

Feds list some green sturgeon as threatened

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EUREKA -- The National Marine Fisheries Service is listing the southern green sturgeon, a fish that can reach 7 feet long and weigh 350 pounds, as a threatened species.

The NMFS, in a notice in the Federal Register, added that it "is currently considering issuance of protective regulations that may be necessary and advisable to provide for the conservation of the species.

The agency, within the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, acted on a petition that had been filed by the Environmental Protection and Information Center (EPIC), Center for Biological Diversity and WaterKeepers Northern California that had requested the green sturgeon be listed as threatened or endangered.

In its filing, the NMFS said, "We conclude that the southern (sturgeon) is likely to become endangered in the foreseeable future throughout all of its range."

It based its conclusion on the fact that the Sacramento River contains the only known green sturgeon spawning population in a distinct population segment, that there was a substantial loss of spawning habitat in the upper Sacramento and Feather rivers and that there is evidence that the Sacramento River and Delta System face mounting threats with regard to maintenance of habitat quality and quantity and the southern area is directly dependent upon this ecosystem for its long-term viability.

Jeff Miller with Center for Biological Diversity said the fish should have been listed as endangered. He also said the designation should have extended to the northern species, which inhabit from the Eel River north to the Klamath and Rogue rivers.

"Fish and Game's estimate that 50 or fewer spawning green sturgeon will return to the Sacramento River this spring should sound alarm bells," said Miller. "With the Delta food web that sturgeon depend upon unraveling, it is imperative we protect and restore suitable habitat for this ancient fish in the Sacramento River and Bay Delta. Endangered Species Act protection is the most effective tool available for recovering endangered species."

"It certainly needs protection," Miller added. "We do think it should be endangered because the green sturgeon are in much more dire straits."

Green sturgeon are among the largest and longest-living fish species found in freshwater, living up to 70 years, reaching 7.5 feet in length, and weighing up to 350 pounds. Sturgeon have a prehistoric appearance, with a skeleton consisting

of mostly cartilage and rows of bony plates for scales. They have snouts like shovels and mouths like vacuum cleaners that are used to siphon shrimp and other food from sandy depths.

For more information about the green sturgeon visit:

<http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/swcbd/species/grnsturgeon/index.html>.