WISCONSIN

LAKE STURGEON GUIDE

Spearing, hook and line, and releasing a giant

Your guide to Wisconsin's biggest, oldest fish.



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LAKE STURGEON

Guide

Spearing, hook and line, and releasing a giant



Wisconsin Lake Sturgeon Guide
First edition, October 2026

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Read this first. Fishing rules change every year and differ by lake. Everything about seasons, sizes and bag limits in this book is for the 2026–27 season, checked 2026-10-08. Always check the current Wisconsin DNR rules and your lake's own rules before you fish. Depth maps are not for navigation. Ice is never guaranteed safe. You are responsible for your own safety and for following the law.

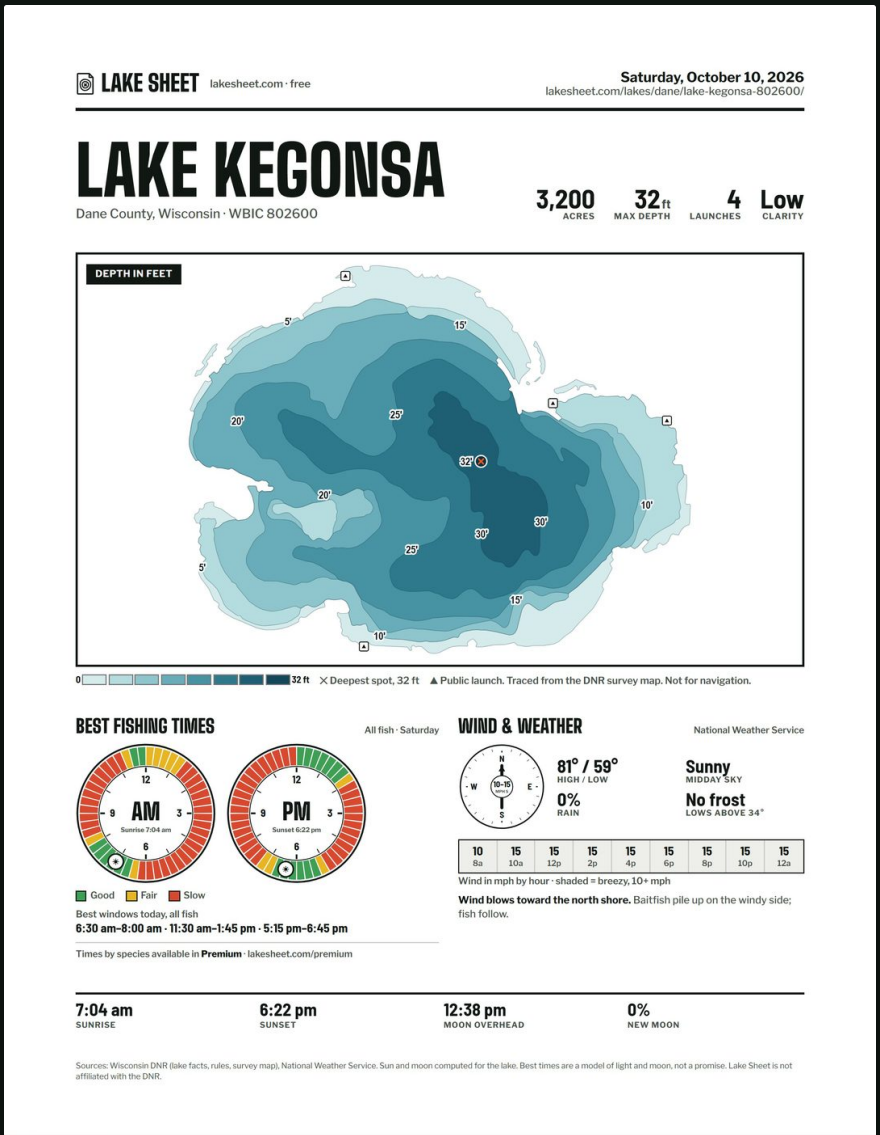
Lake Sheet is not affiliated with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Lake facts come from DNR survey and stocking records as published by Lake Sheet; see the sources at the back of the book.

lakesheet.com

FREE WITH THIS BOOK

YOUR FREE LAKE SHEET

Free for more than 4,600 Wisconsin lakes: two printable pages, made for the boat. This is the real sheet for Lake Kegonsa.



