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## Multiple Threats Endanger Sturgeon

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WASHINGTON (CN) - The National Marine Fisheries Service has [proposed](#) endangered status for five foreign species of sturgeon, under the Endangered Species Act. The agency declined to propose critical habitat for the fish because they are all outside U.S. jurisdiction, the agency said.

In response to a 2012 petition from WildEarth Guardians and Friends of Animals to list 15 species of sturgeon, the NMFS consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and determined that only five of the petitioned species are under the marine agency's jurisdiction. Those five species are the Adriatic sturgeon, the European sturgeon, the Chinese sturgeon, the Sakahlin sturgeon and Kaluga sturgeon. The Sakahlin and Kaluga sturgeon are both in the Amur River Basin/Sea of Japan/Sea of Okhotsk region. The USFWS will conduct the listing analysis for the other ten species.

"These magnificent fish have survived more than 200 million years and are worth more than the sum of their parts. If we want to prevent these incredible creatures from going extinct, we must rein in the caviar trade," Taylor Jones, Endangered Species Advocate for WildEarth Guardians was quoted as saying in the group's press release in response to the listing proposal.

The NMFS acknowledged that the caviar trade decimated sturgeon species in the past, observing that "commercial and recreational sturgeon fisheries have existed since at least the 5th century BC and are noted in ancient Greek, Roman, and Chinese literature," but went on to point out that all the major sturgeon fisheries peaked by the mid-20th century, "with 70 percent of major fisheries posting recent harvests less than 15 percent of historical peak catches and 35 percent of the fisheries examined crashing within 7 to 20 years of inception," according to the rule.

Although some species are still harvested for the roe, or caviar, some are harvested for their meat, and new markets, "including medical and health products, cosmetics, and leather, have appeared in recent years. This could lead to increased demand that may increase pressure for illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing," the agency said.

Other present day threats include dams, dikes and channels, pollution and poor water quality, and habitat loss. Bycatch is also a threat, with up to 200 sturgeon a year being caught in gillnets and trawling for other fisheries. Illegal poaching is also a significant threat for some species.

Sturgeon are bony fish that have unique rows of scales or horny external plates on the outside of the body. They are mostly bottom-oriented feeders and have whiskery growths called barbels that are sensory organs. They also utilize an electrosensory system like sharks for feeding.

The Adriatic sturgeon once ranged the coasts Italy, Greece, Albania, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro, and is now found only near the dammed Po River and Adda River and their tributaries. The six and a half foot-long fish can live up to 50 years, and are believed to have declined by at least 80 percent over the past three generations.

The European sturgeon can reach 20 feet in length and weigh up to 2,200 pounds. Females may not be sexually mature until they reach 18 years of age, and can produce up to 2.4 million eggs in one spawning period. It is believed that this species has declined 90 percent over the past 75 years.

The Chinese sturgeon once engaged in migrations over 2000 miles long, but the construction of the Gezhouba Dam and Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River in China has led to a 97.5 percent decline in the spawning population over a 37-year period. Recent surveys estimate the spawning population to be just 203-257 individuals, the action said.

The two species in the Japan Sea regions face similar declines and threats, the action said.

Comments are due by Dec. 30 and public hearing requests must be submitted by Dec. 16.

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