

California's green sturgeon listed as threatened species

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SAN FRANCISCO (AP) - The federal government said Friday it will give protected status to California's green sturgeon, an ancient fish species that can grow to more than 7 feet long and weigh up to 350 pounds.

The National Marine Fisheries Service will list the green sturgeon population that lives south of the Eel River in Humboldt County as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

The final rule was published in the federal register Friday and becomes effective in June. The agency said it is considering regulations to protect the species.

The fisheries service proposed listing the green sturgeon's southern population in April last year after environmental groups sued the agency over its January 2003 finding that there was no sign the so-called "living dinosaurs" were dying out.

The southern population lives in the San Francisco Bay and San Joaquin-Sacramento River Delta and spawns in the Sacramento River basin. The agency has declined to give protected status to the green sturgeon population that lives north of the Eel River.

Green sturgeon, which can live up to 70 years, is one of the world's oldest fish species, emerging in its current form about 200 million years ago. Like salmon, they spend part of their lives in the ocean, returning to their native rivers to spawn. Salmon and sturgeon share many of the same habitat needs.