

# ROCKIN' the RIVER

This poster was created by students in the Lakeshore Environmental Education Program (LEEP) at Walden Green Montessori School in Ferrysburg, Michigan. Owen Bergman and Malcom Johnson created the Rockin' River Redhorse drawing (right); Todd Marsee of Michigan Sea Grant translated their idea into a cartoon (center).



Students with the LEEP program measure Golden Redhorse, which have grey-colored tails.



Michigan DEQ biologists show students at Fulton Middle School learn how to identify a Greater Redhorse, which has a rounded dorsal fin.

## River Redhorse (aka *Moxostoma carinatum*)

### A REAL ROCKSTAR

- ◆ River Redhorse live in big rivers with rocky or gravelly bottoms.
- ◆ Only a few river systems in Michigan still have good river redhorse habitat. The Grand, Muskegon, and St. Joseph river systems still provide good homes for River Redhorse.
- ◆ Like many of its relatives, these superstar suckers use their fleshy lips to slurp up snacks from the river bottom. Unlike invasive Common Carp, though, River Redhorse don't thrive in heavily polluted waters.
- ◆ River Redhorse munch on invertebrates, including mussels and snails. They crush their meals with heavy teeth found in the back of their throat.

### RAREST OF THE REDHORSES

- ◆ The River Redhorse looks a lot like five of its more common redhorse sucker cousins.
- ◆ All redhorse sucker species have big, shiny scales and fleshy lips.
- ◆ Only River Redhorse have all of these characteristics:
  - Bright red tail,
  - Pointed dorsal fin on the back,
  - Large bodies (adults are usually over 20 inches long),
  - 12-13 scales around the base of the tail.



This River Redhorse is a threatened species in Michigan, but it looks a lot like common cousins such as Greater Redhorse and Golden Redhorse.

- ◆ The River Redhorse is the only redhorse sucker with molar-like teeth in the back of its throat, but it is impossible to see these teeth on a living fish!
- ◆ Invasive Common Carp have four barbels (small whiskers) at the corners of their mouth. River Redhorse and other native suckers never have barbels and are not carp.

### NOT EVERYONE IS A FAN

- ◆ We don't know very much about River Redhorse, because they're tricky to identify and often get mistaken for more common species.
- ◆ People sometimes shoot River Redhorse with arrows. This is not legal in Michigan because they are a threatened species.
- ◆ Some rivers carry too much sediment, such as sand and silt, that makes the water cloudy and can settle onto the river bottom. River Redhorse and the mussels they feed on are sensitive to sand and silt. These sediments smother fish eggs laid on rocky river bottoms and make it hard for mussels to filter food out of the water.

- ◆ Dams can prevent River Redhorse from moving between important river habitats. But dams aren't all bad — they can also block harmful invasive species that don't belong in Michigan's rivers.

### HELP THIS ROCKSTAR THRIVE

- ◆ Keep our rivers clean!
  - Pick up litter and make sure to put your trash in the bin.
  - Give aquarium pets to a store, school, or nature center instead of releasing them into the wild.
  - Protect grasses and other plants that grow along streams, because they prevent too much silt and sand from getting into the water.
- ◆ Have fun fishing, and be sure to follow the rules.
- ◆ Learn how to identify River Redhorse and teach other people that they are a good fish to have around.

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