

## Pallid Sturgeon



Photo courtesy of USFWS

**Scientific name:** *Scaphirhynchus albus*

**Description:** This odd looking fish is a relic from the dinosaur era, pallid sturgeon have been around for over 200 million years. Pallid Sturgeon are large weighing 80 pounds and reaching lengths of 60 inches long, they also live a long life, up to 60 years. Sturgeon are armored with rows of bony plates running the length of the fish, their snout is flattened and shovel shaped and they have a long thin tail.

**Preferred Habitat:** Pallid sturgeon are found exclusively in the Missouri River system in North Dakota. They are adapted to large shallow rivers with gravel, sandbars, turbid water, and seasonal pulses similar to large free flowing rivers.

**Life History:** There is little evidence of natural reproduction in pallid sturgeon in the last fifty years. It is believed that this lack of reproductive success is due to both a lack of spring river pulses that cue spawning and the existences of dams that cut off access to spawning grounds. Pallid sturgeon populations are currently augmented by artificial propagation. Development includes a planktonic larval stage. After the larval stage growth is rapid during the first four years then slows. Pallid sturgeon do not reach sexual maturity until 7 to 20 years of age. Once reaching maturity, individuals may require several years between spawnings.

**Diet:** Pallid sturgeon feed on insects, crustaceans and small fish.

**Reason for Decline:** Populations have undergone severe decline due to damming of the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers. Dams block migration, fragment the population and alter flow rates and temperature regimes required by the species. Different flow rates such as seasonal pulses are believed to have spurred sturgeon spawning, and with those pulses being blocked by dams there is little spawning. Large scale inflow of pollutants from many sources over the length of the species range may also negatively affect reproduction.