LAKE SHEET lakesheet.com · free

Saturday, October 10, 2026
lakesheet.com/lakes/dane/lake-kegonsa-802600/

LAKE KEGONSA

Dane County, Wisconsin · WBIC 802600

3,200	32 ft	4	Low
ACRES	MAX DEPTH	LAUNCHES	CLARITY

DEPTH IN FEET

5' 15' 20' 25' 32' 20' 10' 30' 30' 25' 5' 15' 10'

0 32 ft · ✕ Deepest spot, 32 ft · ▲ Public launch. Traced from the DNR survey map. Not for navigation.

BEST FISHING TIMES

All fish · Saturday

AM — Sunrise 7:04 am

PM — Sunset 6:22 pm

Good · Fair · Slow

Best windows today, all fish
6:30 am–8:00 am · 11:30 am–1:45 pm · 5:15 pm–6:45 pm

Times by species available in **Premium** · lakesheet.com/premium

WIND & WEATHER

National Weather Service

81° / 59°
HIGH / LOW

0%
RAIN

Sunny
MIDDAY SKY

No frost
LOWS ABOVE 34°

10	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15
8a	10a	12p	2p	4p	6p	8p	10p	12a

Wind in mph by hour · shaded = breezy, 10+ mph

Wind blows toward the north shore. Baitfish pile up on the windy side; fish follow.

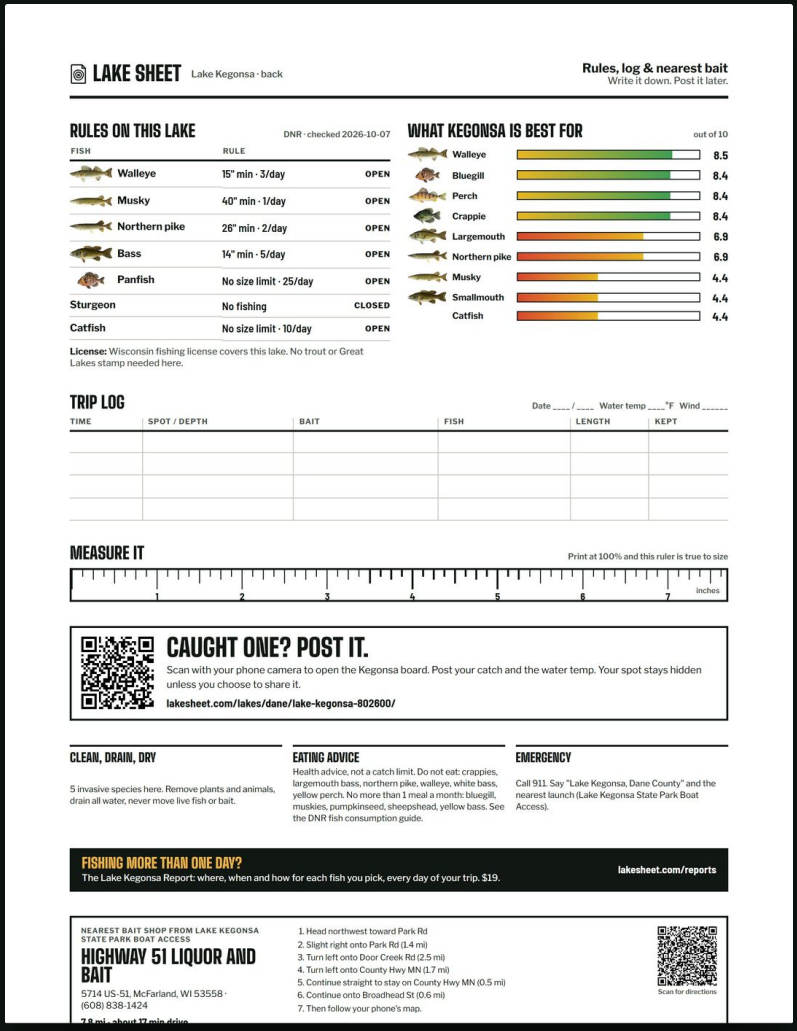
7:04 am	6:22 pm	12:38 pm	0%
SUNRISE	SUNSET	MOON OVERHEAD	NEW MOON

