

St. Clair-Detroit River Sturgeon for Tomorrow



February 2025 Newsletter

March Membership Meeting

Our annual St. Clair-Detroit River Sturgeon for Tomorrow membership meeting will be held on Wednesday March 19th at Club Capri (6343 Dyke Rd, Clay Township). The meeting will run from 6:30pm to about 8pm. There will be a cash bar. Pizza will be provided free to members. An \$8.00 donation will be requested for non-members to cover the cost for pizza. Please RSVP by March 16 if you plan to attend so that we have a head count for the restaurant space and pizza order. This meeting is a chance to visit with fellow sturgeon anglers and sturgeon enthusiasts. Members are encouraged to bring a friend who might be interested in what we do.

Again, please RSVP if you plan to attend so that we have a head count for the restaurant space and pizza order. You can RSVP by emailing stclairsturgeon@gmail.com. If you have not already, please consider becoming a member of St. Clair-Detroit River Sturgeon for Tomorrow. Any person subscribing to the purposes of SC-DR SFT shall be eligible for membership in this organization without discrimination for any reason. A single one-year membership is only \$30 and this year comes with a free Sturgeon for Tomorrow t-shirt. We also have lifetime memberships available. We are a 100% 501(c)(3) organization with all proceeds being used for our charitable purposes. We have a small but amazing and capable team. We are always looking for fresh people with fresh ideas. [Click here to join SC-DR Sturgeon for tomorrow!](#)



President's Message

Another year has passed and I am so proud of the efforts of St. Clair-Detroit River Sturgeon for Tomorrow, all our partners, members, and supporters from the community. I am happy to report that our Sturgeon Fishery is thriving due to combined efforts in education, awareness, ethical

fishing practices and overall respect of the fishery. SCDRSFT has come a long way since it began in 2010.

Our flagship education program, Sturgeon in the Classroom, led by Program Director Jeremy Guc has grown from 4 Schools and 7 fish in 2016, to 14 Schools participating this year and 19 total fish. We are excited to release the 100th Sturgeon raised in the classroom, by students and teacher sponsors to be released this summer at the Blue Water Sturgeon Festival.

Our local outreach and education programs continue at events like St. Clair County's Earth Fair, Macomb Discovery Center's Great Lakes Day, Blue Water Sturgeon Festival, and the Clay Township Sturgeon Festival. At these events we share general education of Great Lakes Sturgeon, the local fishery, the history and importance of Sturgeon to our fishery and the overall recovery of the Sturgeon population is SE Michigan with anyone who will listen. We also hosted an ethical Sturgeon fishing seminar this past summer with one of our members, respected Sturgeon Charter Captain, Anthony Moreschini, who led the curriculum during the event held at our friends at Hook One Bait & Tackle. It will be back in 2025!!

Our partnerships with the Michigan DNR and the US Fish and Wildlife Service are strong and ongoing. With our Management Cooperator Fish Patch program, we continue to provide anglers with incentive to report their tagged sturgeon encounters. Our purchase and donation of external tags, PIT tags and readers to the DNR to continue sturgeon population research efforts in SE Michigan have benefited sturgeon anglers across the Region.

The North Channel Sturgeon Classic continues to grow, in 2024 we hosted 25 Teams who successfully fished daytime hours for the first time with sixty-eight total fish caught and released healthy during the 8hr. tournament. This year's NCSC will take place **Saturday September 27, 2025 -So Save The Date!** More details will be coming soon!

Thank You to US Fish and Wildlife, Michigan DNR, USCG, Clay Township Parks/Rec., Clay Township DDA, Black Lake SFT, Friends of the St. Clair River, Clay TWP. Police and Fire, the Pearl Beach Lions Club for their ongoing partnership and support.

Lastly, but most importantly, a huge Thank You to the General Membership and our extremely dedicated Board Members for your ongoing leadership, support, and participation at all of our events. Without your efforts, we would not have had the positive impact we achieved over the years and look to continue into the future. In this newsletter, you will find more details about our ongoing outreach and education programs, as well as our annual sturgeon tournament and thriving partnerships. We hope you find it informative.

Tight Lines-
Blair H. Hughes,
President
St. Clair – Detroit River Sturgeon for Tomorrow



Design a Sturgeon Cooperator Patch!

