

Save the Mudpuppy Campaign

Research conducted by scientists from Chicago's Shedd Aquarium and Southern Illinois University (SIU) has focused on the newest threatened species at Wolf Lake—the mudpuppy.

Research of the aquatic salamander, a long-time resident of Wolf Lake that grows to 11 to 18 inches long, has piqued the curiosity of local fishermen. Concern for its declining population has spurred the Association for the Wolf Lake Initiative (AWLI), in conjunction with the Shedd Aquarium and Fund for Wild Nature, to launch a “Save the Mudpuppy” campaign. The campaign hopes to remind those who fish in Wolf Lake and nearby waterways to immediately release the mudpuppies they catch back to the water.

Researchers spent years studying the biology and ecology of the mudpuppy population in Wolf Lake. They recorded each specimen's sex, length, mass, and any deformities before gently flushing their stomachs. Their stomach contents reveal a diet of the invasive round gobies, other fish parts, crayfish claws, small aquatic insects and snails, leeches and mussels. The researchers inserted a Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) into the mudpuppies' tails. The tag had a unique number that researchers could read with a scanner. Using this, they assessed the population size and movement patterns of individual animals.

After breeding in late autumn, mudpuppies remain active all winter before the females lay their eggs in the spring.

The study of mudpuppies is funded in part by the Daniel P. Haerther Center for Conservation and Research at the Shedd Aquarium. The Illinois Natural History Survey and the US Army Corps of Engineers are also collaborating on the project.

The *Save the Mudpuppy* campaign is funded by AWLI, the Shedd Aquarium and the Fund for Wild Nature.

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