



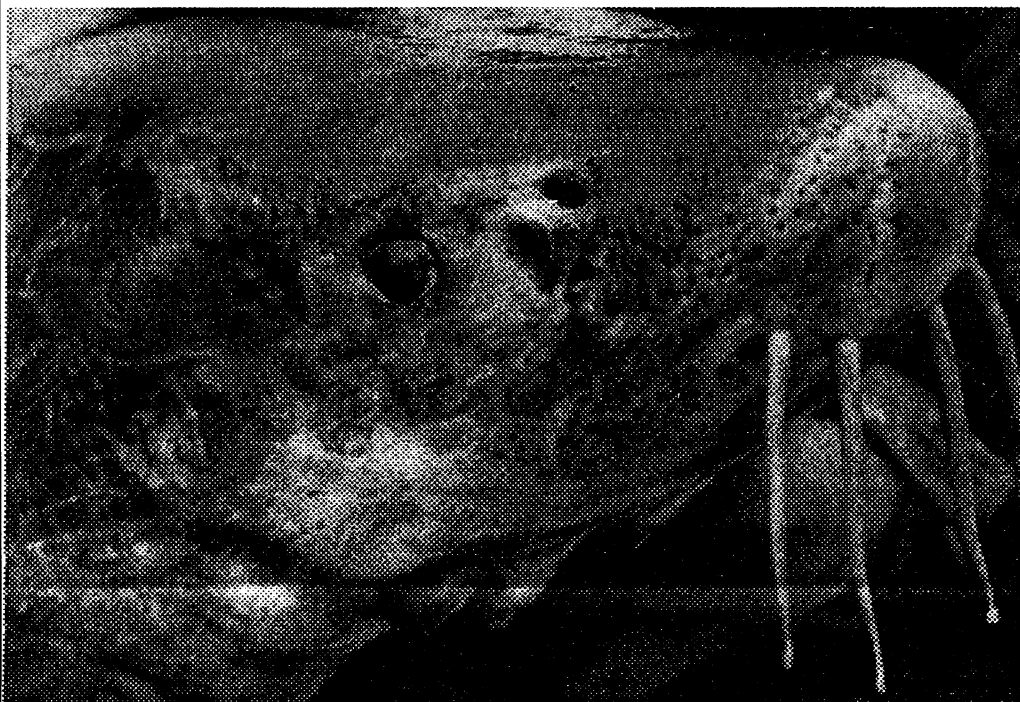
Hook, Line, and Sinker

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The Official Publication of The New Ulm Area Sport Fishermen

Tracking Minnesota's most mysterious fish

Follow that sturgeon



That's right, it's a fish. And DNR fisheries biologists following these massive lake sturgeon are turning up some surprising finds about their habits.

Monstrous and mysterious, with a history nearly as tragic as that of the American bison, the sturgeon is among Minnesota's most remarkable fish.

This toothless, scaleless, boneless throw-back to the dinosaur age is a fish few anglers have ever seen, much less slipped onto a stringer. Even seasoned sturgeon anglers can spend literally hundreds of hours to catch a single one of these uncommon, hard-to-locate fish. Females of the species take more than 20 years to reach sexual maturity, and both sexes can live for more than a century. This is also the biggest fish that swims in Minnesota, reaching over 100 pounds (though unofficial reports from the turn of the century indicate sturgeon 7 feet long and weighing more than 300 pounds!).

DNR fisheries experts in Hinckley hope to unravel some of the sturgeon's mystery with the completion this fall of a three-year study on the Kettle River, a St. Croix tributary in east-central Minnesota

"Our aim is to document which sections of the Kettle River the sturgeon are using - to identify some critical habitat areas that can be

preserved or protected in the future," says Roger Hugill, DNR fisheries supervisor at Hinckley. "The long-term goal is a more healthy sturgeon population in the river. Their abundance seems to be down, so we need to get a better idea of what their habitat needs are.

The study is unique because it follows a resident river sturgeon population rather than a lake population that returns to a river to spawn, as has been the case with other sturgeon tracking studies.

Down there somewhere

Finding where sturgeon spend their days means following the fish around the river. That's easier said than done, however. Though massive compared to other fish species, sturgeon still live underwater and thus out of sight.

The solution to tracking underwater creatures is to surgically implant small electronic transmitters so that biologists can follow them with radio telemetry. But this highly effective technique is also highly expensive. For years, DNR fisheries workers had the knowledge but lacked the funds to determine where the fish hung out.

Then in 1994 the Fond du Lac Band of Chippewa, seeking sturgeon eggs to re-establish the fish in upper St. Croix and Clouquet Rivers, asked to join the DNR study and

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Club Calendar

Aug. 28th

Meeting - 7:30 p.m. Schell's Tap Room -
Guest Speakers

September 12th & 13th

Food Stand at Cash Wise Foods

September 25th

Meeting - New Club Room? - 7:30

September 27th

River Rally - Riverside Park - New Ulm

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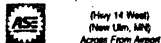
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"PIT STOP" ON FARM TIRE SERVICE

Sturgeon continued from page 1

agreed to buy the radio transmitter. Eager fisheries technicians then went to work, catching several sturgeon with hook and line and surgically implanting them with the 3-inch-long tracking devices.

The transmitter units contain a battery, transmitter, and antenna encased in a plastic resin cylinder about the size of two "D" batteries

Though the Fond du Lac Band has since scaled back its involvement (sturgeon eggs proved to be scarce, the project continues as the DNR fisheries workers Health Weaver and Al Linder track the fish weekly.