Sources: Wisconsin DNR (lake facts, rules, survey map), National Weather Service. Sun and moon computed for the lake. Best times are a model of light and moon, not a promise. Lake Sheet is not affiliated with the DNR.

1. **Depth map** traced from the DNR survey, deepest spot marked (traced lakes)
2. **Lake facts:** acres, max depth, launches, clarity
3. **Best times** from the sun and moon on AM and PM dials
4. **Wind and weather** by the hour, and which shore the wind hits
5. **Sun and moon** times for the lake
6. **Sources and date** on every fact

THE BACK OF THE SHEET

RULES, LOG & NEAREST BAIT



LAKE SHEET Lake Kegonsa · back

Rules, log & nearest bait
Write it down. Post it later.

RULES ON THIS LAKE

DNR · checked 2026-10-07

FISH	RULE	
Walleye	15" min · 3/day	OPEN
Musky	40" min · 1/day	OPEN
Northern pike	26" min · 2/day	OPEN
Bass	14" min · 5/day	OPEN
Panfish	No size limit · 25/day	OPEN
Sturgeon	No fishing	CLOSED
Catfish	No size limit · 10/day	OPEN

License: Wisconsin fishing license covers this lake. No trout or Great Lakes stamp needed here.

WHAT KEGONSA IS BEST FOR

out of 10

Walleye	8.5
Bluegill	8.4
Perch	8.4
Crappie	8.4
Largemouth	6.9
Northern pike	6.9
Musky	4.4
Smallmouth	4.4
Catfish	4.4

TRIP LOG

Date ____ / ____ Water temp ____°F Wind _____

TIME	SPOT / DEPTH	BAIT	FISH	LENGTH	KEPT

MEASURE IT

Print at 100% and this ruler is true to size

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 inches

CAUGHT ONE? POST IT.

Scan with your phone camera to open the Kegonsa board. Post your catch and the water temp. Your spot stays hidden unless you choose to share it.

lakesheet.com/lakes/dane/lake-kegonsa-802600/

CLEAN, DRAIN, DRY

5 invasive species here. Remove plants and animals, drain all water, never move live fish or bait.

EATING ADVICE

Health advice, not a catch limit. Do not eat: crappies, largemouth bass, northern pike, walleye, white bass, yellow perch. No more than 1 meal a month: bluegill, muskies, pumpkinseed, sheepshead, yellow bass. See the DNR fish consumption guide.

EMERGENCY

Call 911. Say "Lake Kegonsa, Dane County" and the nearest launch (Lake Kegonsa State Park Boat Access).

FISHING MORE THAN ONE DAY?
The Lake Kegonsa Report: where, when and how for each fish you pick, every day of your trip. $19.
lakesheet.com/reports

NEAREST BAIT SHOP FROM LAKE KEGONSA STATE PARK BOAT ACCESS

HIGHWAY 51 LIQUOR AND BAIT

5714 US-51, McFarland, WI 53558 · (608) 838-1424

7.8 mi · about 17 min drive

1. Head northwest toward Park Rd
2. Slight right onto Park Rd (1.4 mi)
3. Turn left onto Door Creek Rd (2.5 mi)
4. Turn left onto County Hwy MN (1.7 mi)
5. Continue straight to stay on County Hwy MN (0.5 mi)
6. Continue onto Broadhead St (0.6 mi)
7. Then follow your phone's map.

