

For immediate release

MAINE RIVERS URGES MAINERS TO VOTE LIKE A STURGEON WOULD

Yarmouth, October 9, 2018— Maine Rivers urges you to VOTE LIKE A STURGEON WOULD! Are we serious? Actually we are. Midterm elections are coming up on Tuesday, November 6th and will be a critical time for voters to come out and make good choices. We can't tell you which candidates to vote for but we can tell that your vote matters. And sturgeon matter to us.

Maine has two species of sturgeon, Atlantic sturgeon (*Acipenser oxyrinchus*) and shortnose sturgeon (*Acipenser brevirostrum*). They've been around since the dinosaurs, their evolution dates back to the Triassic period, some 245 to 208 million years ago. They are considered a "primitive" fish because they have not changed much since those ancient times. They have rows of bony, armor-like plates on their sides and a skeleton of cartilage rather than bones. Historically, Atlantic sturgeon ranged along the Canadian and U.S. Atlantic Coast from Labrador to Florida. Both Atlantic sturgeon and shortnose sturgeon are now endangered in the United States. Their future existence on this planet depends on decisions we make—like on November 6th.



Image of Atlantic sturgeon via Duane Raver/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Like alewives and Atlantic salmon, sturgeon are migratory—they are born in freshwater, then migrate to the sea and back again to freshwater to spawn. Most young sturgeon remain in their birth river for at several months before migrating out to the ocean.

Atlantic sturgeon are big—they can grow to be 18 feet long, weigh 800 lbs. and have a lifespan similar to ours. Shortnose sturgeon are much smaller, often no more than 3 feet long.

Sturgeon can't vote but they can leap. And they do. With the removal of the Edwards Dam in Augusta, the Kennebec River now has some of the best habitat for sturgeon in Maine. It's amazing, and not unusual, to see sturgeon leaping from the Kennebec as it flows through Hallowell. Is it for courtship? For communication? There's a lot we don't know about sturgeon but we love to see them leap.

How would a sturgeon vote? The most significant threats facing sturgeon are dams that block access to spawning areas, bad water quality, dredging of their spawning areas, becoming fishing by-catch or being struck by vessels.

Clean water

Sturgeon would vote for candidates who will protect clean water, from headwaters all the way downstream to the ocean. At issue now, in Congress, the Courts and the USEPA, are interpretations of the Clean Water Act, and some argue that headwater streams are not important enough to protect. We disagree.

Endangered Species Act

There are efforts underway to weaken the Endangered Species Act, a law that has been critical for bringing Maine's bald eagle populations back from the brink of extinction. It provides protections for sturgeon and should not be weakened or dismantled.

Free flowing rivers and streams

Healthy rivers without dams are better for sturgeon and our other native fish. Free flowing water is better oxygenated and offers better habitat for spawning. Maine has too many deadbeat dams that no longer serve any purpose but still block access to good habitat and degrade our water. Sturgeon would tell you to support candidates that understand the importance of healthy rivers and will support removing obsolete dams.

Climate change

We know that the Gulf of Maine is one of the fastest warming bodies of water on the planet. Changing temperatures, increased storm events, more invasive species—all of this makes life harder for sturgeon. We think sturgeon would make sure to vote for candidates who will support clean energy policies, scientific research and smart planning to reduce impacts to our land and water.

Water quality

It matters to long-lived species like sturgeon. We know they benefit from reducing pollution that makes its way to our waters. Microplastics. Plastic garbage. Stormwater runoff. Endocrine disruptors. Runoff with fertilizers and pesticides. Sturgeon would look for candidates at every level of government who will act to protect clean water.

What can you do? Talk to the candidates before November 6. Tell them what's important to you. And be sure to register in advance to vote. For more information on candidates in Maine you can check out these resources:

Maine Conservation Voters <https://www.maineconservation.org>

Maine Public <http://www.mainepublic.org/term/your-vote-2018#stream/0>

Thank you for voting like a sturgeon would!

www.mainerivers.org

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FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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