



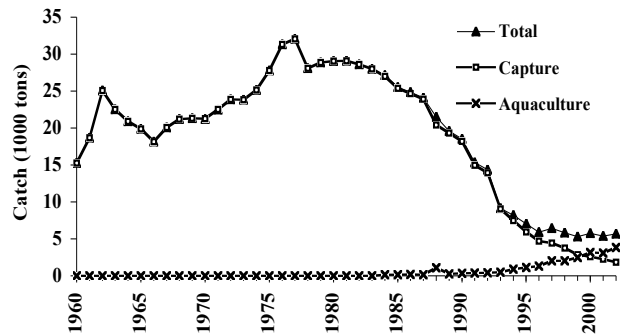
First Global Review Sees Bleak Future for Sturgeon; Bold Measures Can Save Endangered Fish

MIAMI—Sturgeon – producers of the highly prized black caviar, one of the most valuable wildlife commodities on earth – are in worldwide crisis, according to the most comprehensive study to date on the world’s sturgeon fisheries published today in the current issue of the journal *Fish and Fisheries*.

“Our findings are very bleak,” says Ellen Pikitch, PhD, executive director of the Pew Institute for Ocean Science and a professor at the University of Miami Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science. “The majority of the world’s major sturgeon fisheries are now catching 85 percent fewer fish than they did at their peak. More than one-third of the fisheries examined crashed within seven to 20 years of inception.”

Reporting local extinctions in 19 of 27 species, Pikitch and her colleagues developed a report card of indicators, critical to the sturgeon’s survival for key populations around the world. Eleven species ranked at or below 25 percent of the maximum score.

- Caspian and Black Sea populations, the major source of the world’s most valuable caviar, fared worst.
- European and Asian populations outside the Black and Caspian Seas scored slightly better, thanks to free-flowing spawning rivers.
- North American populations (Atlantic and white sturgeon), particularly those currently protected from commercial pressure, fared best in most management categories but fell short in habitat quality.



World Catch of Sturgeon & Paddlefish, 1960-2002

Called “living fossils” clad in bony plates, the late-maturing, naturally long-lived sturgeon is victim to overfishing, poor management practices, poaching, and loss of habitat. Measuring up to 15-foot long and weighing up to 2,500 pounds, the beluga sturgeon, producing the world’s rarest and most expensive caviar at up to \$150 per ounce, is the most threatened commercial species.

“Despite years of recognition of imperilment, no commercial sturgeon fisheries get a passing grade. Caspian Sea sturgeon fisheries will be history if overfishing and poaching are not immediately controlled,” says Phaedra Doukakis, PhD, also of the Pew Institute and co-lead author, outlining the paper’s recommendations:

- For Caspian Sea, Black Sea, Amur River, and wild Siberian sturgeon populations, fishing pressure should be reduced. For the most endangered species, fisheries should be closed until populations have recovered.



Sturgeon Outlook Bleak/2

- For North American sturgeon and paddlefish, interstate, trans-boundary management among states harboring common populations should be strengthened. Mandatory reporting of all commercial and recreational landings should be instituted in all fisheries.
- CITES' international policymakers should adopt a precautionary approach. Decisions on quotas should consider uncertainty of population status, evidence of decline, and rates of illegal fishing. In so doing, zero quotas likely will result for many species.
- The international scientific community should establish guidelines for monitoring, assessment and management of sturgeon populations, and develop thresholds for population declines or abundance levels that will trigger fisheries closures. International programs to build capacity and raise awareness about the benefits of a sustained commercial fishery and alternatives to sturgeon fishing should be instituted, particularly within the Caspian region.
- Focused research efforts on tagging, monitoring, and survivability of hatchery-released fish, with information-sharing across the Northern Hemisphere to aid the most threatened species are needed.
- Aquaculture, with production now exceeding that of wild-caught fisheries, offers great promise for the future, but must proceed cautiously to ensure that it relieves fishing pressure and does not increase demands on deteriorating wild populations or cause additional environmental harm.

“Programs that inform the public about sturgeon conservation, such as Caviar Emptor, already have affected consumer and retailer behavior and can inspire public action to change domestic and international policy,” concludes Pikitch. “We must protect this valuable resource before it vanishes.”

Caviar Emptor has led a public information campaign and public policy effort to reduce consumption of caviar from Caspian Sea sturgeon by proposing ecologically-sound aquacultured alternatives, leading the charge to list beluga sturgeon under the U.S. Endangered Species Act, and calling for a halt to international trade in beluga caviar. For more information, visit www.caviaremptor.org or write to info@caviaremptor.org.

In 2003, the Pew Charitable Trusts partnered with the University of Miami Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science to provide a generous, multi-year grant and founded the Pew Institute for Ocean Science, which undertakes, sponsors, and promotes world-class scientific activity aimed at protecting the world's oceans and the species that inhabit them. The scientific role of the institute is to increase public understanding of the causes and the consequences of problems affecting the marine environment. The conservation role is to promote solutions to these problems. For more information, visit www.pewoceanscience.org.

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ATTENTION JOURNALISTS: To obtain advance copies of the report, maps, and contact information, go to www.pewoceanscience.org/press/sturgeon or contact Chris Dudley at +1-305-456-1625 or cdudley@miami.edu.