



NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC AND
ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE



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NOAA Designates Critical Habitat for Southern Population of North American Green Sturgeon

NOAA's Fisheries Service has designated critical habitat for the southern distinct population segment (DPS) of North American green sturgeon to ensure its survival and recovery. The species spawns in California's Sacramento River and migrates along the west coast of the United States and Canada.

"This designation will help protect important habitat for this population of North American green sturgeon, a species that has persisted for 160 million years but is now likely to become endangered in the foreseeable future," said Melissa Neuman, a biologist for NOAA's Fisheries Service southwest regional office.

In April 2006, the southern DPS of North American green sturgeon was listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. The listing was due in part to the degradation of the primary spawning habitat in the Sacramento River and the declining numbers of green sturgeon.

The ESA requires designation of a critical habitat whenever a species is listed for protection. A critical habitat designation only applies when federal projects, permits or funding are involved. It does not apply to activities on private land that do not involve a federal agency. Private land owners may continue to use the habitat as long as their activities do not require a federal permit, receive federal funding, or involve a federal project.

The designation is a primary component of the ESA listing, which will protect the sturgeon by requiring all federal agencies to ensure that actions they fund, authorize, or carry out are not likely to destroy or adversely modify the critical habitat.

In September 2008, NOAA's Fisheries Service proposed areas for designation and requested input for a final rule that published last week in the *Federal Register*. Using information previously provided by the public and the agency's own data, NOAA's Fisheries Service designated the following areas as critical habitat:

- Coastal U.S. marine waters within 360 feet depth from and including Monterey Bay, Calif., north to Cape Flattery, Wash., including the Strait of Juan de Fuca, to the U.S. border with Canada;
- The Sacramento River, lower Feather River, lower Yuba River, the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and Suisun, San Pablo and San Francisco bays in California;
- The lower Columbia River estuary; and
- Humboldt Bay, Calif.; Coos Bay, Winchester Bay, Yaquina Bay, and Nehalem Bay, Ore.; and Willapa Bay and Grays Harbor, Wash.

The areas designated comprise approximately 320 miles of freshwater river habitat, 897 square miles of estuarine habitat, 11,421 square miles of coastal marine habitat, 487 miles of habitat in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, and 135 square miles of habitat within the Yolo and Sutter bypasses, part of the Sacramento River Flood Control Project.

NOAA understands and predicts changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and conserves and manages our coastal and marine resources.

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On the Web:

Final rule: <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2009/pdf/E9-24067.pdf>