

## **Lake Sturgeon Distribution and Status in Michigan, 1996–2005**

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*Abstract.*—Lake sturgeon is listed as a threatened species in Michigan and throughout much of its native range. There are several impediments to lake sturgeon rehabilitation and management including uncertainty about the distribution and current status of populations and a lack of knowledge of lake sturgeon early life history. I sampled waters across northern Michigan to gain a better understanding of lake sturgeon status and early life history. A total of 1,261 adult and juvenile lake sturgeons were captured from 10 of the 19 waters sampled. Only four populations appear to be reproducing successfully and self-sustaining: Black Lake, Sturgeon River, Menominee River, and Lake St. Clair. In the Sturgeon River larval lake sturgeons drifted downstream after hatching and were captured up to 61 km downstream from the spawning site. Young of the year and juvenile lake sturgeons proved difficult to capture, but collaborative efforts in Black Lake and Sturgeon River/Portage Lake provided insights into lake sturgeon early life history. In the Sturgeon River, young lake sturgeons drifted downstream and were present in the lower river until at least mid-August. In the Black River, some larval lake sturgeons likely drifted out of the river and into Black Lake, located only 11 km from the spawning site. Young of the year and juvenile lake sturgeons were found over sand, or sand and small gravel, substrates in the Sturgeon River and over sand in the Black River. In the Ontonagon River, which was stocked with lake sturgeons from 1998 to 2004, age-0 and yearling lake sturgeons were captured in the lower river over soft substrates of sand and silt. Rehabilitating and reestablishing lake sturgeons will likely require continued prohibitions on harvest as well as future stocking efforts to reintroduce lake sturgeons to former habitats.