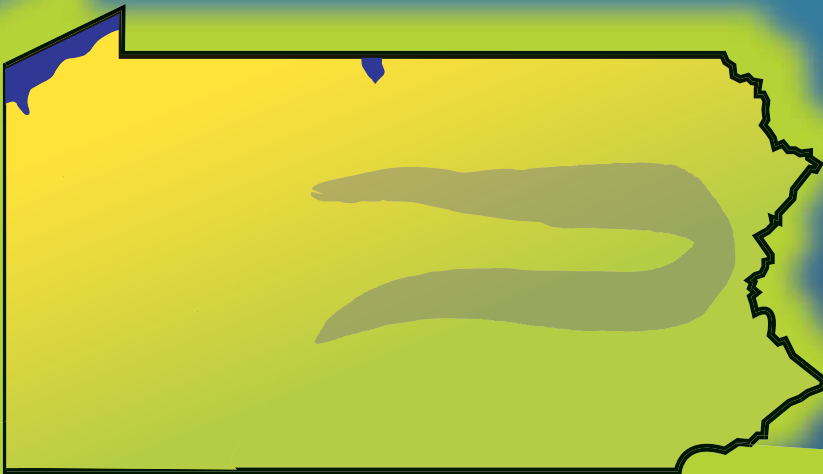


American Eel



photo-Rob Criswell



American Eel

Family: Eels (Anguillidae).

Catadromous.

PA Watershed Range:

**Ohio, Potomac,
Susquehanna, Delaware.**

The American eel is a mysterious fish that is often mistaken for a snake. It might be long and slender as a snake, but that's as far as the similarities go. Eels are covered with tiny smooth scales, which make them almost impossible to grab.

Some anglers have never seen an eel. One reason is that eels are nocturnal predators. Another reason is that some rivers have dams that block their migration.

This unique fish also has a unique life cycle. Scientists didn't understand the eel's migratory life cycle until the early 1900s. It is our state's only catadromous fish: It lives in fresh water and spawns in salt water, the opposite behavior from what most

people know as "migratory," like the behavior of the anadromous American shad and striped bass.

The American eel begins life in the Sargasso Sea, an area of the Atlantic Ocean near Bermuda. After hatching, eels are called "glass eels" because they are transparent. Glass eels transform into "elvers" once they reach America. Female eels stay in estuaries while the males ascend rivers and streams. They live the rest of their lives in fresh water until they head back to the ocean to spawn.

How is that for a complicated lifestyle? Now you can see how a dam might block their migration!