Scan for directions

1. **This lake's rules** for every fish, from the DNR
2. **What the lake is best for,** rated by fish
3. **Trip log** and a true-size **ruler**
4. **Invasive species** and eating advice
5. **Nearest bait shop** we know of, with turn-by-turn directions
6. Scan to post your catch

lakesheet.com

Find your lake, print it, take it in the boat

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Lake sturgeon are not a fish you catch every weekend. Most of the year you can't keep one, on most waters you can't fish for them at all, and the fish you do catch can be older than your grandparents. This book is built around the three ways Wisconsin anglers meet a sturgeon: **spearing** through the ice on the Winnebago system in February, **hook and line** on a short list of rivers and flowages, and **watching** the spring spawning run on the Wolf River.

IF YOU WANT TO SPEAR IN FEBRUARY

1. Chapter 8.4: the license, the Upriver Lakes drawing and the deadlines (Oct. 31 for Lake Winnebago).
2. Chapter 5.6: how a spearing day works, step by step.
3. Chapter 6.4: reading Lake Winnebago, water clarity and where fish were speared.
4. Chapter 9.7: tagging, registering and eating your fish.

IF YOU WANT TO CATCH ONE ON A ROD

1. Chapter 8.1–8.3: which waters are open, and when.
2. Chapter 4: the heavy gear a sturgeon needs.
3. Chapter 5.1–5.5: the bottom rig and how to fish a tailwater.
4. Chapter 9: landing and releasing a fish of 50 lb or more.

The QR codes. Most lakes named in this book have a code. Scan it with your phone camera and you land on that lake's free Lake Sheet: launches, wind, today's best times, the nearest bait shop and the lake's own rules. Most sturgeon water is river, and rivers are not Lake Sheet lakes; for rivers, the book gives the DNR source instead.

The rules. Sturgeon rules are the strictest in Wisconsin fishing and they change often: the 2026–27 season added a list of new catch-and-release waters. Rules in this book are for the 2026–27 season and the February 2027 spearing season, checked October 8, 2026. Before you fish for a sturgeon, check the current DNR rules for the exact stretch of water you'll be on.



CHAPTER 1

MEET THE LAKE STURGEON

The lake sturgeon is the biggest and oldest fish in Wisconsin. The DNR calls it a living fossil: its family goes back more than 100 million years, to the age of the dinosaurs, and it still carries bony armor instead of scales and a rod of cartilage instead of a backbone. A female doesn't spawn until she is about 25 years old, and she can live past 80. Everything about how sturgeon are fished and protected in Wisconsin comes from that slow life.

1.1 How to tell a lake sturgeon · **1.2** Lake or shovelnose? · **1.3** Size, age and growth · **1.4** The records · **1.5** Built for the bottom · **1.6** Spawning · **1.7** Why there are so few

1.1

HOW TO TELL A LAKE STURGEON

LAKE STURGEON

Acipenser fulvescens



TELL IT BY	Five rows of bony plates instead of scales, a shark-like tail with a longer upper lobe, four barbels in a row under a pointed snout, and a toothless mouth that pushes out to suck up food.
LOOKS LIKE	Shovelnose sturgeon (Mississippi, lower Wisconsin and Chippewa rivers): flat, shovel-shaped snout, a long thread off the top of the tail, bony plates on the tail stalk, and no spiracles. Shovelnose stay small.
COLOR	Slate gray, olive-brown or black, with a milky or yellow-white belly. Young fish are lighter, with dark blotches on the sides and snout.
SIZE	The biggest fish in Wisconsin. Spearing-season males average about 55 inches, females about 61. Fish over 100 lb turn up every year on Winnebago.
WISCONSIN RECORD	Hook and line: 170 lb 10 oz, 79.0 in, Jon Procai, Yellow Lake, Burnett County, Sept. 22, 1979. Speared: 212 lb 3.2 oz, Ron Grishaber, Lake Winnebago, Feb. 13, 2010.
EATS	Small bottom animals: insect larvae such as midge larvae (red worms), snails, small clams, leeches and the occasional crayfish.

