

SPAWNING UPDATE

Tuesday, May 3, 2011

Despite water temperatures about 10 degrees F below optimum, lake sturgeon were spawning in earnest below Shawano Dam on Tuesday May 3. Normally we are done with our sturgeon spawning assessment by now on the Wolf River, and if anything, we are looking for the "2nd Run" at this time in early May. This year, because of the cold April, things are very late and we are now just getting into the "1st Run" at Shawano. Spawning activity was good yesterday, but not as intense as we normally see on the 1st big day at Shawano - probably due to the cold water and lengthy spawning season. Overall we tagged about 120 fish at Shawano yesterday including about 30 females. Since we started our sturgeon spawning assessment on April 16, and after yesterday's work, we have dip netted and tagged about 980 males and 100 females. Our minimum goal is to capture and tag 100 females (and as many males as it takes to get 100 females). Our target is 150 females. Hitting 150 females allows us to accurately estimate the size of the adult stock (using tag returns in the spear harvest) which we in turn use to set harvest caps for the upcoming spearing season, and estimate sex specific exploitation rates. While we attempt to tag sturgeon at as many sites as possible each spring, tagging sturgeon below Shawano dam is critical to our management program.

Spawning activity is rapidly dropping off at sites other than Shawano. Shawano is about the only public access site that people can still come out to get a look at fish yet this spring. I expect Wednesday, 4 May will be a huge tagging day for us at Shawano. We could tag as many as 400-500 fish there today. We will also be taking eggs today for lake sturgeon restoration programs for the Menominee Tribe (Legend Lake), and the Milwaukee, Kewaunee, and upper Fox River restoration programs.

People from 77 countries around the world watched us work and the sturgeon spawn at the Shawano spawning site on the Wolf River Cam through yesterday. We will be tagging fish at this site today and possibly tomorrow. Spawning activity may be pretty well wrapped up by tomorrow - although the goofy spring weather may drag things on a little longer this year. We'll have to see how things unfold.

Monday, May 2, 2011

FINALLY - lake sturgeon began spawning at the site below the Shawano dam today. Although the water temperature was only 47 degrees F (8.3 C) at 2:00 PM this afternoon (well below the optimum of 52-56 degrees F), spawning commenced and we were able to capture and tag a few fish at the very early stage of spawning activity there including one ripe female. Normally the run lasts at this site for three to four days. The first day of light spawning activity, then two days of heavy activity followed by a final day of very light activity. This year all bets are off on how long spawning activity will last below the dam. The cold weather and low water temperatures persist which could make the activity last longer - we will just have to wait to see what happens.

We plan to tag fish at the spawning site below Shawano dam for the next two to three days. You can watch our tagging operations live on the Wolf River Cam website.