

## Aquatic Species at Risk



# The Spotted Gar... a *Species at Risk* in Ontario

as designated under the federal *Species at Risk Act*

COSEWIC Status – THREATENED May 2005

SARA Status – THREATENED June 2003



*Lepisosteus oculatus*

© J. R. Tomelleri

### General Description

The Spotted Gar (*Lepisosteus oculatus*) is a member of the Gar family (Lepisosteidae) and has the following characteristics:

- Streamlined, with a long, cylindrical body, usually 28 to 60 cm in length but can grow to over 1 m
- Beak-like mouth with sharp teeth
- Snout broader and shorter than Longnose Gar
- Dorsal portion of the body is olive brown and ventral portion is grey; adults are generally dark brown with darker spots
- Distinctive spotting on the dorsal and ventral surfaces of the head, body and fins

This species has been identified as Threatened by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC). It is listed under the federal *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) and is afforded protection

under the SARA. Additional protection is afforded through the federal *Fisheries Act*. Under the SARA, a recovery strategy must be developed for this species.



## Distribution

In Ontario, the Spotted Gar is mainly found at three sites in Lake Erie: Long Point Bay, Point Pelee and Rondeau Bay. There are historical records from the Thames and Sydenham rivers, and also one record from the Bay of Quinte in Lake Ontario, which may represent an introduction. Populations in these areas are extremely small.

## Habitat and Life History

The Spotted Gar usually lives in quiet, clear pools and backwaters of creeks, rivers and lakes with abundant aquatic vegetation. In spring, adults move to shallow, heavily vegetated waters to breed. Spawning occurs in late spring/early summer among rooted vegetation and weed beds. Males become sexually mature at two to three years, and females at three to four years.

## Diet

Spotted Gar feed on small fishes such as minnows and yellow perch.

## Threats

It is likely that the Spotted Gar was never common in Ontario since this is the northern limit of its range. Pollution and destruction of the shallow, weedy bays required for breeding is a threat to this species in Ontario. As this fish is so uncommon, there have been no reports of capture by anglers in Canada.

## Similar Species

Shortnose Gar (*Lepisosteus platostomus*) (not yet found in Canada) and Longnose Gar (*Lepisosteus ossensis*) differ in scale counts and width of snout, and spots are mainly limited to the fins and posterior half of the body. A common aquarium species, the Florida Gar (*Lepisosteus platyrhincus*), also looks similar but has a shorter snout than the Spotted Gar and the distance between the eye and the gill cover is less than two-thirds the length of the snout.

Text Sources: Campbell 1994; Scott and Crossman 1998.

For more information, visit the SARA Registry Website at [www.SARAreistry.gc.ca](http://www.SARAreistry.gc.ca) and the Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) Website noted below.



*Cette publication est également disponible en français.*

DFO/2004-206

©Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada 2005

Cat. No. Fs22-4/8-2005E-PDF ISBN 0-662-42404-2

[www.aquaticspeciesatrisk.gc.ca](http://www.aquaticspeciesatrisk.gc.ca)

Section 32 (1) of the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) states that “no person shall kill, harm, harass, capture or take an individual of a wildlife species that is listed as an extirpated species, an endangered species or a threatened species.”