Our sturgeon cooperator patch program is one of our signature programs to promote ethical and sustainable sturgeon fishing. Occasionally we design and produce somewhere between 100 and 130 embroidered patches that we provide to the Michigan DNR to be given to anglers reporting the catch of a tagged lake sturgeon. Once those supplies are depleted, we design a new one. These patches have never been for sale (except in the secondary market).



We will accept design illustrations for a new Cooperator Patch through the end of May. Please submit your design concept as a jpg format file. You can submit your design by email to Stclairsturgeon@gmail.com.

To report catching a tagged lake sturgeon [click here](#). Be sure to include date, time, place, length and girth of the fish along with the tag number.

You can see our past patch designs [here](#).



DNR Sturgeon 2024 Tag Return Summary

Our thanks to MDNR Fisheries Research Biologist Andrew Briggs for providing information for this brief summary of sturgeon survey results and tag recoveries reported in 2024.

A total of 115 Lake Sturgeon were caught during DNR sturgeon surveys in SE Michigan in 2024. Of those, 39 were recaptures (thanks to Sturgeon for Tomorrow who has donated both external metal tags and internal PIT tags and a PIT tag reader to us in the past!). The largest fish caught in the 2024 surveys was 75.2 inches long and 125 pounds. This was the longest Lake Sturgeon we have caught in the history of our surveys in SE Michigan!

Anglers reported a total of 66 total tag recaptures thus far for 2024. This number will likely go up a great deal as we still need to process the sturgeon angler diary program data for 2024. Sturgeon with metal dorsal tags accounted for 44 angler recaptures (specifying metal tags here since angler diary anglers can also report out on PIT tagged sturgeon and other anglers are starting to purchase their own PIT tag readers). This is the 7th most we've seen but may increase following inclusion of angler diary participants.

In 2013, the MDNR caught, tagged, and released a 36.2" sturgeon that weighed 10 pounds and was 10 years old. Since then, that fish has been recaptured 16 more times (2 during DNR surveys and 14 by recreational anglers). In fact, the fish, which is now 21 years old and about 50 inches long, was reported recaptured by 5 different anglers in 2023 and 4 different anglers in 2024! Andrew reports that 6 of those 14 angler recaptures occurred while the fish was within the legal slot size and during the legal harvest season. This single fish is a fantastic example of the success of catch-and-release sturgeon angling.

2024 Earth Fair



SCDRSFT directors attended the St. Clair County Earth Fair on April 26-27, 2024, at Goodells County Park. This event is held annually on the last Friday and Saturday in April and SCDRSFT has attended with our outreach booth for over ten years now. It has become one of Michigan's largest and liveliest Earth Day celebrations with thousands of attendees passing through and stopping by our booth. SCDSFT is the only sturgeon-centered booth that attends this event. Our outreach booth contains information and live juvenile sturgeons to support SCDRSFT's mission to promote lake sturgeon conservation through community outreach and education. The juvenile sturgeon swimming around in the tank is always a hit and often the only opportunity most of the attendees will ever have to see a living a lake sturgeon.



On Friday, thousands of students from local schools are bussed to the event, visit our booth, and learn about the life history of lake sturgeon and the importance of conservation and education efforts to support the lake sturgeon population and fishery. The student's knowledge

of lake sturgeon range widely. Many students have no knowledge of Michigan's largest fish and mistakenly think the juvenile sturgeon are sharks. But in the years SCDSFT has attended, the number of students who do correctly identify the lake sturgeon is always increasing due to programs like Sturgeon in the Classroom and the many outreach events pertaining to this wonderful fish. 2024 had a surprise visitor, the Michigan Attorney General, Dana Nessel. SCDSFT took the opportunity to explain to the Attorney General the importance of protecting lake sturgeon by continuing to promote, preserve, and protect ethical and sustainable fishing for lake sturgeon in the Huron-Erie Corridor as opposed to listing the species as a federally threatened or endangered species which would limit anglers ability to target lake sturgeon including catch and release fishing. The 2025 St. Clair County Earth Fair is scheduled for April 25 & 26, 2025 at the Goodells County Park and SCDSFT will be there again. Please consider attending and stopping by our booth.



