

Winter & Spring Sturgeon Fishing In The Net with Fish'n Dog Drew

By Drew Gidlof

Photo by Jan Vick

Drew Gidlof, owner of Fish'n Dog Drew Guide Service, offers his expertise on fishing the vast waterways of the Delta.

Now that the fall and winter Salmon runs are winding down, it is time to start concentrating on winter Striper, or Sturgeon fishing. Last year we wrote about winter Striper fishing so we thought this would be a great opportunity to focus on Sturgeon fishing opportunities.

Let's begin reviewing the current California Department of Fish and Wildlife rules and regulations for Sturgeon fishing as outlined in California Code of Regulations Title 14, Section 27.90. Green Sturgeon are listed as a threatened species, so it is illegal to take them at all. White Sturgeon are open year-round, with a daily bag and possession limit of one fish that must be between 40 inches and 60 inches measured from nose tip to the tail fork. The annual limit is three. Once taken, the fish must be tagged and recorded on your Annual Sturgeon report card. Short or oversized Sturgeon must be released unharmed immediately; note that white Sturgeon greater than 68 inches fork length may not be removed from the water prior to their immediate release. No snare may be used to assist in taking Sturgeon. Only one single barbless hook may be used. Do not forget to complete your on-line Sturgeon card reporting with the Department of Fish and Wildlife each year, even if you did not catch a Sturgeon during the year.

White and Green Sturgeon are native to California and are often located in the same habitat. They are anadromous, meaning they move from the salt and brackish water to freshwater to spawn. Sturgeon reach sexual maturity at around 15 years old, and can live to be 100 years or older. Mature females spawn every 2 to 4 years. Large females produce more eggs than their smaller counterparts, with high water flow years leading to higher sturgeon spawning success. Long life, late sexual maturity and infrequent spawning contribute to the vulnerability of the sturgeon population.

The primary difference between White and Green Sturgeon is their color, with "white" having a silver/gray skin and "green" having a green stripe visible on its belly. Other differences are the white's somewhat flat head and barbels

further from the mouth versus the green's longer and more pointed head.

When fishing from a boat we have had the best luck looking for large flat areas in 20 to 45 feet of water, ideally with a silt bottom and minimal rocks to take advantage of the Sturgeon's feeding pattern.

Target areas are along a slow edge of the current break or on the outer edge of the eddy of swirling water. If the flats are not working, you might try an area that has sloping features to it, or a nice hole in the area of your flats. Sturgeon are known to move from one location to another as they feed.

Over the years, a favorite location for fishing has been just south of the Rio Vista Bridge between Sandy Beach and Sherman Island. Check

out the areas around Channel marker 8, 9 and 14, between the shipping channel and shore in 30 to 35 feet of water. Do not anchor up in the shipping channel, as this area is restricted to large cargo ships. Scanning these areas with an on-board GPS provides an outline of what to look for when searching new locations to fish.

The hook rigging is an important setup consideration because Sturgeon have rigid, sharp ridges that run from their mouth to their tail. This is the main reason we advocate extra awareness when dogs and small children are fishing with you. These ridges, or spikes, can cause a lot of damage quickly. Use a wire Sturgeon leader that cannot be cut easily and make sure you have a long enough leader. Generally three to four feet with a good size heavy duty barrel swivel on one end and your hook on the other will work well.

As for bait, some of the favorites are shad, eel, and uncured salmon roe/eggs, the fresher the better. Do not be afraid to add some extra scent to add to the attraction of your bait. Finally, once you cast your line and the weight has settled on the bottom of the river, take advantage of a "teeter" system to balance the pole. Ideally, the pole should balance in the "V" of the teeter system while allowing the line to be taken with minimal resistance.

In closing, "remember to keep those fishing lines tight", and "take time to take a child fishing..." Drew and Boonie the river dog hope to see you on the water this fall!



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