Words in This Story

fossil

英 ['fɒs(ə)l; -sɪl] 美 ['fɑsl]

n. 化石；僵化的事物；顽固不化的人

adj. 化石的；陈腐的，守旧的

alligator

英 ['ælɪgeɪtə] 美 ['æləˌɡetɚ]

n. 短吻鳄（产于美国及中国）；短吻鳄皮革；鳄口式工具

vi. 皱裂；裂开

adj. 鳄鱼般的；鳄鱼皮革的；鳄鱼皮纹的

复数 alligators或alligator

predators

美 [ˈprɛdətərz]

[动] 捕食者

[动] 食肉动物（predator的复数）

Living Fossil Returns to Illinois Waters

KASKASKIA RIVER STATE FISH AND WILDLIFE AREA — The Illinois Department of Natural Resources is reintroducing a living fossil into its waterways. The alligator gar is a fish so old, it's thought to have evolved during the Early Cretaceous period, more than a 100 million years ago.

Alligator gar are the second largest freshwater fish in North America. Later it disappeared from the state's waterways in the 1990s.

"We want to restore the ecosystem because it is important to have top predators to balance the species below them in order to keep check on some more abundant species."

Fisheries biologist Randy Sauer says, Beyond that, alligator gar make for some big game fishing. The diamond-scaled animals, which can breathe both air and water, can grow up to 2.7 meters and weigh more than 136 kilograms. In fact, their large size is what did them in originally in the state.

"It was pretty much extirpated out of its range because of misconceptions about it eating sport fish," he said. "People would target it and put bounties on it."

Everything is on the menu

The alligator gar is an opportunistic eater, meaning it will eat whatever it encounters — from an occasional turtle or small duck to invasive species such as Asian and silver carp. Sauer hopes the re-introduction program will help the state's efforts to control the carp.

Because gar can live up to 60 years, this program is going to take decades to fully expand.

"The (female) alligator gar does not sexually mature until 11 years, and the male not till 6 or 7 years," Sauer said, "so at the outset of this project we're probably going to stock more heavily than 10 or 20 years down the road when hopefully these fish will find each other and start doing the job on their own."

To date, 7,000 alligator gar have been fitted with transponder tags so that they can be tracked and then released into Illinois waterways. As it rains and floods, biologists expect some of the fish to follow the rivers all the way down to the Louisiana and Texas.