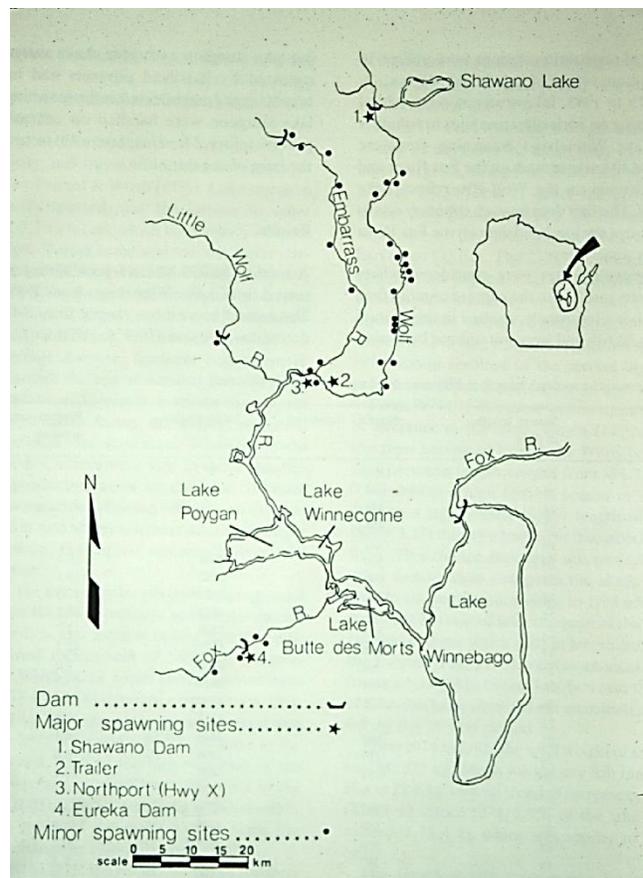


## ***Sturgeon for Tomorrow strongly opposes proposals to construct fishways at dams on the Wolf River, Winnebago System***



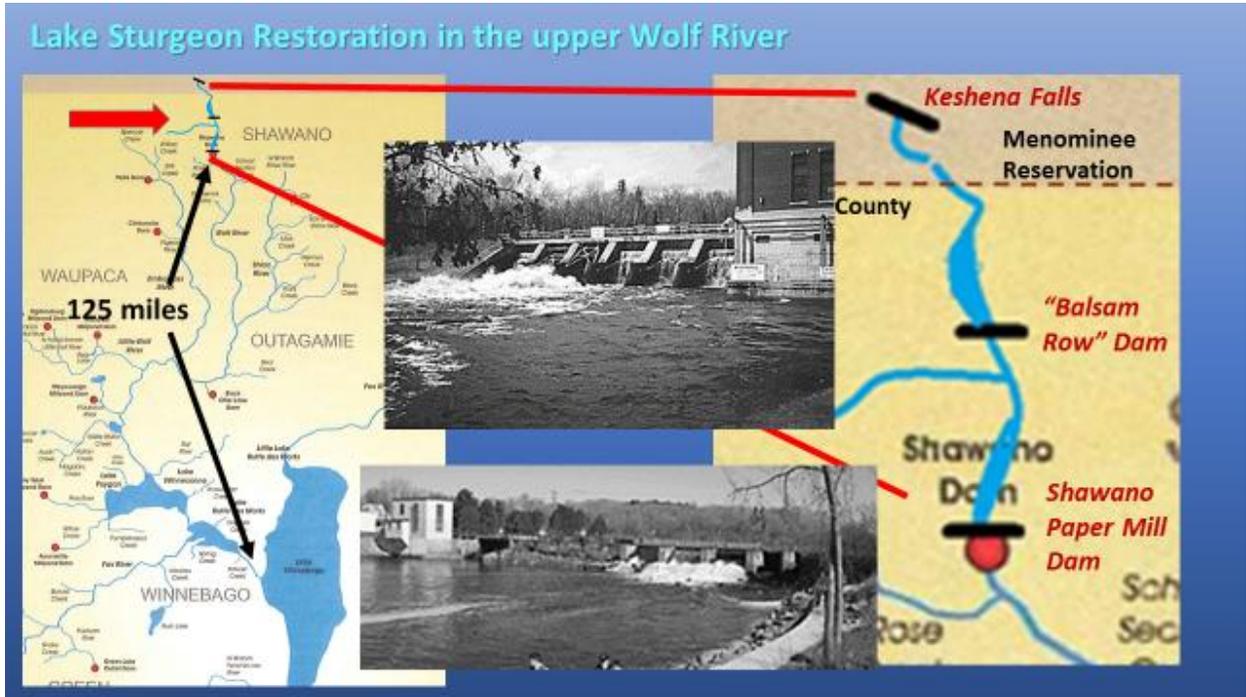
Sturgeon for Tomorrow (SFT), Wisconsin Chapters, are strongly opposed to proposals being aggressively pursued by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin, and the US Bureau of Indian Affairs to construct fishways at two dams on the Wolf River 125 miles upstream of Oshkosh on the Lake Winnebago System.

