



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Watershed Activists, Businesses, and Residents Commemorate Loss of 350,000 Atlantic Sturgeon in Procession Around City Hall

Philadelphia, PA - Activists, indigenous leaders, and environmental advocates from across the watershed banded together today at Philadelphia City Hall to demand better protections for the Delaware River's genetically unique population of Atlantic Sturgeon. Over fifty demonstrators processed around City Hall and the Army Corps of Engineers offices dressed in black, holding a funeral for the soon to be extinct Delaware River Atlantic Sturgeon. Protestors carried a coffin supported by pallbearers representing various regulatory agencies, a banner adorned with the 250 remaining sturgeon hand-made by Westfield Friends School middle school students, 180,000 paper sturgeon piled high into wheelbarrows, and three oversized sturgeon representing just a fraction of the total population loss. Through this action, demonstrators spotlighted the knowing decimation of the Delaware River Atlantic Sturgeon population by government agencies, pressing these agencies to take strong action immediately to prevent the sturgeon's demise.

Despite the Atlantic Sturgeon's listing as a federally protected endangered species since 2012, numerous regulatory agencies, including the Delaware River Basin Commission (DRBC), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the National Marine Fisheries Service (also known as NOAA Fisheries), have failed to adequately protect the sturgeon from pollution, vessel strikes, habitat destruction, dredging, deepening, fossil fuel industry port projects, and climate change. Protestors demanded that agencies take strong action to safeguard the future of the sturgeon, aiming to keep this vital species alive for both present and future generations to appreciate.

“For hundreds of years the government officials of our region have allowed our genetically unique population of Atlantic Sturgeon to be ravaged. It is legally and morally wrong that our government agencies today do not use the authority they have to right this historic wrong and to

take every step necessary to help our Atlantic Sturgeon to populate and to thrive. Our Delaware River Atlantic Sturgeon live nowhere else on earth but in our beautiful Delaware River. If our agencies fail to do everything they can to protect them, they will have betrayed their oath of office, betrayed future generation's who will be denied the beauty and joy of our River's genetically unique sturgeon, and will have acted with an unforgivable hubris believing they were entitled to wipe out a genetically unique population of sturgeon without apology or concern," stated **Maya van Rossum, the Delaware Riverkeeper and leader of the Delaware Riverkeeper Network.**

Featured speakers at the event included Maya van Rossum (Delaware Riverkeeper Network & Green Amendments For The Generations), Hereditary Chief Daniel StrongWalker Thomas (Delaware Nation Lenni Lenape), Reverend Jesse Brown (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America), Minister Roy Jones (National Institute for Healthy Human Spaces), Earl Wilson (Eastwick Friends and Neighbors Coalition), Tracy Carluccio (Delaware Riverkeeper Network), and Heidi Jacobs (Westfield Friends School). The action was organized by the Delaware Riverkeeper Network and sponsored by Green Amendments For The Generations, Saddler's Woods Conservation Association, Westfield Friends School, Waterspirit, Food & Water Watch, Brandywine River Restoration Trust, and Clean Water Action.

Numerous environmental and community leaders highlighted the importance of protecting the Delaware River's Atlantic Sturgeon population:

"As an organization dedicated to habitat preservation in the Delaware watershed, we are proud to add our voice in the call to protect the endangered Atlantic Sturgeon. We can no longer kick the problem of extinction downstream for the next generation. If we are to save the Delaware's genetically unique sturgeon, we must act now," notes **Janet Goehner-Jacobs, Executive Director, Saddler's Woods Conservation Association**

"We call on President Biden and Governor Murphy to protect the Atlantic Sturgeon and communities who live along its shores by rejecting permits for the proposed Gibbstown LNG export terminal and the PENN America LNG terminal," stated **Noa Gordan-Guterman, Stop Fracked Gas Exports Organizer, Food & Water Watch**

"Westfield Friends School middle school students think it's cool these sturgeon have been alive since the dinosaurs, surviving the great extinction, the last ice age, and the worst of the industrial revolution," adds **Margaret Haviland, Head of School, Westfield Friends School.** "These young activists believe the Delaware River is only healthy when all the living things that depend on it, including the sturgeon, thrive. By ensuring their Delaware River is vital, full of life, and healthy throughout their lives and beyond reinforces their commitment to our School's theme this year: 'We seek an earth restored.'"

