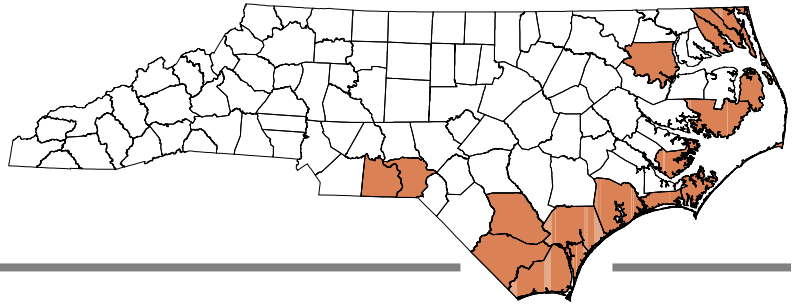

Shortnose sturgeon

Acipenser brevirostrum

Endangered (March 11, 1967)



Description: The shortnose sturgeon has five rows of bony plates, or scutes, (1 dorsal, 2 lateral, and 2 ventral) separated by naked skin that runs the length of the body, a tail with the upper lobe larger and longer than the lower, and four barbels (like droopy whiskers) along the mouth located under a long pointed snout. This sturgeon has a blackish head and back, yellowish-brown body, pale underside, and grows to about 39 inches (1 m) long. Young individuals have blotches of darker color. The shortnose sturgeon resembles young Atlantic sturgeon (*A. oxyrinchus*), but can be distinguished by its shorter snout, wider mouth (mouth width greater than 62% of distance between eyes), and the usual lack of bony plates between the anal fin base and the lateral row of plates.

Life History: This fish moves from the ocean and estuaries into freshwater rivers between February and May, and spawns from April through June. Juveniles may remain upriver for up to 5 years after birth before migrating to the ocean. Feeds on worms, crustaceans, insect larvae, small clams, small fish, and stems and leaves of macrophytes. It matures at 4-16 years of age and may live for up to 60 years.

Habitat: A bottom dweller, shortnose sturgeon prefer deep water with soft substrate and vegetated bottoms. Found in ocean and estuaries, at spawning requires freshwater of inland portions of rivers with fast current and rough bottoms. According to Jackson et al. (1992), the fish usually gather in deep spots during the day and move to tidal flats for the night, in the summer and early fall.

Distribution: This fish is found along the Atlantic coast from New Brunswick to Florida. Historically, shortnose sturgeon were widely reported from North Carolina rivers. Current distribution is not well known. This species occurs sparingly in the Cape Fear River drainage and Albemarle Sound, and an unconfirmed report exists for Pamlico Sound. Most recent reports have come from the Cape Fear River near Wilmington. Also, it has been found in the Pee Dee River and in the Roanoke River not far from the river's mouth. Records exist for Anson, Bertie, Bladen, Brunswick, Carteret, Columbus, Currituck, Dare, Hyde, New Hanover, Onslow, Pamlico, Pasquotank, Pender, and Richmond counties.

Threats: Overfishing and degradation of habitat by erosion, siltation, toxic pollution, and dams that interfere with upstream migration to spawning areas.

Management Recommendations: Enforcement of protective laws regarding fishing and water quality regulation.

Sources: Gilbert and Moran 1989, Jackson et al. 1992, Lee et al. 1980, Ross 1988.

