GULF STURGEON
Acipenser desotoi

Order: Acipenseriformes
Family: Acipenseridae
FNAI Ranks: G2G3/S2?
U.S. Status: Threatened
FL Status: Threatened

Description: A large sturgeon, generally reaching 5 - 7.5 ft. (1.5 - 2.2 m), with historical records of specimens reaching 9.5 ft. (2.8 m); vertical mouth, lightly colored viscera, long, sharply V-shaped snout (upturned at the tip in young), and prominent bony scutes (enlarged scales); general body color is blue-black dorsally, fading on sides, and eventually white ventrally.

Similar Species: No other sturgeon species are known to occur in Florida's Gulf coastal waters or drainages.

Habitat: Forages in Gulf of Mexico and associated estuaries; spawns in most major coastal rivers in areas with limestone outcrops.

Seasonal Occurrence: Gulf sturgeon is anadromous; adults and subadults spend the coldest three to four months in the Gulf and the remainder of the year in rivers where spawning occurs. Spawning typically takes place February - April.

Florida Distribution: The 2016 review by Sulak et al documents reproducing populations in five Gulf of Mexico drainages including (from west to east) the Escambia/Backwater, Yellow, Choctawhatchee, Apalachicola, and Suwanee Rivers. While incidental sturgeon observations have been recorded to southern Florida these areas are thought to be regularly occupied.

Range-wide Distribution: Gulf of Mexico and associated drainages westward to Mississippi River Basin.

Conservation Status: Due to the damming of many of north Florida's tributaries to the Gulf of Mexico, the Suwannee, Choctawhatchee and Yellow rivers appear to be the last high-quality spawning areas for the Gulf sturgeon. Banning of commercial harvest of this species has undoubtedly resulted in increased stocks.

Protection and Management: Due to the limited breeding habitat that has resulted from the damming of several of the large rivers within the Gulf sturgeon's range, the recovery of this and other anadromous species will likely require some means for these species to pass dams that are currently blocking their historical spawning migrations.

References: Gilbert (ed.) 1992, Hoehn 1998, Mettee et al. 1996, USFWS and Gulf States Marine Fisheries Comm. 1995, Wooley and Crateau 1985.

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