“Pope Francis tells us that, ‘Because all creatures are connected, each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another.’ A genetically unique species like the Atlantic Sturgeon highlights this interdependence—the sturgeon’s fate is linked to our own. We must take action now to protect the Delaware and the life she supports,” said **Blair Nelsen, Executive Director, Waterspirit**

“The Atlantic sturgeon are on the brink of extinction unless we act to save them. The threats to this unique Delaware River species bombard them at every stage of their lives and throughout their habitat. But the two biggest harms they endure can be addressed right away if government takes the action so urgently needed – adopt water quality standards that will increase healthy dissolved oxygen levels and stop the wanton vessel strikes that are killing these critically endangered animals. That is why we are marching and rallying in Philadelphia today – to demand action NOW before it is too late!” noted **Tracy Carluccio, Deputy Director, Delaware Riverkeeper Network**

"When we talk about ensuring clean water for all, that assurance extends to the unique aquatic life that also calls Pennsylvania home," said **Steve Hvozdoich, Pennsylvania Campaigns Director, Clean Water Action**. "That's why we and our 80,000 Pennsylvania members are urging greater protections to be put in place to safeguard the Delaware River Basin and the endangered Atlantic Sturgeon."

“It is our responsibility not to trash our environment, but to live alongside it. We don’t bring animals to extinction, instead we need to be good stewards of the earth. Our governmental institutions have been given the spirit of the people in order to protect the people. They need to uphold their duty to everyone,” said **Reverend Jesse Brown, Pastor, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

"I think that our Delaware River Atlantic Sturgeon are amazing because they are a living dinosaur! They are unique, majestic, and worthy of the greatest level of protections," added **Heidi Jacobs, Middle School Student, Westfield Friends School**. "Sadly, they have not been adequately protected by the grown ups in charge, but I am the generation that will fight to change that. I am the generation that will bring the Sturgeon back from the brink of extinction."

“Like our efforts to restore the American Shad, Sturgeon conservation efforts are a must to replenish our dwindling fish populations. The Brandywine River Restoration Trust is excited to partner with the Delaware Riverkeeper Network to Save the Sturgeon. Together, we can restore Delaware waterways and our aquatic ecosystems.” said **Jim Shanahan, Executive Director, Brandywine River Restoration Trust**

Background:

The Delaware Riverkeeper Network has advocated for the protection of the Delaware River’s sturgeon populations for over thirty years. In 2013, Delaware Riverkeeper Network was the lead

petitioner urging the Delaware River Basin Commission (DRBC) to upgrade the estuary's dissolved oxygen standards in order to appropriately protect aquatic life, as called for by the Clean Water Act. This petition was updated and resubmitted to the DRBC in 2021, where Delaware Riverkeeper Network was joined by Environment New Jersey, PennFuture, and Clean Air Council, as well as a host of other organizations from our region.

In 2022, responding to the lack of action by the DRBC to properly address dissolved oxygen levels in a timely manner, Delaware Riverkeeper Network, Environment New Jersey, PennFuture, Clean Air Council, and PennEnvironment jointly petitioned the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, urging them to exercise their statutory authority under the Clean Water Act to promulgate revised water quality standards in order to increase oxygen levels in the river and to protect the Delaware River Atlantic Sturgeon.

Later that year, the Delaware Riverkeeper Network filed a sixty-day notice of intent to sue the National Marine Fisheries Service (also known as NOAA Fisheries) for violating multiple sections of the Endangered Species Act by not using the best available data when issuing Biological Opinions to the Army Corps of Engineers for the New Jersey Wind Port project and the Edgemoor Container Port project, threatening increased sturgeon mortality by vessel strike. NMFS later ordered reconsideration of those projects utilizing the appropriate, Delaware River specific, scientific study.

To watch the livestream of this event, please visit: <https://fb.watch/gOYshMZrOv/>

To sign the petition and learn more about this event, please visit: www.dinointhedelaware.org.

To learn more about the Delaware Riverkeeper Network's ongoing efforts to protect the Atlantic Sturgeon, please visit: <https://bit.ly/DRNSturgeon>.

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