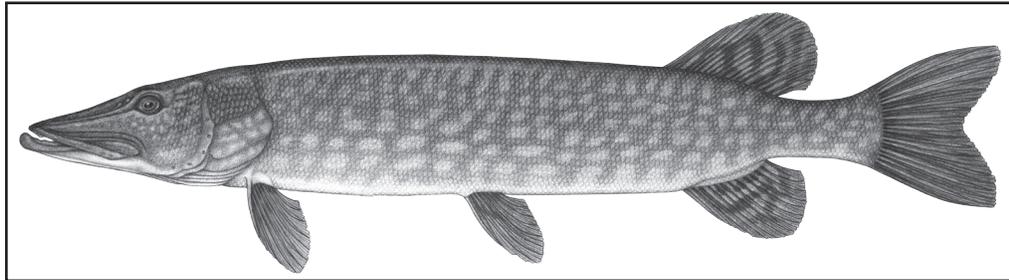
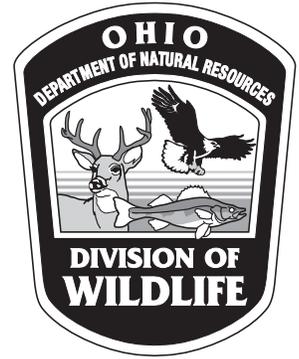


Life History Notes

Northern Pike

Common Names: Hammer handles

Scientific Name: *Esox lucius*



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Identification

The Northern pike is a long and slender fish with a duckbill shaped mouth and lots of needle sharp teeth. The dorsal fin is soft and located near the tail fin. In contrast to the muskellunge, the lower half of the opercle (gill cover) does not have scales while the cheek is fully scaled. Northern pike also have numerous white or yellow-green spots on the sides of the body which are arranged in oblique rows. There is no teardrop below the eye.

Range and Habitat

The Northern pike is native to Ohio and is more widely distributed than any other pike species. Historically, they were abundant in Lake Erie and its tributaries. It is also thought to have been present in some tributaries of the Ohio River. Today, its distribution is limited to a small portion of Lake Erie, Sandusky Bay, Maumee Bay and the marshlands and tributary streams of these areas. Northern pike were also introduced into inland waters between 1950 and 1980. Northern pike prefer marshes, bays and pools of slow moving water in clear streams where aquatic vegetation is abundant.

Life History

Northern pike spawn in Lake Erie tributaries as soon as the ice breaks, usually in late February or early March. Females spread between 15,000 to 75,000 eggs freely into vegetated areas. As the eggs settle they adhere to vegetation, rocks, sticks and other debris until they hatch in about two weeks. Young Northern pike feed on zooplankton for about two weeks and then begin switching to a diet of fish. After spawning, females return to the bays, marshes and Lake Erie. Adult pike feed primarily on fish but will take nearly anything they can fit in their mouth, including frogs, muskrats, and small ducks.

Adult Size

Most Northern pike caught in Ohio weigh between 2 and 10 pounds. However, individuals up to 22.5 pounds have been recorded.

Fishing Methods

Most Northern pike in Ohio are caught by anglers using large minnows as bait. Ice fishing often produces nice catches in inland lakes and ponds. Anglers have less success with artificial lures in Ohio than in states and provinces farther north.