an important indicator of how the fisheries of the Minnesota River Basin have changed over the last 50 or more years. A basin-wide survey in the 1990s found close to 100 different species living in the main stem and tributaries. The Minnesota River has come far from the 1950s when peas, carrots and fecal matter floated in the water. Today, indicator species like the Blue Sucker, Paddle Fish and Lake Sturgeon are being snagged at increasing rates and the Minnesota River is being celebrated for its thriving catfish population. DNR fishery biologists conduct surveys on the river and identify sediment as one of the biggest concerns for maintaining and increasing a healthy fishery.

Indicator species like the Paddle Fish, Lake Sturgeon and the Blue Sucker are just three of close to 100 fish species found today in the Minnesota River and tributaries. Species diversity and fish abundance have begun a slow rebound with improving water quality including less sediment in the water. The Minnesota River has come a long ways from the 1950s when peas, carrots and fecal matter floated in the water and surveys found few fish. More and more the Minnesota River is being celebrated for its thriving catfish population, increasing fish habitat and more stable fish populations. DNR fishery biologists conduct surveys on the river and identify sediment as one of the biggest concerns for maintaining and increasing a healthy fishery.

Cool fish like the prehistoric Paddle Fish with its large snout in the shape of a paddle and shark-like forked tail. There are two different types of the sturgeon (Lake and Shovelnose) who had been hammered by overfishing and water quality problems. How about the Blue Sucker? Here is another important indicator species on an upward swing and reproducing in the Minnesota River for the first time in years.

For more information visit the Natural History of Minnesota Fishes web page http://hatch.cehd.umn.edu/research/fish/fishes/natural_history.html



Ron Bolduan



Jane True



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MDNR

Lake Sturgeon - *Acipenser fulvescens*

A fairly-slow growing fish, the Lake Sturgeon is the state's largest reaching up to 100 pounds and females living up to 150 years old. In the early days of Minnesota's history there are stories of anglers catching Lake Sturgeon as big as 400 pounds and 14 feet in length. A combination of factors including overfishing, dams limiting migration and water quality problems not only reduced its population but also the sizes with many only reaching 40 pounds today. Look for its bony or shark-like plates covering the slate gray skin and usually found in large rivers with deep channels and pools.



Konrad Schmidt

Paddlefish - *Polyodontidae*

If it seems like this fish has stepped from the era of the dinosaurs you would be right. Once common in the Minnesota the paddlefish is known for several shark-like characteristics including its forked tail, large amount of cartilage in its skeleton and on its head gills found inside of spiracles. No one has quite figured out the use of this large paddle shaped snout except they don't use it to dig into the bottom of the river. At one time before it became rare due to pollution problems people valued it as a prized fish food. Normally you will find paddlefish swimming with sturgeons, catfish, carpsuckers, the buffalo, and common carp.



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Blue Sucker - *Cypleptus elongatus*

DNR Fish Biologists get excited when they caught a number of Blue Suckers above the Minnesota Falls Dam near Granite Falls. They consider this an indicator species and see its reproducing population as a sign of improving water quality. Known to live in large, southern rivers like the Minnesota, St. Croix and Mississippi, this very rare fish can live more than 10 years (normally 7 to 8 years). The Blue Sucker is currently listed as a species of Special Concern after being impacted by dams and locks built on the Mississippi and Minnesota rivers.



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Shovelnose Sturgeon - *Scaphirhynchus platyrhynchus*

Much smaller than the Lake Sturgeon, this fish usually grows to the size of 24 inches and three pounds and North America's smallest sturgeon. They will live for about 14 years. At one time it had been commercially netted for both its meat and caviar before the destruction and loss of habitat. Shovelnose Sturgeon feeds on the bottom of river and lake bottoms like the Lake Sturgeon eating macroinvertebrates or aquatic insects including stonefly larvae, snails and small mussels. Check out its long, flat snout; shovel-shaped head and shark-like tail.

"Ask an Expert about the Minnesota River" project profiles scientists and citizens answering questions about the health of the Minnesota River. More answers to questions about the Minnesota River can be found at: mrbdc.mnsu.edu/learn
Funding for this project was provided by the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund as recommended by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) and the McKnight Foundation.