

INTERSTATE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Atlantic Sturgeon

Management Unit:

Coastwide (Maine through Florida)



Stock Status

[The 2017 benchmark stock assessment](#) concluded that Atlantic sturgeon were depleted coastwide. The “depleted determination was used instead of “overfished” because of the many factors that contribute to the low abundance of Atlantic sturgeon, including directed and incidental fishing, habitat loss, ship strikes, and climate changes. While overall levels of Atlantic sturgeon remain low, the population appears to be recovering slowly since the 1998 implementation of a 40-year moratorium on harvest, and the current mortality level is indicated as sustainable. While Atlantic sturgeon is still considered a “data-poor” species, a tremendous amount of information has been collected on the species since 1998 that improve the abilities of managers and scientists to manage the species. The 2017 benchmark stock assessment indicates that all DPSs remain depleted, and the Gulf of Maine and Carolina DPSs are experiencing the highest mortality, while abundance in the Gulf of Maine and Chesapeake Bay DPSs is less likely to be at an increased level since the moratorium when compared to the other DPSs.

Involved States and Jurisdictions

ME, NH, MA, RI, CT, NY, NJ, PA, DE, MD, DC, PRFC, VA, NC, SC, GA, FL, NMFS, USFWS

Active Boards/Committees

Sturgeon Management Board, Sturgeon Technical Committee, Sturgeon Stock Assessment Subcommittee, Sturgeon Plan Review Team, Sturgeon Advisory Panel

Chairs

Board, Chair – Ross Self (10/2019); Vice Chair – Vacant

Technical Committee, Chair – Amanda Higgs (2/2021); Vice Chair – Vacant

Stock Assessment Subcommittee, Chair – Laura Lee

Staff Lead

James Boyle, jboyle@asmfc.org

Management Plan History

[Atlantic Sturgeon Interstate Fishery Management Plan \(November 1990\)](#)

The Commission began development of the FMP in 1988 in order to effect better coastwide management of Atlantic sturgeon throughout the species' range. The goal of the FMP is to provide the framework for the restoration of Atlantic sturgeon to fishable abundance throughout its range. The management objectives are: (1) protect the species from further depletion; (2) improve our knowledge of the stock; (3) enhance and restore the stock; and (4) coordinate research and management activities throughout the Atlantic coast range.

[Amendment 1 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Sturgeon \(July 1998\)](#)

Despite the implementation of the FMP and many of its recommendations, some Atlantic sturgeon spawning stocks continued to deteriorate through 1996. The goal of Amendment 1 is to restore Atlantic sturgeon spawning stocks to population levels that will provide for sustainable fisheries and ensure viable spawning populations. The objectives of Amendment 1 include: (1) establish 20 protected year-classes of females in each spawning stock; (2) institute a moratorium for a sufficient amount of time to reestablish spawning stocks and increase numbers in current spawning stocks; (3) reduce or eliminate bycatch of Atlantic sturgeon; (4) identify and protect spawning habitat; (5) reestablish access to historical spawning habitat; and (6) conduct research to define stock units.

[Addendum I to Amendment 1 \(January 2001\)](#)

Addendum I was established to provide an exemption for the importation of non-indigenous Atlantic sturgeon and to permit the development of private Atlantic sturgeon aquaculture facilities. Exemptions were provided to Canadian Caviar Company and the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

[ASMFC Terms, Limitations, Enforcement and Reporting Requirements for the Purposes of Permitting Importation of non-Indigenous Atlantic Sturgeon and the Development of Private Aquaculture Facilities \(January 2001\)](#)

This documents the terms, limitations, enforcement, and reporting requirements to be met in order for the Management Board to grant an exemption to the moratorium on possession and harvest of Atlantic sturgeon for the purposes of importation of non-indigenous Atlantic sturgeon and the development of private Atlantic sturgeon aquaculture facilities.

[Addendum II to Amendment 1 \(May 2005\)](#)

Addendum II was established to provide an exemption for the importation of non-indigenous Atlantic sturgeon and to permit the development of private Atlantic sturgeon aquaculture facilities. Exemptions were provided to LaPaz Group LLC and Acadian Sturgeon and Caviar.

[Addendum III to Amendment 1 \(November 2006\)](#)

Addendum III was established to provide an exemption for the importation of non-indigenous Atlantic sturgeon and to permit the development of private Atlantic sturgeon aquaculture facilities. Exemptions were provided to LaPaz Group LLC and Supreme Sturgeon. The Addendum

also gives the Management Board the ability to modify the details of the exemption in this Addendum and Addendum II through a vote.

[Addendum IV to Amendment 1 \(September 2012\)](#)

In response to the Endangered Species Act listing in February 2012, Addendum IV updates habitat information for Atlantic sturgeon and identifies areas of concern and research needs. The addendum further recommends that state agencies identify habitat protection and restoration needs and coordinate restoration plans with other agencies.

Endangered Species Act

Atlantic sturgeon were listed on the Endangered Species list in February 2012. The listing separated the coastwide population into five distinct population segments (DPS). The Gulf of Maine DPS was listed as threatened and the remaining four DPSs (New York Bight, Chesapeake, Carolina, and South Atlantic) were listed as endangered.

Annual Events

- Compliance reports are due annually on October 1st. The PRT reviews the compliance reports and prepares the Annual FMP Review.
- The Coordinator sends the AP an update after each Management Board meeting.

Other Items of Interest

- In August, NMFS published two rules (one under each Regional Office jurisdiction) designating critical habitat for the five ESA-listed DPSs.
- ASMFC and NMFS worked together to develop a document of research protocols for Atlantic sturgeon which can be found at:
<https://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/protected/atlsturgeon/research/tm215.pdf>
- Pursuant to section 7 of the ESA, NOAA Fisheries released a biological opinion in December 2013 stating that seven Northeast fisheries will likely not jeopardize the continued existence of the five distinct population segments of Atlantic Sturgeon.
- Other ASMFC Publications:
 - Estimation of Atlantic Sturgeon Bycatch in Coastal Atlantic Commercial Fisheries of New England and the Mid-Atlantic (August 2007)
 - Guidelines for Stocking Cultured Atlantic Sturgeon for Supplementation or Reintroduction (February 2006)
 - ASMFC Atlantic Sturgeon By-catch Workshop, 1-3 Feb., 2006 Norfolk (February 2006)
 - ASMFC Breeding and Stocking Protocol for Cultured Atlantic Sturgeon (May 1996)