

Paddlefish



Juvenile paddlefish

photo-John Mahn; inset photo-Art Michaels



Paddlefish

Family: Paddlefish (Polyodontidae).
Status: Extirpated. The Commission is restoring paddlefish populations.
PA Watershed Range: Ohio.

Paddlefish are prehistoric. Scientists believe this species first appeared some 150 million years ago! Why is it called a "paddlefish"? A paddlefish has a long nose (or rostrum) that is shaped like a canoe paddle. It uses this weird snout to stabilize itself in the water. Experts believe the paddlelike nose is also an organ of touch. These pale blue-gray fish can reach five feet in length by the time they are 17 years old. They can live for 20 years or more.

Paddlefish are found in the Mississippi River watershed. This area includes the Ohio River watershed in Pennsylvania. Paddlefish numbers declined in the early 1900s. The last historical

mention of a paddlefish in Pennsylvania was recorded in 1919. Paddlefish were absent from Pennsylvania's waters but could be found elsewhere in their range. So they are considered "extirpated" from Pennsylvania. In the 1990s, the Fish & Boat Commission started a paddlefish reintroduction program.

Visit the Commission's web site, www.fish.state.pa.us, for more information about this program and to view links to learn more about paddlefish.