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Missouri River Recovery Program: THE PERILS OF THE PALLID STURGEON

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05/12/2008

Missouri River

Recovery Program

THE PERILS OF THE PALLID STURGEON

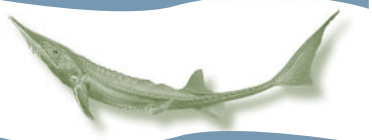
Introducing the Pallid Sturgeon

The pallid sturgeon is native to the Yellowstone River, Missouri River, middle and lower Mississippi River, and the lower segments of their major tributaries. It is a bottom-dwelling fish that lives in large, turbid, free-flowing rivers. The pallid sturgeon has poor vision and relies on its highly sensitive barbels to locate food. Individuals can live up to 70 years, and females do not reproduce until they are 15 to 20 years old.

Why They are In Trouble

Historical records indicate that the pallid sturgeon was never a common species, but it has experienced significant declines in distribution and abundance over the last 75 years. During this period, alterations to the Missouri and Mississippi rivers occurred, including channelization, bank stabilization, impounding and river flow modification.

The pallid has experienced significant declines in distribution and abundance over the last seventy-five years.



The pallid was listed as an endangered species under the Endangered Species Act in 1990.

These alterations led to significant changes in the natural features of the rivers, including significant reductions in the sediment they carry and a resulting decrease in turbidity (cloudiness). The pallid sturgeon was listed as an endangered species under the Endangered Species Act in 1990. Primary reasons for listing included extensive habitat modification, a lack of reproduction, continued threats from poachers and incidental take by commercial fishing.

Recent research funded by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Missouri River Recovery Program has greatly expanded knowledge on pallid sturgeon ecology, including the first documented spawning by a pallid sturgeon in the Missouri River basin last year. However, more research is required to learn what is limiting the production and survival of the pallid sturgeon.

Restoring Pallid Sturgeon Habitat

A major element of the reasonable and prudent alternative from the 2000 Missouri River Biological Opinion issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service requires the Corps to restore 20 to 30 acres per mile of shallow water habitat on the lower Missouri River by 2020. Shallow water habitat for the pallid sturgeon is water that is five feet deep or less and flowing two to three feet per second, or less, during the month of August. The Fish and Wildlife Service believes that restoring this amount of aquatic habitat, equivalent to 20 percent of the estimated loss from channelization, will help recover the pallid sturgeon.

The pallid sturgeon is native to the Missouri River.

The Missouri River Recovery Program is also enabling hatchery production of pallid sturgeon. To date nearly 829,000 pallid sturgeon of various sizes have been stocked in the Missouri River, and an additional 16,000 in the Mississippi River. The Fish and Wildlife Service has approved the use of stocking only as a temporary measure to avoid extinction of the species.

Recent research funded by the MISSOURI RIVER RECOVERY PROGRAM has greatly expanded knowledge on pallid sturgeon ecology, including last year documenting the first spawning by a pallid in the Missouri River basin.

The mission of the Missouri River Recovery Program is to implement actions to accomplish Missouri River ecosystem recovery goals in coordination and collaboration with agency partners and stakeholders. The vision of the program is to create a sustainable ecosystem supporting thriving populations of native species while providing for current social and economic values.

For more information on the Missouri River Recovery Program, please visit www.moriverrecovery.org.

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