2024 Blue Water Sturgeon Festival

The 2024 Blue Water Sturgeon Festival was held June 1, 2024, and SC-DR SFT was there. We had our outreach booth set up for promoting education, conservation, and ethical and sustainable angling of lake sturgeon.



Thousands of people attended to celebrate the Great Lakes' largest fish. In addition to outreach, we also sold T-shirts, hats, and hoodies that help support our mission. This event is extra special for us because all the Sturgeon in the Classroom fish that are distributed amongst the

many schools enrolled in the program are returned at the festival and available for public viewing in a large tank at our booth. At the end of the festival, all the juvenile sturgeon are released into Lake Huron at the Lighthouse Beach by students and attendees. It's a full circle for these fish which were collected as eggs in Lake Huron the previous spring, raised at a hatchery in Wisconsin, transferred back to a classroom in southeast Michigan, and then released into the same lake they originated from.



This unique hands-on fish release event is sponsored proudly by SCDRSFT annually. In addition, SCDRSFT sponsors the Huron Lady Sturgeon Cruises the days prior to the festival for local 5th grade students. These cruises take students up the St. Clair River to the mouth of Lake Huron where U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staff biologists speak to the kids from their research boats while studying lake sturgeon. Using membership and fundraiser funds to support the student cruises is just one of the many ways SCDRSFT assists management agencies and their partners in their efforts to improve sturgeon populations and habitats by promoting conservation through community outreach and education.



North Channel Sturgeon Festival 2024

Each year a great deal of time is spent planning for the North Channel Sturgeon Festival and The North Channel Sturgeon Classic Fishing Tournament. These are both community events that were held in early October of 2024. The festival, held at the Clay Township Park, included a sturgeon touch tank, and family activities and games during the day. The evening event normally includes a band and adult beverages. The daytime activities went as

planned in 2024, but we were disappointed that the band was canceled due to rain and lightning in the area.



Results of the 2024 North Channel Sturgeon Classic

The 10th North Channel Sturgeon Classic was held on Saturday, October 12 in Clay Township, Michigan. This year 25 teams registered on-line and all of the teams fished. The Classic is a fund raiser for two local non-profit organizations (Pearl Beach Lions Club and the St. Clair-Detroit River Sturgeon for Tomorrow). This tournament is a catch and immediate release event with digital photos taken onboard each vessel and then texted to tournament judges to report each fish. A total of \$2,500 in cash prizes are awarded for the top 3 longest sturgeon recorded. There were also 4 additional prizes including shortest sturgeon, 2 randomly drawn mystery fish, and the highest total combined length for all sturgeon registered by a single team.

For the first time, the 2024 Classic was a daytime event, with fishing from 9am to 5pm. The weather was spectacular with sunshine, light winds, and cool temperatures in the 50's and 60's. As a result, all 25 teams fished the entire 8 hours. A total of 68 sturgeon were reported during the 8 hours of fishing. Twenty teams (or 80%) reported at least 1 sturgeon.

The first fish (Fish 1, 62 1/2") was caught at 9:15am and the last fish (Fish 68, 40") was hooked just before 5pm. The most productive hour was from 3-4pm when 14 fish were reported. At least two of the registered fish had been previously tagged by the Michigan DNR. The teams were encouraged to report their tagged fish catches to the DNR.

The largest sturgeon registered was 74.0" in length and the smallest was 17 1/8". A total of 16 (23%) sturgeon recorded were over 60" in length, while 19 (28%) were less than 30" in length. Five of the recorded fish fell within the 42"-50" slot limit size range, but no fish were harvested during the event (tournament rule prohibits harvest during the event).

At 11:50am, "South River Contracting" caught a beast that measured 70 3/8". That fish held first place until 12:48pm when "Rod Busters" landed a daytime dinosaur that measured 74 inches. That fish stood up through the rest of the day and took home the 1st place prize of \$1,500. The third place fish, a 67 1/4" beauty, was caught by "Dirty Old Hooker" at 4:13pm.

The Awards Ceremony was held at 6:30pm at the Clay Township Park. Cash prizes were awarded to the top 3 longest sturgeon registered as indicated in the photos and table below. In addition, four other prizes were awarded for 2 randomly drawn mystery fish, the highest total combined length for sturgeon caught by a single team, and the shortest sturgeon. Team 24, “South River Contracting”, won the highest combined length for sturgeon caught with a total 329 1/8” for 9 sturgeon. End to end, they caught over 27 feet of sturgeon! The smallest sturgeon, a 17 1/8” cutie, was recorded by Team 7 “Dirty Old Hooker”.