Nothing else in Wisconsin looks like a sturgeon. Check four things:

1. **Bony plates (scutes), not scales.** Five rows run the length of the body: one down the middle of the back and two along each side. On young fish each plate rises to a sharp spur. On old, big fish the plates wear smooth and are hard to see.
2. **A shark-like tail.** The upper lobe is longer than the lower one. The fish's flexible notochord runs all the way out into it.
3. **Four barbels.** Whisker-like feelers hang in a row under the snout, in front of the mouth.

4. **No teeth.** The mouth is underneath and pushes out like a tube to suck food off the bottom, then pulls back in. Two small vents called spiracles sit on top of the head, in front of the gills.

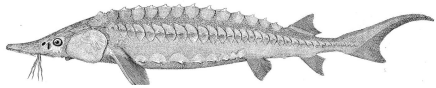

FIG 1.1 A young lake sturgeon. Sharp spurs on every plate and a long, pointed snout. Both fade with age. H. L. Todd, 1884.



FIG 1.2 Juvenile colors. Young lake sturgeon are lighter, with dark blotches on the sides and snout. From *The Fishes of Illinois*, 1908.

The snout tells you roughly how old a fish is: long and pointed on a small one, shorter and blunter on an old one. Old-timers have called the lake sturgeon rock sturgeon, stone sturgeon, red sturgeon, shell-back, bony sturgeon, smoothback and rubbernose.

1.2 LAKE OR SHOVELNOSE?

Wisconsin has two sturgeon. The shovelnose lives in the Mississippi and the lower parts of big rivers that flow into it, and small lake sturgeon there are often mistaken for one.

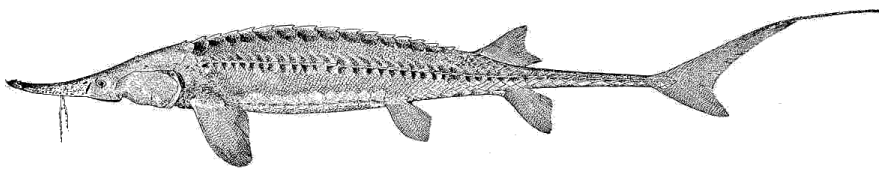

FIG 1.3 Shovelnose sturgeon. A flat, shovel-shaped snout and a long thread trailing from the top of the tail. H. L. Todd, 1894.

	LAKE STURGEON	SHOVELNOSE STURGEON
Snout	Cone-shaped, pointed when young, blunt when old	Long, flat and rounded like a shovel
Tail	No thread	A long filament off the upper lobe
Tail stalk	Skin between the plates	Covered in bony plates
Spiracles	Yes, on top of the head	None

Size	The biggest fish in Wisconsin	Small: the state record is 7 lb 13.1 oz
Where	Winnebago system, Lake Michigan and Superior basins, Chippewa, Flambeau, Wisconsin, St. Croix, Menominee rivers	Mississippi, lower Wisconsin and Chippewa rivers
2026–27 rules	Strict: closed on most waters (Chapter 8)	Lower Wisconsin below Prairie du Sac Dam: July 4, 2026 – Mar. 7, 2027, 3 a day

1.3

SIZE, AGE AND GROWTH

Lake sturgeon grow and live longer than any other Wisconsin fish. At first they grow fast in length and slowly in weight; later it flips, and an old fish adds pounds faster than inches.

AGE	TYPICAL LENGTH
1 year	11 in
3 years	23 in
5 years	33 in
10 years	40 in
15 years	47 in
20 years	51 in
25 years	56 in

Length at age from the Wisconsin DNR's lake sturgeon page. Growth depends on the water temperature and food.

When they grow up. Males mature at about 15 years old and 45 inches. Females mature at **24 to 26 years** and about 55 inches, then spawn only once every four, five or six years. Most males spawn every other year. That is why a 60-inch minimum on the rivers protects most females until they have spawned at least once or twice.

How old they get. Females live longer than males: in the DNR's numbers, 97% of sturgeon over 30 years old are females. The oldest on Wisconsin

record was an 82-year-old from Lake Winnebago in 1953. The same year, a 152-year-old, 215-lb fish was caught in Lake of the Woods, Ontario.

