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## Connecting Prehistoric Fish to the Present

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Did you know lake sturgeon coexisted with dinosaurs and have lived in the Great Lakes for thousands of years? Cheboygan and Onaway School students, along with other students across Northeast Michigan, have been learning about this prehistoric fish through an opportunity to host living sturgeon in their classrooms. This unique project teaches students about this state threatened fish while allowing them to actively participate with scientists in sturgeon research and restoration efforts locally on Black Lake and the Cheboygan River Watershed.

Partnering with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Michigan State University, and Sturgeon for Tomorrow, this Sturgeon in the Classroom project allows students to learn about the



fish biology, connect fish with aquatic habitat needs, and explore conservation issues of threat to this rare species. At the beginning of the school year, participating classrooms receive a fingerling lake sturgeon to care for during the school year. Students are responsible for maintaining the tank, testing the water quality,

and feeding bloodworms to the lake sturgeon. Through a variety of hands-on activities, students are applying science, technology, engineering (STEM) curriculum and connecting to their local watershed.

Coordinating with the local Sturgeon for Tomorrow chapter, teachers and students are also helping to share this information with other students in the school and across their community. Cheboygan Middle School students developed outreach materials for the 2015 Black Lake Sturgeon Shivarree, a fundraiser for the lake sturgeon hatchery, habitat conservation, research, and outreach. Onaway high-schoolers also mentored and taught younger grades about the fish's anatomy, habitat, and needs.

Near the end of the school year, the fish are released, and in 2014, the different fish grew from 5 inches up to 18 inches when released. Prior to its release, the sturgeon is chipped by researchers with a tracking identification tag. This tagging allows future students to stay connected to the fish since with each recapture they will be notified of the location and an update of its growth and health.

This program also connects students to community partners, MI Department of Natural Resources and Sturgeon for Tomorrow, who facilitate the fish's placement in the classroom. In 2014, schools in Alpena, Cheboygan, Holt, Lake Orion, Lapeer, and Onaway participated in this program. Many



of these schools are also connected through the Northeast Michigan Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative, a network of education and community partners working to integrate the environment into the classroom and benefit the local community. This project is a perfect example of place-based stewardship education since students are learning about their local watershed and a threatened fish species while improving local fisheries with the fish's release. 🐟