SAVE THE DATE: The 11th annual North Channel Sturgeon Classic tournament is scheduled for Saturday, September 27, 2025. Put a reminder on your calendar to register on July 16th so you don’t miss your chance. The limited team spaces fill up fast.



Partnerships

We continue to prosper because of our strong working relationships with management agencies. As mentioned by biologist Andrew Briggs, we have donated some much-needed equipment to the Lake St. Clair Fisheries Research Station for incidental purchases. Brad Utrup from the same office manages a sturgeon angler diary program. SFT president, Jim Felgenauer continues to represent St. Clair-Detroit River Sturgeon for Tomorrow as a member of the Lake Erie/ Lake St. Clair Citizens Advisory Committee after his recent resignation as the chair of that committee. Blair Hughes serves in the same capacity. A memorandum of understanding between Michigan’s Sturgeon for Tomorrow chapters, The Michigan DNR, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service

allows us to secure and hold lake sturgeon under permit for our Sturgeon in the Classroom Program. Our strong relationship with US Fish and Wildlife enables us to have adult sturgeon touch-tanks at some of our outreach events. They catch those fish on setlines and transport them to our events. They then staff our events to help educate the public about the importance of lake sturgeon. Fish are held under their federal permits before being release back into the river at the end of the day.



Sturgeon in the Classroom – 2024-25

One of the hallmark programs of SC-DR SFT is the Sturgeon in the Classroom program, where schools and other educational organizations are selected to raise juvenile sturgeon during the school year with a goal of growing future stewards of our amazing resources among our youth.

2024 was another exciting year for the Sturgeon in the Classroom program. In June, we wrapped up the 2023-2024 school year with the annual release of fish raised by the 11 participating organizations during the year. Several schools organized field trips to give students a chance to be part of the release, while others chose to release their fish at the Blue Water Sturgeon Festival in Port Huron. In all cases, the release of the fish back into their home waters, where they may live a century or more and grow to well in excess of 100 lbs, was exciting and rewarding for all involved.

This past Fall, SCDRSFT kicked off its 9th year of coordinating the Sturgeon in the Classroom program. 14 organizations, including schools at every level from elementary school through community college, as well as a few other educational organizations were selected to participate this year. As is always the case, students and teachers alike were excited to meet the sturgeon that they will be caring for and learning about during the year.

Program requirements dictate that these fish are not simply “classroom pets” but must actively be used to enhance student-learning through place-based education. Prior to being approved to participate, all teachers are required to submit educational outlines of how they will do this, and then they must report on outcomes at year-end. Many teachers have their students chart water chemistry and measure growth throughout the year. Fish average around 7” in length when they arrive in schools in October. Some will surpass 17” by the time of their release in June. What is immeasurable is the appreciation,

memories and concern for our natural resources that the presence of these fish will grow in the everyone, especially the young people who get to experience them. In just a few months, the cycle will continue with current participants wrapping up their year and new participants being selected for next school year. And then a new cohort of our future conservationists will begin their journey in learning to appreciate these amazing fish and the places they live to the point they want to preserve them. And that is what Sturgeon in the Classroom is all about. For more information, visit stclairsturgeon.org/sturgeon-classroom.html.



The SC-DR SFT Mission is to perpetuate Lake Sturgeon through the support of science and public education by:

- promoting, preserving, and protecting ethical and sustainable fishing;
- assisting management agencies and their partners in their efforts to improve sturgeon populations and habitats;
- promoting conservation through community outreach and education;
- engaging in other charitable activities deemed proper and necessary to accomplish the foregoing objectives within the Huron-Erie corridor.



Upcoming Volunteer Opportunities

We also have sponsorship and volunteer opportunities during the year. Our sponsors, volunteers, and participants are what make us successful. The work we do is both fun and rewarding. We believe it's a good thing to be passionate about lake sturgeon.

