

# SUPER STURGEON

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## Lake Sturgeon (aka *Acipenser fulvescens*)

Roaming the bottoms of our Great Lakes is a big torpedo of a fish – she is the lake sturgeon! The lake sturgeon is one of the splendid native species found throughout the Great Lakes. Helping to support native species means helping to support strong ecosystems — and that means healthy Great Lakes!

### WHO IS THIS NATIVE HERO SPECIES?

- ◆ **Bigger than the rest:** As the largest fish in the Great Lakes, she can grow 8 feet long and up to 300 pounds.
- ◆ **Armor-clad:** She has a spiked armor and thick plates called scutes instead of scales to keep her protected.
- ◆ **Invisibility cloak:** Even though she's big and armored, our hero can blend into the background. She is brownish in color often with black splotches (or mottling).
- ◆ **Vacuum face:** With a super sucker mouth and sensory whiskers to help find food, she can suck up invasive species like round gobies and quagga mussels for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

### OUR SUPERHERO'S STORY

- ◆ A prehistoric species of fish, her ancient ancestors swam with the dinosaurs (136 million years ago).
- ◆ Before human settlement of the Great Lakes region, scores of sturgeon called these waters home.
- ◆ Our superhero is the longest living fish species in the Great Lakes! Females can live up to 150 years and males up to about 100 years.

- ◆ That means, our superhero sturgeon swimming in the lake right now could be the very same one that swam by your grandparents, your parents and maybe one day your kids and even grandkids!
- ◆ Today, she patrols the bottoms of the lakes and rivers, fighting back against invaders — by eating them.

### EVERY SUPERHERO MUST FACE A BATTLE!

When Europeans settled in the Great Lakes, it didn't take long for the once-abundant sturgeon populations to dwindle.

- ◆ They were overfished and overharvested.
- ◆ Pollution and development damaged their homes.
- ◆ Hydroelectric dams were built near or blocked important spawning areas – taking away the areas needed for reproducing and replenishing populations.
- ◆ Once catch limits were in place, people still caught them illegally (poached) them, especially sturgeon entering shallow rivers to spawn.
- ◆ Over time, their populations continued to fall, and today this superhero is a threatened species in most Great Lakes states.

### HOW DO WE HELP THE STURGEON?

- ◆ Researchers and scientists are learning about our superhero's behavior, habitats and her importance to the ecosystem and food web.
- ◆ Researchers are repairing lost habitat by creating new spawning reefs in rivers.
- ◆ Citizens are on patrol! Groups of citizens and supporters of the sturgeon help protect the fish from poaching by organizing watches during spawning season.

### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- ◆ Take a few minutes and learn about what sturgeon do and what you can do to help save them – you could become the next sturgeon research scientist!
- ◆ Teach your friends, family and community about this native species superhero.
- ◆ Help our superhero combat invasive species — by eating them! Just kidding! Help prevent introductions and spread of invaders by following best practices.
- ◆ Become a member of a community group that helps to protect our Great Lakes.
- ◆ Go fishing! Learn and follow the fishing rules that are made to protect our Great Lakes fish. And if you catch a sturgeon, make sure you let her go as quickly as you can.