Sturgeon Enforcement on the Menominee River

Trends and Techniques
By: Mike Kitt - Marine Enforcement Warden - Marinette
History of Menominee River
Sturgeon Population and Harvest:
History of the fishery

• Traditionally, Native Americans harvested lake sturgeon from the Menominee River and Green Bay.
• State licensed fishermen over-harvest of the resource and habitat degradation led to the closure of the fishery until 1946.
• Jointly managed fishery with Michigan.
• The agencies began to allow a hook and line fishery in 1946.
### Menominee River Sturgeon Harvest by Section

<table>
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Section 1, 2, &amp; 3</th>
<th>Section 4</th>
<th>Grand Total</th>
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<td>2003</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>155*</td>
<td>210</td>
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**Total Harvest**

714 + 792 = 1506

*High harvest year since sturgeon registration began in 1983*
Lake Sturgeon Harvest Summary

- Mandatory registration of harvested fish began in 1983 and kill was 19.
- By 1992 kill increased to 72.
- And 1999 kill increased to 167.
- 2000, 2002, and 2004 were zero harvest years with a 70” size limit.
- 2001 (185), 2003 (210), and 2005 (172) with a 50” size limit.
Lake Sturgeon Fishing Regulations

- 1946-52 5 per season size limit 30”
- 1953-62 3 “ 30”
- 1963-73 2 “ 42”
- 1974-91 2 “ 50”
- 1992-99 1 “ 50”
- 2000,02,04 1 “ 70”
- 2001,03,05 1 “ 50”
- 2006* 1 “ 60”
Hook and Line Regulations Prior to 2006 Season:

• Season: 1st. Saturday in September to October 30th.
• Person may obtain 2 sturgeon tags free of charge. One for Inland open waters only. One for Wis./Mich. Boundary Waters only.
• Odd years: 50” minimum size.
• Even years: 70” minimum size.
• Can fish around the clock.
• Can use up to 3 lines per person - can lead to user conflict.
Menominee River
Sturgeon Fishing Pressure 1983 - 2003

Wisconsin required tags beginning in 1983, Michigan in 1986
Regulations Cont’d.: 

- Fish must be registered within 24 hrs. of catching. Only 6 registration stations currently operating.

- Tags may not be loaned or borrowed - Must put your tag on your fish.

- No snagging or foul-hooking.

- Tags must be immediately validated and attached.
Profile of Anglers:

• 80% are Eastern Europeans (mostly Polish - followed by Russian, Lithuanian, Czech.) from the greater Chicago area.
Angler Profile Cont’d.

• Very close - knit.
• Very leery of people they don’t know.
• Very wary and fearful of Law Enforcement.
• Very loyal to their sport.
• Most have financial means to come up often (skilled trades).
• Very “hardy” people.
Angler Profile Cont’d.:

- 10 % “Fox Valley” area (Sturgeon Spearers)
- 5 % “locals”.
- 5 % “other areas”.
- Can get very crowded (conversation with Mario Gasowski).
Enforcement Techniques:

• Surveillance, surveillance, surveillance!!!
• - driven by budget cuts (low mileage) in 2003.
• Good Fish and Game Cop intuition - knowing unusual or erratic behavior.
Enforcement Techniques Cont’d.:

- Good help - reliable Officers with skill and patience!
- Good interview skills: very difficult to get them to tell the truth.
- Getting to know the participants:
  - let them see you upon occasion.
  - stop and visit with them.
  - tell them you are the “Straznyk Ryb”.
Enforcement Techniques Cont’d.:

• Help from local sport shop:
  • education - laws and expectations while they are here.
• Citizen Involvement (Fish Patrol)
Case Review – 2003 Season:

- Wolkosz: Failure to tag - turned over to Michigan for prosecution - $180.00
Case Review Cont’d.:

- Danko/Cison - failure to immediately tag sturgeon - 2 counts, warning for undersize fish. $1,000.00 total.
Case Review Cont’d.:

- Rejolak/Kutek - Loan and borrow sturgeon tag, over bag limit. $1,073.00.
Case Review Cont’d.:

• Swiderski - Fail to tag - $517.00
Case Review Cont’d.:

- Surma - Fail to tag: party to... - $550.75 (reduced) Only case to go to trial.
Case Review Cont’d.:

- Gasowski - turned over to Michigan - snag fish - $180.00.
Case Review Cont’d.:

• Pilny - fail to tag, snag fish. $715.00.
Season Synopsis 2003:

- 11 cases on 9 individuals.
- Total fines - $4,214.75.
- Fish released - 6.
Where Do We Go From Here?

- Seek rule changes. Modified in 2006.
- Education (pamphlet).
- Citizen Involvement (Fish Patrol)
- Continue to monitor harvest *closely*.
- Continue to review season and harvest.
Questions?

Criticisms?