



*Friends of Animals* 

Jeff Bezos  
Founder and CEO  
[Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com)

Dear Jeff Bezos:

Caviar sales are wiping out sturgeon. We are writing to inform you that our organizations have petitioned the U.S. government to add 15 species of sturgeon to the endangered species list, and to request that [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com) stop selling caviar and other products derived from these fish.

Sturgeon, among the oldest families of fish to grace our planet, are also described by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as the most threatened group of animals on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

In 2004, Beluga sturgeon, whose caviar is a popular and expensive “delicacy,” were listed as “threatened” under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. Five populations of Atlantic sturgeon will be added to the list as “endangered” on 6 April 2012. This means the U.S. Secretary of Commerce deems the largest native fishes in the Chesapeake Bay to be on the verge of extinction. This month, WildEarth Guardians and Friends of Animals petitioned the U.S. government to add 15 more sturgeon species to the endangered species list. If they are listed as “endangered,” which is likely due to their extremely small and diminishing populations, commerce in these fish will be unlawful for anyone subject to the jurisdiction of the United States.

Global threats to sturgeon include dams, agricultural pollution and household waste, and natural gas and oil extraction and development. The central Caspian Sea, home to many of the petitioned species, is even threatened by radioactive contamination from a nuclear reactor. But the biggest threat to sturgeon is international exploitation for their body parts and roe.

North American demand drives both legal and illegal trade in caviar, as shoppers’ demand far exceeds the supply. Trade in sturgeon caviar in Russia and Iran is ridden with crime. Some caviar traders circumvent the law by using false species labels, and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) last year expressed pessimism about efforts to control caviar smuggling. Although sturgeon have persisted on Earth for 200 million years, they may not survive the 21<sup>st</sup> century. To ensure their survival, we must stop viewing these fish as a commodity and begin protecting them.

Caviar (marketed by species name or as *Kaluga*, *Osetra*, *Sevruga* or *Karaburun* caviar) as well as smoked meat from some of the fifteen petitioned sturgeon species is currently sold through [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) by Alma Gourmet; Alpicina; Bemka; Caviar & Caviar; Caviar Express; For the Gourmet; Gourmet Food Source; Gourmet Food Store; Little Pearl; Marky's; Mozart Caviar; Olma; Paramount Caviar; Russian Caviar; Taste Specialty Foods; and Viking's Delight, among others.

We are aware that many of these products are marketed as farm-raised. Some are even touted as environmentally friendly: caviar from *Acipenser naccarii* sold by Delitaliana Food Products on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) is marked as "certified eco-friendly farmed."

But sturgeon farming is replacing the planet's natural population of sturgeon with a commodified or captive population. Moreover, sturgeon farming makes it possible to illegally kill free-living sturgeon and pass the parts off as farm-raised. The sturgeon market also creates an incentive to catch free-living, mature fish as breeding stock. Finally, even if members of a species listed as "endangered" are farm-raised, trade in their parts without a permit would still be illegal. [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) would do right by the environment and save itself from possible prosecution by simply banning the sale of products derived from any of these 15 species now.

Online commerce supports the market for sturgeon, and imperils them. The situation is so bleak for sturgeon communities worldwide that some experts suggest their only chance for survival might be in captivity. We find that future unacceptable, and we believe you do too. [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) has a key role in protecting these 15 critically endangered fish. We hope [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) will discontinue sales of caviar and other products from imperiled sturgeons. Please assure us that [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) will do so.

Very truly yours,

Lee Hall  
Vice President – Legal Affairs  
Friends of Animals  
777 Post Road, Suite 205  
Darien, Connecticut 06820  
[leehall@friendsofanimals.org](mailto:leehall@friendsofanimals.org)

Taylor Jones  
Endangered Species Advocate  
WildEarth Guardians  
1536 Wynkoop Street, Suite 301  
Denver, Colorado 80202  
[tjones@wildearthguardians.org](mailto:tjones@wildearthguardians.org)

\*\*\*

Friends of Animals, a nonprofit animal-advocacy organization, advocates for the interests of

animals in living free, on their own terms, and sponsors a variety of projects to protect and recover at-risk animals, including marine species. Friends of Animals' offices are located in Connecticut, New York, Washington, DC, Pennsylvania, California, and British Columbia.

WildEarth Guardians, a nonprofit environmental-advocacy organization, works to protect wildlife, wild places, and wild waters in the United States and beyond. The organization maintains offices in New Mexico, Colorado, and Arizona.

Our organizations petitioned for fifteen sturgeon species in the hope of saving them from extinction. They are, briefly:

### **Western Europe**

(1) The olive-hued *Acipenser naccarii* (Adriatic sturgeon) once ranged throughout the Adriatic from Italy to Greece. Their numbers have declined due to exploitation for their flesh. Currently only about 250 individuals remain in the wild population.

(2) *Acipenser sturio* (Baltic sturgeon) can grow to 16 feet in length. Sought aggressively for caviar, they have been reduced to a single reproductive population in the Garonne River in France.

### **Caspian Sea, Black Sea, and Sea of Azov: the Heart of the Caviar Trade**

(3) The olive-grey *Acipenser gueldenstaedtii* (Russian sturgeon; also known as Azov-Black Sea or Danube sturgeon) and (4) *Acipenser nudiiventris* (Ship, Spiny, or Thorn sturgeon) have been commercially exploited and caught as by-catch, and are likely on the verge of extinction.

(5) *Acipenser persicus* (Persian sturgeon) are exploited for caviar and suffer habitat loss from dams and pollution.

(6) Populations of *Acipenser stellatus* (Star sturgeon) have been devastated by legal and illegal exploitation for meat and caviar. The Black Sea population is so depleted that commercial catch was halted in 2006.

### **Aral Sea and Tributaries**

Three sturgeon species, (7) *Pseudoscaphirhynchus fedtschenkoi*, (8) *Pseudoscaphirhynchus hermanni*, and (9) *Pseudoscaphirhynchus kaufmanni*, have declined or disappeared along with the Aral Sea, which shrank by more than 60 percent from 1973 to 2000 and continues to shrink. Dangerous heavy metals and agricultural run-off also threaten these populations.

### **Amur River Basin, Sea of Japan, Yangtze River, and Sea of Okhotsk**

(10) *Acipenser mikadoi* (Sakhalin sturgeon) can grow to 8 feet in length and were historically common in Japanese markets; now, only 10-30 spawning adults survive.

Increasing pollution from Russian and Chinese agriculture is threatening (11) *Acipenser*

*schrenckii* (Amur sturgeon), which have declined an estimated 95 percent.

Also native to China and Russia, (12) *Huso dauricus* (Kaluga or Great Siberian sturgeon) are among the world's largest freshwater fishes, exceeding 18 feet in length and one ton in weight. They are heavily poached for caviar.

(13) *Acipenser baerii* (Siberian sturgeon) are fished for caviar and have lost nearly half their spawning habitat from dam construction.

(14) *Acipenser dabryanus*, (Yangtze sturgeon) may only survive due to stocking, and there is no evidence that stocked animals are reproducing naturally.

The massive (15) *Acipenser sinensis* (Chinese sturgeon) were deemed a major commercial resource in the 1960s. Less than 300 wild individuals now remain.