

WHITE SUCKERS CAN BE FOUND THROUGHOUT NEW YORK STATE

# WHITE SUCKER

White Sucker (*Catostomus commersoni*) can be found in nearly every body of water in New York State, from lakes to small creeks. This fish, native to Lake George, is a bottom feeder and is most often used as a bait fish for larger predator fish such as trout, bass, pike and catfish. It is generally not a sportfish sought by anglers, but it can be eaten.



Suckers have elongated bodies, a forked, blunt lobed tail and a caudal peduncle. Their bodies are typically gray above, shading to white on the belly. Fins are gray to orange. Scales on the sucker are somewhat rectangular. During the breeding season, males will gain stripes on their sides and tubercles on their fins. Females are generally larger than males and live longer. The average adult can be between 10-20 inches long and weigh between 2-4 pounds. Suckers are slow growing; it takes between 3-4 years to reach sexual maturity. Outside of the spawning

Suckers are bottom feeders that are typically used as bait fish. It is not a sportfish that is typically sought by anglers.

season it is difficult to distinguish the sexes.

Adults travel in small schools, while fry and young suckers will school together with other fish of like sizes. They frequently form large aggregations. White suckers are crepuscular; they are most active during the dawn and dusk when they will suck up food whole due to their lack of teeth.

The spawning migration takes place in the natal (birth) stream in early spring at the tail end of the smelt spawning migration into

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# White Sucker

## LAKE GEORGE FACT SHEET

streams. The suckers spawning can last until June, with older fish waiting till later in the season to make the migration upstream. During the migration females will lose between 20-25% of their body weight. A female 16 inches long can contain 21,800 eggs, while a female 20.75 inches long can contain 41,600 eggs. White suckers can spawn in a variety of habitats, however the preferred substrate is gravel located in riffles. It is normal to see between 2-10 males with each female.

When ready to spawn a female will move out onto the gravel and rest on the bottom. Males will approach her with their fins spread. The female will move a short distance away. This repeats itself until the female allows the males to approach. The males then raise their dorsal fin, protrude their lower jaws, and tremble as they surround the female. The fish then all vibrate together releasing the eggs and milt. The female then swims upstream to spawn with more males, while the males wait for another female.

Newly hatched suckers feed at the surface eating rotifers, insects, diatoms and other plankton. There is a critical stage in the



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development during which the young suckers will dive to the bottom and eat sand. They will also eat algae, midges, and cyclops. Larger suckers will eat midges, larger insects and about 6 percent plant material as well as a small amount of sand.

White sucker meat is firm and good tasting. It is often sold under the name mullet. White sucker can be used fresh, smoked, in fish sticks, soups or chowders.

For additional information on fishing regulations in New York State please visit the website of the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation ([www.dec.ny.gov](http://www.dec.ny.gov)).

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