



State of California • Department of Fish and Game
Office of Communications, Education & Outreach
1807-13th Street, Suite 104, Sacramento, CA 95811
(916) 322-8911

NEWS

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact(s): *Warden Patrick Foy, (916) 651-2084 and (916) 508-7095*
Kirsten Macintyre, DFG Communications, (916) 322-8988 and
(916) 804-1714

Jan. 14, 2010

Sturgeon Poachers Convicted, Sentenced in Colusa County

Five Sacramento-area sturgeon poachers caught by California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) wardens have been convicted in Colusa County.

DFG wardens initially arrested the suspects in April 2009, after a month of 24-hour surveillance. The men had been regularly observed night fishing on the Sacramento River in groups of three to five, using unlawful fishing methods to take sturgeon. They were accused of consistently catching more than the legal limit and making efforts to conceal their catch from wardens.

Two of the men were also observed selling sturgeon, leading to charges of poaching sturgeon for commercial sale. The harvest of white surgeon in California for commercial purposes has been illegal for 100 years.

"The commercial poaching of sturgeon was the cause of the species' near-extinction in the early 1900s," said Lt. Kathy Ponting of DFG's Special Operations Unit. "One of these defendants sold a poached sturgeon for a mere \$120. That's a nominal fee compared to the substantial adverse biological, social and economic effects associated with the illegal sale and harvest of these fish."

The men were prosecuted by Colusa County District Attorney John R. Poyner and sentenced by Judge John H. Tiernan and Judge Jeffrey A. Thompson on charges related to poaching. Over the last nine months, the defendants entered the following pleas:

- Ivan Banatskiy entered a guilty plea to charges of conspiring to sell sturgeon, illegally catching and possessing sturgeon, the sale of sturgeon and failure to exhibit fish upon demand to a DFG warden. He received a \$19,480 fine and three years of probation. His fishing gear was also forfeited and his fishing privileges were revoked for three years. Banatskiy, who was considered the ringleader of the operation, has been linked to the take of at least 18 illegal fish since October 2008.
- Andrey Bukaty entered a guilty plea to charges of conspiracy to sell sturgeon and unlawful possession of illegally caught sturgeon. He received a \$950 fine and three years of probation. His fishing gear was forfeited and his fishing privileges were revoked for three years.
- Sergey Solkalskiy entered a guilty plea to charges of possession of illegally caught sturgeon and conspiracy to sell sturgeon. On January 13, Solkalskiy received an \$8050 fine and three years of probation. His fishing gear was forfeited and his fishing privileges were revoked for three years.

- Serhiy Omelchuk entered a guilty plea to charges of fishing without a license, various poaching related offenses and failure to exhibit fish upon demand to a DFG warden. He received \$1,200 fine.
- Petr Kolosov entered a no contest plea to two counts of littering and possession of an illegally caught sturgeon. He was sentenced to a \$2,510 fine and three years of probation. His fishing gear was also forfeited and his fishing privileges were revoked for three years.

In addition to the fines imposed by Judge Tiernan and Judge Thompson, the Fish and Game Commission - which is currently considering increased restrictions on the sturgeon fishery due to the depressed population of the species - may take action to seek permanent revocation of the defendants' fishing privileges.

California's sturgeon population is just strong enough to maintain a very limited recreational fishery. Though the season is open year-round, regulations allow for sturgeon to be retained only if they are within a "slot limit" or measure between 46" and 66". Any fish larger or smaller must be released.

Sturgeon are sought after by poachers because of their valuable meat and their eggs, which are processed into caviar. The continued existence of the state's white sturgeon recreational fishery is dependent upon conservation measures, such as limits on allowable gear and techniques, daily bag limits and size restrictions.

Tips from anglers are the best way to combat illegal poaching a sale of sturgeon. Anyone with information about poaching sturgeon or any other poaching or pollution should call DFG's CalTIP line at 1-888-DFG CalTIP (888-334-2258).

###

Subscribe to DFG News via email or RSS feed at www.dfg.ca.gov/news.