The Winnebago System is currently home to one of the largest populations of lake sturgeon in the world which since the 1970s likely experienced a full recovery from historic low levels. The recovery was fueled in large part by SFT's support and funding for a number of sturgeon restoration and management initiatives since the organization was founded in 1977 including: the Sturgeon Guard Program which uses volunteers to protect spawning fish from poaching each spring; the creation and maintenance of sturgeon spawning and nursery habitat on the lower Wolf and upper Fox Rivers; numerous research projects which have helped better understand lake sturgeon life history, movement, and habitat requirements; purchase of critical sturgeon sampling equipment for the WI Dept of Natural Resources (WDNR); and active participation in the WDNR's Winnebago Citizens Sturgeon Advisory Committee since its inception in 1993 to help write and shape regulations, harvest caps, and other management actions for the annual sustainable winter sturgeon spear fishery.



Historically lake sturgeon had access to an additional 10 miles of river spawning and nursery areas above the Shawano dam (locally known as the *Shawano Paper Mill dam*) prior to the construction in the late 1800s and early 1900s of this dam and the Balsam Row dam 5 miles upstream of the Shawano Paper Mill dam. About 7 miles above the Shawano Paper Mill dam is the boundary of the Menominee Indian Tribe Reservation. The Menominee people historically had a close

cultural connection with lake sturgeon on the Wolf River as, prior to the installation of the two dams, migrant sturgeon would swim 2-3 miles up the Wolf River into the reservation and be available for tribal members to view and harvest below Keshena Falls. These migrations ended after the dams were put in.



The State of Wisconsin, through the WDNR, has been working with the Menominee Tribe since 1993 to re-establish resident and migrant lake sturgeon in the Wolf River and other waters on the reservation through transfers of wild adult fish from the lower river below the dams, and through fingerling stocking. The stocking efforts have been very successful in establishing a fishable population of sturgeon in the chain of lakes on the Reservation known as Legend Lake. A wild fish Capture and Transfer Program, where the WDNR uses electrofishing to capture, and



trucks to transfer fish upstream, has re-established an annual successfully spawning adult population within the Reservation in the river below Keshena Falls. These adult sturgeon have not only been spawning below Keshena Falls each spring since the current program began in 2011, they were also documented to be successfully naturally producing sturgeon larvae which in turn contribute to the restoration of the species in the Wolf River on the Menominee Reservation.

The cost to collect and re-locate 100-140 lake sturgeon per year into the Reservation through the Capture and Transfer Program through 4 seasons, 2011-2014, according to WDNR records averaged approximately \$5000/yr or about \$50 per fish. The program is not only cost-effective,

it also eliminates any risk of allowing any unwanted aquatic invasive species (AIS) such as carp, or fish diseases such as VHS virus, present in the Winnebago System below Shawano Paper Mill dam to move further up into the Wolf River watershed. All sturgeon moved are health inspected and given a fish health certificate from the state prior to truck transfer and release upstream.



Despite the cost and health benefits, and success of the Capture and Transfer Program, the US Fish and Wildlife Service and Bureau of Indian Affairs have been working aggressively with the Menominee Tribe to design, find funding for, and install fishways at the dams on the Wolf River. They have completed the design for a fishway at the Balsam Row dam with an initial construction estimate of \$1.5 million, not including annual operating costs which will likely cost more than the total annual costs of the entire Capture and Transfer Program. The Federal agencies and the Tribe have made it known that once they are able to successfully install a fishway at the Balsam Row dam that they will be focusing then on forcing a fishway to be installed at the Shawano Paper Mill dam. The \$1.5 million being sought by the Tribe and Federal agencies to build the Balsam Row fishway would be enough money to fund the current Capture and Transfer Program for 150-200 years. The proposed fishway, if built, although currently being required by WDNR to be a trap and sort facility, would open up a potential pathway for the movement of AIS upstream into the upper Wolf River watershed. *[As a Trap and Sort facility, all fish that enter the fishway would have to be handled by workers, health inspected each day by a fish health professional at a cost of approximately \$1000/day and, if certified healthy, be physically moved and released upstream of the dam.]*

**In light of the above information, Sturgeon for Tomorrow has the following position on the restoration of lake sturgeon to the waters of the Menominee Reservation, and the proposed installation of fishways at the dams on the Wolf River:**

- **Sturgeon for Tomorrow supports the Capture and Transfer program and the restoration of resident and migrant lake sturgeon to the Wolf River within the Menominee Reservation and above the Shawano and Balsam Row dams (providing the restoration has no significant negative impact on the Winnebago System lake sturgeon population or recreational spear fishery).**
- **Sturgeon for Tomorrow is opposed to the construction and operation of fish passage ways at the Balsam Row and/or Shawano Paper Mill dams on the Wolf River because:**
  1. **There is no biological need to build fish passage way(s) on the Wolf River to allow sturgeon to be restored to the Menominee Reservation waters as the current Capture and Transfer program is working exceptionally well;**

- 2. Constructing, operating, and maintaining fish passage way(s) on the Wolf River for the purpose of restoring sturgeon to the Menominee Reservation waters is not cost effective nor economically feasible, and would be a waste of economic resources regardless of the source of those resources; and**
- 3. Capture and Transfer of lake sturgeon using electrofishing boats and trucks is a proven low cost, low risk, and high reward method for restoring lake sturgeon to the upper Wolf River; while constructing, operating, and maintaining fishways on the Wolf River at Balsam Row and/or Shawano Paper Mill dams is a high cost, high risk, and likely low reward method of restoring sturgeon to the upper Wolf River.**

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August 2016

*(images credit: WI Department of Natural Resources)*