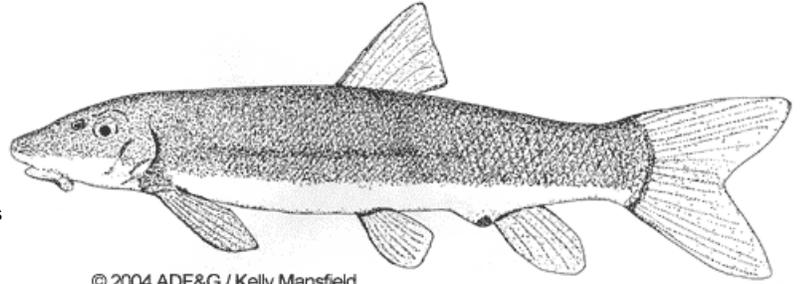




## Longnose Sucker

The **longnose sucker** (*Catostomus catostomus*) is the only species of sucker located in Alaska. It is found throughout the state (except for islands) and other parts of North America in both lakes and streams where the water temperatures are usually clear and cold. A sucker is named for its unique fleshy mouth located on the bottom of its head.

**General description:** The longnose sucker has a reddish-brown, dark brassy green, or gray to black upper body and the underside is usually white. The lateral line, which is complete, is usually brownish-black, except during the breeding season when it turns reddish. Breeding males also develop tubercles (small bumps) on the head, anal fin, and the lower lobe of the caudal (tail) fin. The longnose sucker has an elongated, round body with a somewhat long snout. The mouth has large lips that are lined with papillae (small fleshy projections), which create suction for ingesting food. There are no teeth located on the jaws. Instead, there are pharyngeal teeth (teeth in the pharynx area, which is the beginning of the digestive tract) that are used by pressing food against a hard pad of cartilage. The caudal fin (tail) is forked with rounded lobes. Longnose suckers have been measured up to 25 inches in other parts of North America, but in Alaska they are usually shorter than 23 inches. The longnose sucker belongs to a group of fish (Cypriniformes, which also include the lake chubs) that have a unique feature called the Weberian apparatus. The Weberian apparatus is made up of four to five modified vertebrae in the head that connect the ear to the swim bladder, which aids in sensing sound and pressure changes.



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**Life history:** Longnose suckers spawn between May and July depending on location. They sometimes travel to streams with gravel bottoms and cold water. They can also spawn and thrive in lakes or ponds. Unlike salmon, the longnose sucker does not build a nest for fertilized eggs. Instead, the fertilized eggs fall into crevices in the gravel. During spawning, which usually occurs during the daylight, the male grasps the female with his pelvic fins while they vibrate to release both eggs and sperm at the same time. A female can produce up to 60,000 eggs. The eggs, which are yellow in color, take up to about two weeks to hatch, depending on water temperatures. They remain as sac fry in the gravel for another one to two weeks before they begin to move around and feed. By October, longnose suckers have left the spawning areas and have moved downstream or to lakes to over-winter. Some longnose suckers spawn every year, while others skip years. The age at which a longnose sucker reaches sexual maturity varies depending on location, but can be as soon as two to three years old.

**Food habits:** The longnose sucker feeds primarily on the bottom of streams or lakes. It swims slowly along the bottom in search of invertebrates, which include insects, mollusks, snails, and crustaceans, and sometimes eats aquatic plants, algae and fish eggs. Its large lips enable it to suck up its food. Longnose suckers are a source of food for other larger fish, some mammals, and birds.

**Human use:** The flesh of the longnose sucker is typically white and flaky, but bony. People have used suckers for bait, dog food, and as food (sometimes as fillets called mullet). The longnose sucker is not usually sought after as a sport fish. In fact, some anglers dislike suckers because they believe suckers reduce fish populations by feeding on fish eggs and competing for similar food items, like aquatic insects. Suckers have been shown to compete with stocked salmonids in lakes and ponds.

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