In 2025, we will be attending several of our annual public outreach events. Details will be posted on our Facebook Page. Everyone is welcome to join in the fun. If you would like to volunteer, please contact a board member by email at: stclairsturgeon@gmail.com

- April 25-26: St. Clair County Earth Fair, Goodells Park.
- June 7: Bluewater Sturgeon Festival, Fort Gratiot Lighthouse Park, 10am-3pm.
- September 27: North Channel Sturgeon Classic, Pearl Beach Lions Building, Clay Township.



Sturgeon Fishing New Year Resolution

For the last several years, I've made a sturgeon fishing New Year Resolution. A few years ago, I resolved to make no more solo trips after a November trip that resulted in a couple of big fish boated and a screwed up back that lasted for months. Ever since, I've only been fishing with a partner and it really is much more fun fishing with another sturge-aholic. Two years ago, I resolved to spend more time fishing during daylight hours.



That went so well that now I only fish sturgeon during the day, and my LED light mast has been gathering dust in the top of my garage for the last couple seasons. Last year, I resolved to spend at least part of each sturgeon fishing trip fishing the Middle Channel and exploring new locations in the North Channel. That went pretty well, and now I have so many "spots" that it's difficult to fish them all for more than 15-20 minutes in a single trip. This season, my sturgeon fishing New Year Resolution is to find more goby fishing hotspots. Gobies are my favorite sturgeon bait (I despise the messiness of crawlers), and reliably productive goby fishing spots are priceless.

– Mike Thomas



In Memoriam: Suzanne Salerio

The Southeast Michigan community of sturgeon enthusiasts lost a special member recently. In addition to being a public school teacher and a professional musician,



Suzanne Salerio was an ardent supporter of sturgeon conservation. She was one of the first teachers to participate in our Sturgeon In the Classroom program, helping to introduce children to lake sturgeon and their special coolness. She was also a volunteer at many of the Bluewater Sturgeon Festivals. We were sad to learn that Suzanne passed away on January 9th, 2025 after battling an aggressive lymphoma. Her passion and advocacy for lake sturgeon conservation and habitat protection will be dearly missed.



Recent Scientific Publications of Interest

Listed below are several recent peer-reviewed journal articles that report findings of lake sturgeon research projects in the St. Clair-Detroit River System or other nearby waters.

Briggs, A., M. Thorn, K Towne, M Belore, A Cook, C Harris, J-M Hessenauer, E Slavik, S Thomas, T Wills, and G Wright. 2024. Development of a collaborative long-term fish community assessment in the St. Clair-Detroit River System, *Journal of Great Lakes Research*, 102500, ISSN 0380-1330, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jglr.2024.102500>.

Embke, H. S., Nikiel, C. A., & Lyons, M. P. 2023. Potential effects of climate change on *Acipenser fulvescens* (lake sturgeon). No. 2021-1104-E. US Geological Survey.

Harrison, Daniel F. 2024. *Michigan's Venice: The Transformation of the St. Clair Maritime Landscape, 1640–2000*. Wayne State University Press, 280 pgs.

Hilling, C. D., Belore, M. L., Boase, J., Chiotti, J. A., DeBruyne, R. L., Doka, S. E., ... & Roseman, E. F. 2024. How well do existing surveys track fish community performance measures in the St. Clair-Detroit River System?. *Environmental Monitoring and Assessment*, 196(2), 129.

DID YOU KNOW THAT:

The dried air bladders of lake sturgeon were used to produce isinglass that was a key ingredient in production of wine, beer, jellies, and glue.



The Fish Thief!

SkyhoundMedia, in partnership with the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, is thrilled to announce the streaming release of “THE FISH THIEF: A Great Lakes Mystery.” Narrated by Oscar-winning actor J.K. Simmons, THE FISH THIEF reveals the true story of remarkable people tackling the mystery of why the fish most prized in the Great Lakes--the largest freshwater ecosystem on Earth--nearly vanished. The crash destroyed jobs and businesses and devastated towns and Indigenous communities in the United States and Canada. Yet, in the face of immense loss, a dedicated group of international scientists, policymakers, and conservationists banded together to address this ecological invasion, an effort that continues today.

This film's release marks the 70th anniversary of the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, established in 1955 to combat sea lampreys, advance science, and foster cross-border collaboration. The film can now be streamed on Amazon Prime (Free with subscription), AppleTV, and Google Play.