What a fish weighs. The DNR weighs and measures every fish speared on the Winnebago system. The 2026 numbers show what real Wisconsin sturgeon run:

2026 SPEARING SEASON	AVERAGE LENGTH	AVERAGE WEIGHT	RANGE
Males, Lake Winnebago	55.3 in	38.5 lb	8.9 – 108.5 lb
Juvenile females (under 55 in)	48.3 in	23.4 lb	7.2 – 67.6 lb
Adult females, Lake Winnebago	64.3 in	61.9 lb	26.6 – 138.1 lb
Adult females, Upriver Lakes	64.2 in	64.4 lb	24.3 – 148.9 lb

From the DNR's 2026 spearing season report. 54 of the 1,539 fish speared in 2026 weighed over 100 lb.

1.4
THE RECORDS

RECORD	SIZE	WHO, WHERE, WHEN
Hook and line	170 lb 10 oz, 79.0 in	Jon Procai, Yellow Lake, Burnett County, Sept. 22, 1979
Spear	212 lb 3.2 oz, 84.25 in	Ron Grishaber, Lake Winnebago, Calumet County, Feb. 13, 2010
Live release (length)	89.5 in	Jacob Huntington, Yellow Lake, Burnett County, Sept. 16, 2026
Shovelnose, hook and line	7 lb 13.1 oz, 37.5 in	Xavier Vang, Mississippi River, Vernon County, May 28, 2017

Wisconsin DNR Record Fish List, revised September 2026.

The biggest sturgeon the DNR has handled on the Winnebago system was a female caught, tagged and released below the Shawano dam on the Wolf River in April 2012: 240 lb and 87.5 inches. The DNR's sturgeon biologist at the time estimated she was about 125 years old.

1.5
BUILT FOR THE BOTTOM

A sturgeon can't chase anything. With no teeth, it lives on small animals it finds on the bottom: midge larvae (the "red worms" Winnebago spearers talk about), snails, small clams, leeches, insect larvae and now and then a crayfish.

It feeds by cruising slowly along the bottom and dragging its four barbels over it. When a barbel touches food, the mouth shoots out and vacuums up the food along with silt and gravel. The grit goes out through the gills; the food stays. Sturgeon feed where food is thick: lakes with big areas of water under 30 feet, and deep pools in rivers.

> **WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU**
> A sturgeon finds bait by touch and smell, on the bottom. Your bait has to lie still on the bottom, in the path the fish cruise: the deep holes, the edges of current and the flats below dams (Chapter 6).

The jump. Sturgeon sometimes leap clear of the water and land with a huge splash. Biologists think they may be trying to shake off lampreys. Most adults carry old lamprey scars, and the DNR reports seeing six or more lampreys on one fish.

1.6
SPAWNING

Lake sturgeon spawn in rivers, on shallow rock and gravel along the banks, between late April and early June. Water temperature and flow decide the day:

RIVER IN SPRING	SPAWNING STARTS AT
High water, warming slowly	53°F
Low water, warming fast	58–59°F

Males arrive first and cruise the rocks in groups of eight or more, so shallow that their backs, tails and snouts stick out of the water. When a ripe female

joins them, the males swim alongside her against the current, thrashing their tails, and she drops her eggs.

- **Eggs** are about 1/8 inch across and sticky; they glue to rocks until they hatch. One female lays 50,000 to 700,000 in a season.
- **Hatching** takes 5 to 8 days, depending on temperature.
- **Fry** are an inch long, with a working mouth and barbels, 12 to 14 days later.

On the Winnebago system the fish run up the Wolf River as far as the dam at Shawano, and up the Fox. Section 2.6 lists the public places where you can watch them.