Here Sturgeon

Linder and Weaver head out in a boat or an airplane, toting a receiver unit that responds to radio signals with sound and meter readings.

When they pick up a signal, the technicians hone in and meticulously document the readings. Their tracking will continue through October.

Steve Morse, assistant fisheries supervisor, says it's too early to tell what the study will show. But that doesn't mean he won't talk about what he's learned so far.

"Unlike previous radio-telemetry studies of different lake sturgeon populations, which appear to be more active during the day, we're seeing that this Kettle River population is more active at night," Morse says.

The fish spend much of their daylight hours hunkered down in deep pools but then range around once the sun sets, using a wide range of habitats.

Morse says the study appears to confirm widely held beliefs about sturgeon movement, such as that the fish move more when water levels rise. But he says it also is turning up some surprises.

"We'd expected to see the sturgeon range much farther than they have," Morse says.

Another surprise: None of the sturgeon moved upstream of the rapids at the site of the former Sandstone dam, which the DNR removed in 1995. Nor did any of the study fish move downstream into the St. Croix

River.

Linder, a weekly "spy" on the private life of the secretive fish, is a source of rare sturgeon lore. He has tracked a sturgeon swimming as far as one mile in an hour - a surprisingly speedy rate.

Another tantalizing tidbit: Though sturgeon are notoriously hard to catch, it's apparently not because they are easily spooked by anglers.

"They don't seem to be bothered by motors, because on occasion we've actually had them follow our boat for a quarter-mile downstream," says Linder of the inquisitive fish. "One time we turned the boat around and started upstream and the sturgeons followed us the whole time.

Worth Preserving

Morse sees the sturgeon as a Minnesota mainstay that should be preserved for the future. "I think of the sturgeon as part of the state's natural heritage. There were good populations of them 200 years ago, but they were rather easily exploited." Minnesota's lake sturgeon, Morse explains, were almost fished to extinction in the late 1800s for their flesh and for their eggs, which can be made into caviar.

"We have a chance now to help restore some of those historic populations," says Morse, who cautions that even with the most optimistic results, bringing the fish back will take decades. "Restoring sturgeon populations is sort of like planting an oak tree," he explains. "It takes a long time before you ever see the results."

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Contact Mike Deinken



Hook, Line, and Sinker

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The Hook Line and Sinker is published monthly by copy haus for the New Ulm Area Sport Fishermen. The opinions expressed in this newsletter are solely those of respective writers and not to be construed as the opinion of the NUASF or its members. Send all correspondence and submissions to Mike Deinken, Editor, 1022 Spring Street, New Ulm, Minnesota 56073.

The NUASF Board

President - Scott Sparlin (359-2346); Vice-President - Jerry Carlson (354-8869); Secretary / Treasurer - Mike Deinken (359-9650); Board Member - Jim Huelke (354-3654).

• • • • • **FROM THE PRESIDENT** • • • • •

As the year wears on let's not forget that new membership is critical to our organization. With a new member comes new ideas and help for needed and worthwhile projects that we are involved with. As we continue to work on habitat for fish and the perpetuation of sport fishing, we will need invocation from all our membership to insure that generations of anglers will experience the joys we have had from fishing. So if you know of a person who loves fishing and is willing to give some of their time and resources to make a difference get them involved. Too many times I have heard complaints about the "way things are" we have the answer that fits, join us in giving some of your personal resources to make conditions better and have a voice in shaping the future or simply quit complaining.

Our next meeting at the Schell's tap room will include a discussion of water quality problems at Clear Lake. I have arranged to have Brown County staff at the meeting to discuss it. We will also be giving a final recommendation as to our wishes for fish management at the lake given the recent population conditions.

Clear Lake Update

Progress is being made on the aeration system. Last summer one of the air lines floated to the surface and was struck by a boat. At the time we thought the line was just cut. This past winter we discovered that it was more serious. It seems that the air line was pulled off of the the helixer. The air line was easy to locate, the helixer is proving more difficult. By the time you read this the system should be repaired. While we are working on it we plan to add another helixer, giving us a total of six in the lake.

On the piscatorial side of the lake, it seems to be doing well. Young of the year bass are being caught from the docks. Quite a few small fish can be seen feeding along the shore. The weed growth that was so prolific earlier in the year seems to have gone down, making boating possible. With any luck this coming winter, we should see significant increase in the fish population at the lake.

Food Stand Fundraiser

This September we are going to try something a little different in the way of fundraising. I'm sure most of you have seen the little hotdog and brat stands outside of most area grocery stores. Well, this September 12th and 13th we will be running the stand at Cash Wise Foods. The work schedule has been broken down into two four hour shifts per day. The stand will open at 10:00 A.M. and will run until 6:00 P.M. Both morning shifts are already taken care of. We need three people per shift for the two afternoons, from 2:00 P.M. until 6:00P.M. Most groups that run these stands make between \$200 and \$400 per weekend. It could be a nice little fundraiser for our club. If you can help give me a call at 359-9650. --- Mike Deinken

Membership Update

We are holding at 108 members, with only six past due. There has been no new members signed the last two months. Our membership drive continues with the most new members signed earning that person a club jacket. There are only five more meetings until the end of the year. Let's get some competition going for that jacket. The leader so far has signed only two new members. Talk to your friends and co-workers, invite them to the next meeting.



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