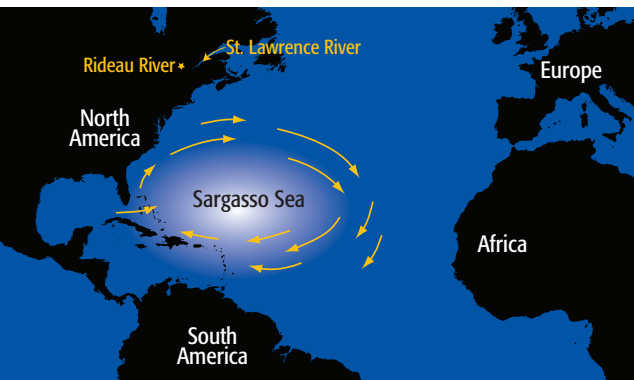




Rideau Valley Conservation Authority

American Eel



American Eels – unique, adventurous and endangered

All American Eels spawn in the Sargasso Sea near the Bermuda Triangle. That's a 6,000 kilometre swim from the Rideau River! They're the only fish in Canada that live out their lives in freshwater and spawn in saltwater.

Many young eel larvae drift up the coast and migrate to their freshwater homes in Canada, the United States and even some parts of Europe. There, most eels live out their lives for 10 to 30-plus years. Once they're mature enough to spawn, feeding stops and they begin their long, final journey back down to the Sargasso Sea. After they've spawned, they die.

Why are they disappearing?

There are several factors affecting American Eels. Some of the major reasons for decline are:

Migration Barriers and Habitat Loss

Mature eels migrating downstream to spawn are blocked, or face deadly turbines in hydroelectric dams. Dams also block 80 to 90 percent of potential habitat for young eels migrating upstream. Sea kelp harvest in the Sargasso Sea is also suspected to affect spawning habitat.

Overfishing

Commercial and recreational harvest has been cancelled in Ontario since 2004, but continues elsewhere at all life stages.

Parasites and Pollution

A recently discovered non-native parasite can cause a variety of health problems for eels. As with other fish, contaminants in the water (like PCBs) can accumulate in their systems, affecting fertility and survival.

Under the *Ontario Endangered Species Act, 2007*, the American eel is listed as "Endangered," meaning *it is in imminent danger of becoming extirpated or extinct*.



American eels are protected under *Ontario's Endangered Species Act*. The fishery is closed in Ontario and any accidental catches must be released unharmed.

Eel Facts

- They're most active at night. They come out of their mud or rocky burrows at dusk to feed on fish, frogs, and invertebrates.
- In the winter, they bury themselves in the mud, like a frog.
- Females are larger, growing up to one metre long and several kilograms.
- They can absorb oxygen through their moist skin and live out of the water for days in a damp enough environment.
- Virtually all eels in Ontario are female; a male has yet to be found.



Photo courtesy of OMNR

Have you seen or caught an American Eel in the Rideau or Ottawa Rivers, Rideau Lakes or any of their tributaries? Let us know!

Date | _____

Time of Day | _____

Waterbody | _____

Location | _____

Approx. Water Depth | _____ Bait | _____

Estimate of Length | _____

Name | _____

Phone | _____

E-mail | _____

If possible, a photo would also be appreciated. But please remember to release the eel unharmed. With your help, RVCA can continue monitoring the status of American Eel in the Rideau Watershed and achieve Recovery Strategy actions. Call, e-mail or send this information to:

Rideau Valley Conservation Authority
3889 Rideau Valley Drive, P.O. Box 599, Manotick, Ontario K4M 1A5
Tel 613-692-3571 ext. 1176, postmaster@rvca.ca

American Eel or Lamprey?

Eels have jaws (left), whereas lamprey (right) have a sucking disc with teeth, several gill openings and no pectoral fins.



American Eel Lamprey



Photo courtesy of OMNR

For more information contact:

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3889 Rideau Valley Drive
P.O. Box 599, Manotick, Ontario K4M 1A5
Tel 613-692-3571 | Fax 613-692-0831
postmaster@rvca.ca | www.rvca.ca

References
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www.cosewic.ca
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