

THE
CONSERVATION FUND

GREAT LAKES OFFICE
P.O. BOX 734
BAY CITY, MICHIGAN 48707
(989) 892-9171
FAX (989) 892-7172
www.conservationfund.org

April 21, 2021

Representative Gary Howell, Chair
Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Committee
Michigan House of Representatives
P.O. Box 30014
Lansing, MI 48909-7514

Dear Representative Howell:

I am writing to offer support for House Bill 4470 that would amend the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act of 1994. This bill is commonly referred to as the "Sturgeon Poaching Bill".

As you know, Lake Sturgeon are native to Michigan and are one of our state's keystone fish species. These fish, which date back 130 million years, can live to be more than 100 years old and grow to be up to 300 pounds and seven feet long. Unfortunately, their numbers in Michigan are less than 1% of their historic level, and they have been identified as a "threatened species" due to habitat loss, water quality impacts, overfishing, and poaching.

Across Michigan - in particular in the Black River system, St. Clair system and the Saginaw River system - important efforts have been ongoing to restore populations through habitat improvements and the reintroduction of sturgeon. However, as the population increases, so does the threat of poaching. In fact, along the Black River, Sturgeon for Tomorrow operates the volunteer "sturgeon guard" program specifically to defeat poaching efforts as sturgeon eggs (caviar) can be worth hundreds of thousands of dollars per fish.

House Bill 4470 is an important step in the direction of protecting this important fish species. The increase in fines from \$500 to \$5000, as identified in the bill, will further dissuade poaching of sturgeon in Michigan and would be a critical piece in the future protection and conservation of the species.

Thank you for your consideration. Please feel free to contact me if I can provide any additional information.

Sincerely,



Michael Kelly, Director
Great Lakes Office / Saginaw Bay Program