1.7 WHY THERE ARE SO FEW

Wisconsin's tribes, including the Menominee, the Ho-Chunk (Winnebago), Ojibwe, Potawatomi, Oneida and Sauk, revered the lake sturgeon. The Menominee Nation still holds a spring sturgeon celebration; the DNR has trucked Wolf River sturgeon from below the Shawano dam up to Keshena Falls on the reservation for it. By 1860, commercial fishermen on the Great Lakes treated it as a nuisance that tore their nets; they stacked sturgeon on shore like cordwood and left them to rot. Then the market discovered caviar, smoked sturgeon and isinglass, a gelatin from the swim bladder, and the fish were taken by the ton. Great Lakes sturgeon never recovered.

Three things keep sturgeon scarce today:

- **Slow maturity.** A female killed at 20 never spawned once. Lose too many young females and a population takes decades to recover.
- **Dams.** They block spawning runs and change the flows that eggs and the bottom food need.
- **Poaching.** Sturgeon are easy targets on their spawning rocks. Volunteers of the Sturgeon Guard program have watched the Wolf River spawning sites for more than 30 years.

Lake sturgeon are a **Special Concern** species in Wisconsin. In April 2024 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service decided they do not need federal endangered-species listing, partly because of restoration and the way states like

Wisconsin manage them. The Winnebago system holds about 25,000 adult males and roughly 15,000 adult females, one of the largest lake sturgeon populations in the world.

REMEMBER

- Bony plates, four barbels, no teeth.
- Females don't spawn until about 25.
- Big fish are mostly females. Handle them like the breeders they are.

DON'T

- Call a small one a shovelnose without checking the snout and tail.
- Bother fish on their spawning rocks. Watch from shore.
- Fish for sturgeon where the season is closed, even to release them.



CHAPTER 2

WHERE STURGEON LIVE IN WISCONSIN

Lake sturgeon are big-water fish. In Wisconsin they live in three drainages, the Lake Michigan basin, the Lake Superior basin and the Mississippi, and almost all of the fishing happens in two places: the Lake Winnebago system and a handful of northern and western rivers with their flowages. This chapter shows where those waters are, which of them are lakes you can look up on Lake Sheet, and where you can stand on a riverbank in spring and watch sturgeon spawn.

2.1 The three drainages · **2.2** The Winnebago system · **2.3** The rivers · **2.4** Sturgeon lakes on Lake Sheet · **2.5** Stocking and restoration · **2.6** Watch the spawning run · **2.7** Does my lake have sturgeon?

2.1
THE THREE DRAINAGES

DRAINAGE	WHERE STURGEON LIVE (DNR)
Lake Michigan basin	Lake Winnebago, Butte des Morts, Winneconne and Poygan; the Wolf River up to Shawano; the Fox River up to Lake Puckaway; the Embarrass River; the Menominee River up to the White Rapids Dam; Green Bay and Lake Michigan
Lake Superior basin	Shallow water around the Apostle Islands and Keweenaw Bay; spawns in the Bad River
Mississippi basin	The Mississippi and St. Croix; the Chippewa and its big tributaries, including the Flambeau; the Wisconsin River up to the Castle Rock Flowage

The DNR rates lake sturgeon **common** in the Menominee River, the lower Wolf River, Lakes Poygan and Winnebago, Lake Wisconsin, the St. Croix River up to Gordon Dam, the Namekagon River below Trego Dam, and the Chippewa and Flambeau rivers. They are **uncommon to rare** in the lower Wisconsin River, the Mississippi, the Madison lakes, and Lakes Michigan and Superior.

2.2
THE WINNEBAGO SYSTEM

The Winnebago system is home to one of the largest lake sturgeon populations in North America, and it is one of only two places in the world where people may spear lake sturgeon; the other is Black Lake in Michigan. It is made of:

- **Lake Winnebago**, 131,939 acres and only 21 feet deep at its deepest, with a soft bottom rich in midge larvae, the "red worms" sturgeon feed on.
- **The Upriver Lakes**: Lake Poygan (14,024 acres), Lake Butte des Morts (8,581 acres) and Lake Winneconne (4,553 acres), all 11 feet deep or less. Because they are shallow, water clarity matters less to spearers there, and they succeed far more often (Chapter 8).