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Contact:  
Maya K. van Rossum, the Delaware Riverkeeper, 215 369 1188 ext 102

## **Delaware River Atlantic Sturgeon Listed as Endangered; Deepening Identified as Harm**

Washington, D.C.: The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has just announced today that it will list the Atlantic sturgeon in the Delaware River as an endangered species under the federal Endangered Species Act, because the species is presently in danger of extinction. The Atlantic sturgeon of the Delaware River are listed as part of the New York Bight distinct population segment, which includes all Atlantic sturgeon that spawn in watersheds draining to coastal waters from Chatham, MA to the Delaware-Maryland border on Fenwick Island. NMFS believes there are fewer than 300 spawning adults in the Delaware River population; just over 100 years ago there were estimated to be 180,000 spawning adult females. Although NMFS recognizes a number of threats, including fisheries bycatch and degraded water quality, imperiling the Atlantic sturgeon, NMFS explicitly identifies the Delaware River Main Channel Deepening Project as a threat to the species: “[T]he location and scope of the project in the Delaware River, coupled with the lack of information on the precise location of spawning and other important habitat in the Delaware River, indicate that the project could be very harmful to the Delaware River riverine population of Atlantic sturgeon.” NMFS also identified the increased risk of vessel strikes resulting from more and/or larger ships on the Delaware River as a factor in its listing decision.

“Experts have identified our Delaware River Atlantic Sturgeon as being genetically unique, found nowhere else in the world but our River,” says Maya van Rossum, the Delaware Riverkeeper. “The National Marine Fisheries Services has stated multiple times that the Delaware River Deepening project is a direct threat to their spawning habitat and the species. We used to have so many sturgeon in our River that

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DELAWARE RIVERKEEPER NETWORK  
925 Canal Street, Suite 3701  
Bristol, PA 19007  
Office: (215) 369-1188  
fax: (215) 369-1181  
drm@delawareriverkeeper.org  
www.delawareriverkeeper.org

the Delaware was known as the caviar capital of the nation. Now we risk losing them forever. We simply have too few to spare for a make-work boondoggle like the Delaware River deepening. Morally speaking, extinguishing the Delaware River unique genetic line is wrong. Economically it makes no sense either -- if we were to restore the sturgeon population to historic levels, we could generate an estimated \$400 million a year of economic income for the region. Why throw our tax dollars at a deepening project that is an economic loser for the region and that the ports don't need?" van Rossum asks.

Jane Davenport, senior attorney at the Delaware Riverkeeper Network, says: "As of today, federal agencies like the Army Corps of Engineers, as well as private parties like shipping companies, are on notice that each and every Atlantic sturgeon in the Delaware River will be protected by the ESA's wide-ranging prohibitions against killing or harming it or degrading its habitat. Congress gave public interest groups like the Delaware Riverkeeper Network the explicit right to enforce these protections through citizen suits in federal court, a right we fully intend to exercise as necessary to protect this ancient fish."

The Atlantic sturgeon, *Acipenser oxyrinchus oxyrinchus*, is a large, long-lived, late-maturing, slow-reproducing migratory fish with a distinctive long snout and armor-like plates. It spawns in rivers such as the Delaware and migrates hundreds of miles to the ocean and back again. Mature adults may live as long as 60 years, reach lengths up to 14 feet, and weigh over 800 pounds. The Delaware River once supported the largest known population of Atlantic sturgeon in the world.

For more information on the listing: [http://www.nero.noaa.gov/prot\\_res/atlsturgeon/](http://www.nero.noaa.gov/prot_res/atlsturgeon/)

For more information on the Delaware River population:

[http://www.delawariverkeeper.org/resources/Factsheets/Action\\_Plan\\_Atlantic\\_Sturgeon.pdf](http://www.delawariverkeeper.org/resources/Factsheets/Action_Plan_Atlantic_Sturgeon.pdf)

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