

SPORT FISHING REGULATIONS

The conservation status and fishing regulations for lake sturgeon vary greatly between Great Lakes states and the Province of Ontario. Therefore, it is essential for lake sturgeon anglers to know the regulations for each region in which they will be fishing. In addition, if an angler wants to transport a lake sturgeon across the U.S. – Canadian border, or any other international border, it is imperative to be aware of the laws that regulate international movement of wildlife. All sturgeon, including lake sturgeon, are protected under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). CITES is implemented through the United States' Endangered Species Act (ESA) and Canada's Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation of International and Interprovincial Trade Act (WAPPRITA).

CITES: INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

The goal of the CITES treaty, in effect since 1975, is to ensure that international trade in wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival. Countries that have agreed to participate in CITES, called Parties, use a permit system to regulate trade of species listed in the CITES Appendices. Parties must report annually on the amount of trade that occurred for each CITES-listed species.

Concern over increasingly heavy international trade in sturgeon products and declining sturgeon populations worldwide led to the listing of all previously unlisted sturgeon species under CITES Appendix II in 1998. This Appendix-II listing, which includes Great Lakes lake sturgeon, means that international trade is allowed, but it is regulated by permits. CITES plays an important role in protecting all sturgeon from extinction due to over fishing to meet international demand for their highly prized caviar and meat.

TRANSPORTING ACROSS THE U.S. – CANADIAN BORDER: CITES EXPORT REQUIREMENTS

If an American angler catches a lake sturgeon while fishing in Canadian waters, or a Canadian angler catches one while fishing in the U.S. waters of the Great Lakes, can the angler transport the sturgeon across the border like other sport fish species? Will adhering to the requirement of leaving enough skin on the fish filets during transportation to allow inspectors to identify the species be sufficient? No! With CITES regulating the international transportation of lake sturgeon, bringing a lake sturgeon across the Canadian – U.S. border is a bit more difficult than for other sport fish. An angler needs to make sure that the CITES requirements for lake sturgeon are met. If an angler catches a lake sturgeon in Canadian waters of the Great lakes, the angler must obtain a CITES export permit from Canada to legally transport the fish into the U.S. The United States recognizes a personal effects exemption to the CITES permit requirement for sport-caught lake sturgeon under certain conditions (see below). To legally transport a lake sturgeon caught in U.S. waters into Canada the angler must have a Personal Effects

Exemption letter issued by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and proof that the fish was legally taken.

To legally transport your lake sturgeon from Canada to the United States:

1. Contact the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR), which is the Canadian CITES Management Authority, to get an application for a permit to export a CITES Appendix-II species. You will need to provide proof that the angler possessed a valid sport-fishing license at the time of harvest.
2. Keep the CITES export permit with the lake sturgeon at all times!
3. Inform BOTH the Canadian and U.S. Customs that a lake sturgeon is being transported across the border, and stop at the Customs offices at the border to show the CITES export permit from OMNR.
4. Submit the original copy of the OMNR-CITES permit to the Customs authorities of the country of destination (USA).

To legally transport your lake sturgeon from the United States to Canada:

If you are transporting a sport-caught lake sturgeon from the United States to Canada for personal use, you may qualify for a CITES personal effects exemption. This exemption applies only to personally carried specimens and may not be used for commercial shipments or shipments sent via mail.* To legally transport your lake sturgeon to Canada you will need a Personal Effects Exemption letter and a Wildlife Declaration form.

1. Obtain a copy of the Personal Effects Exemption letter and a Wildlife Declaration form when registering your tagged fish with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) or download the letter and the form from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service website (www.fws.gov).
2. Complete the Personal Effects Exemption letter by filling in your Michigan fishing license number, MDNR sturgeon tag number, and your name and address. Complete the Wildlife Declaration form.
3. Present the completed Wildlife Declaration form to U.S. Customs at the border.
4. Present the completed Personal Effects Exemption letter, your Michigan fishing license and your sturgeon tag to Canada Customs authorities upon import.

** Exports that do not qualify as personal effects require a CITES export permit issued by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in Arlington, Virginia.*

Wildlife and Customs inspectors are entitled to physically inspect lake sturgeon.

Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources CITES Permit Applications

South Central Regional Office:

300 Water Street
4th Floor, South Tower
P.O. Box 7000
Peterborough, ONK9J 8M5
(705) 755-2000

Northeast Regional Office:

Ontario Government Complex
Hwy. 101, E.P.O. Bag 3020
South Porcupine, ONPON 1H0
(705) 235-1157

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

**CITES Management Authority
4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Room 700
Arlington, VA 22203
(703) 358-2104**

VIOLATORS OF CITES

If an angler is caught transporting a lake sturgeon across the Canadian – U.S. border without the proper CITES export permit, the angler can be charged under the Canadian Federal Statute of WAPPRITA and/or under the U.S. ESA and the Lacey Act. Under these acts, the lake sturgeon can be seized by officers, and the angler can receive a fine and/or jail time.

In Canada, an angler that is found guilty can be fined up to \$150,000 and/or sentenced to five years in jail. In the U.S., penalties can reach a maximum of a \$250,000 fine and/or five years in jail. Fines increase if the angler is transporting multiple sturgeon; in which case, fines can be assessed for each lake sturgeon separately.

Violating CITES can result in strong penalties & the continued loss of a valuable fish species.

Make sure you know the law before fishing!