

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Lake sturgeon return to North Carolina

Welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

Absent for more than half a century, lake sturgeon returned to North Carolina waters this fall as seven-thousand fish were released into the French Broad River.

Lake Sturgeon are native to the Mississippi, Great Lakes, and Hudson Bay basins - a historical range sweeping from the Deep South to well into Canada. Despite the wide distribution, during the 20th century lake sturgeon declined across their range as a result of overfishing, habitat loss, dams, and pollution. The last suspected record of the fish in North Carolina is from Hot Springs in 1946. Though not on the federal endangered species list, it's considered threatened or endangered in 19 of the 20 states in its range.

Lake sturgeon can grow to 200 pounds and nine-feet long and belong to a family of fish has been around for 136 million years, pre-dating Tyrannosaurus rex. This prehistoric pedigree is evident in their distinctive bodies, which are lined with bony plates instead of the fish scales we typically think of. They're bottom-dwelling fish, feeding on insect larvae, crayfish, leeches, and other stream-bottom animals.

Anglers who catch a lake sturgeon are asked to report their catch to the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission at 828/550-0064.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.