Dedicated to the Memory of
Commissioner Enoch S. "Inky" Moore Jr.

PLAY

Fall
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Pennsylvania • League • of • Angling • Youth

All about the Pike Family!

There are currently five pike fish species that occur naturally or are native to Pennsylvania. All are popular with Pennsylvania anglers. Their fierce struggle to be caught makes them an attractive sportfish. Those native to Pennsylvania include the Redfin Pickerel, Grass Pickerel, Northern Pike, Muskellunge and Chain Pickerel.

Members of this family have long and slender bodies. They are easily identified by their "duck bill." Females grow faster and live longer than males. Pike are ambush predators, fish that eat other fish. They wait in cover as their prey approaches. Then, they strike.

Pike are active by day, and most live in coolwater streams and large rivers. They also like lakes with submerged vegetation. The family name "Esocidae" is from "Esox," an old European name for the pike.

In the next few pages, you will learn some interesting facts about the pike family.

Redfin Pickerel
(Esox americanus americanus)

Muskellunge
(Esox masquinongy)

Northern Pike
(Esox lucius)

Grass Pickerel
(Esox americanus vermiculatus)

Chain Pickerel
(Esox niger)

Grass Pickerel and Redfin Pickerel

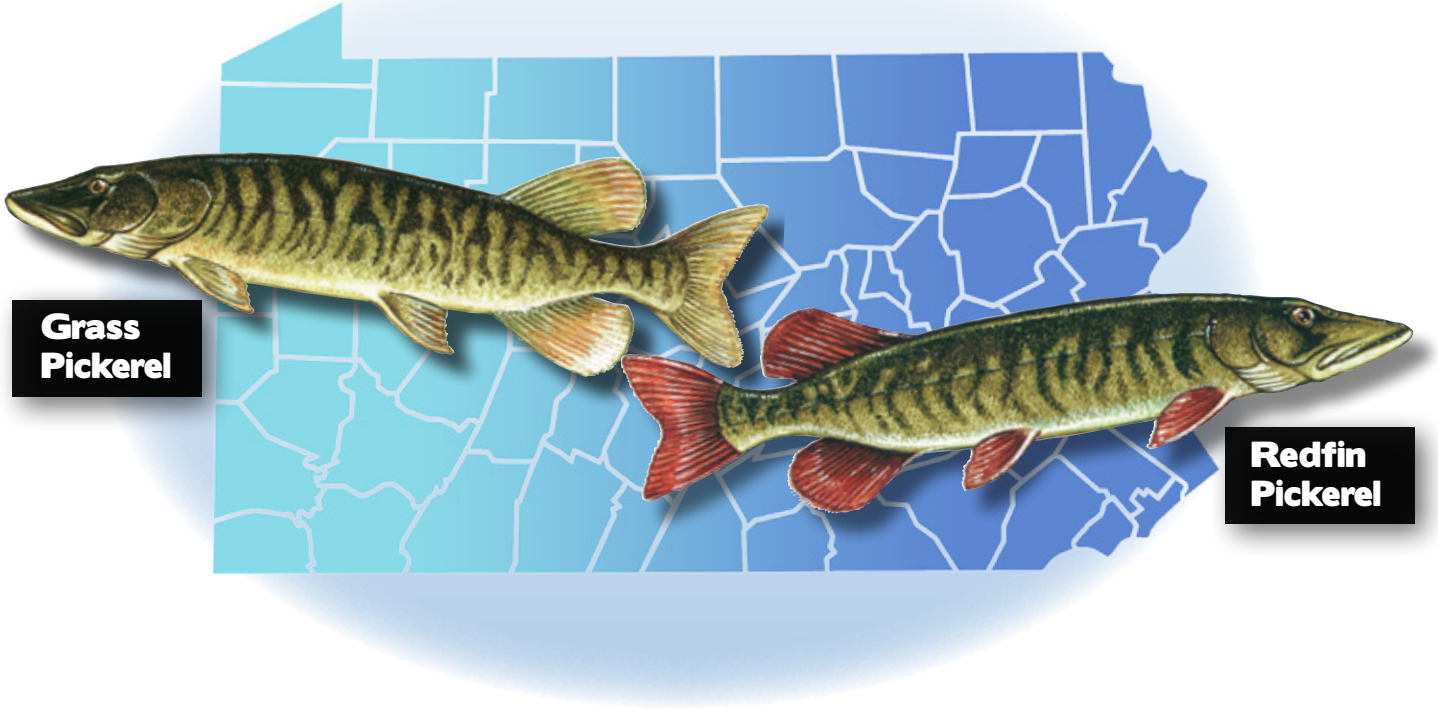
First, we will look at the smaller members of the pike family. The Grass Pickerel and Redfin Pickerel are subspecies twins.

Grass Pickerel

The Grass Pickerel lives in the western side of Pennsylvania. The Grass Pickerel grows to 12 inches. They are often mistaken for a young Muskellunge. Grass Pickerel live in the marshy areas of lakes and ponds. Due to its small size, Grass Pickerel eat very few fish. Instead, they feast on small invertebrates and other crustaceans.

Redfin Pickerel

The Redfin Pickerel lives in the eastern part of Pennsylvania. The Redfin Pickerel grows to 12 inches. Redfin Pickerel live in the weedy shallows of slow-moving streams. Also, they can survive in lakes. Redfin Pickerel prefer clear water. Their diet is similar to that of the Grass Pickerel. They mostly eat crustaceans.



Chain Pickerel

Kiersten Dennison, age 12, caught this Chain Pickerel at High Point Lake, Somerset County, using a shiner.

Chain Pickerel

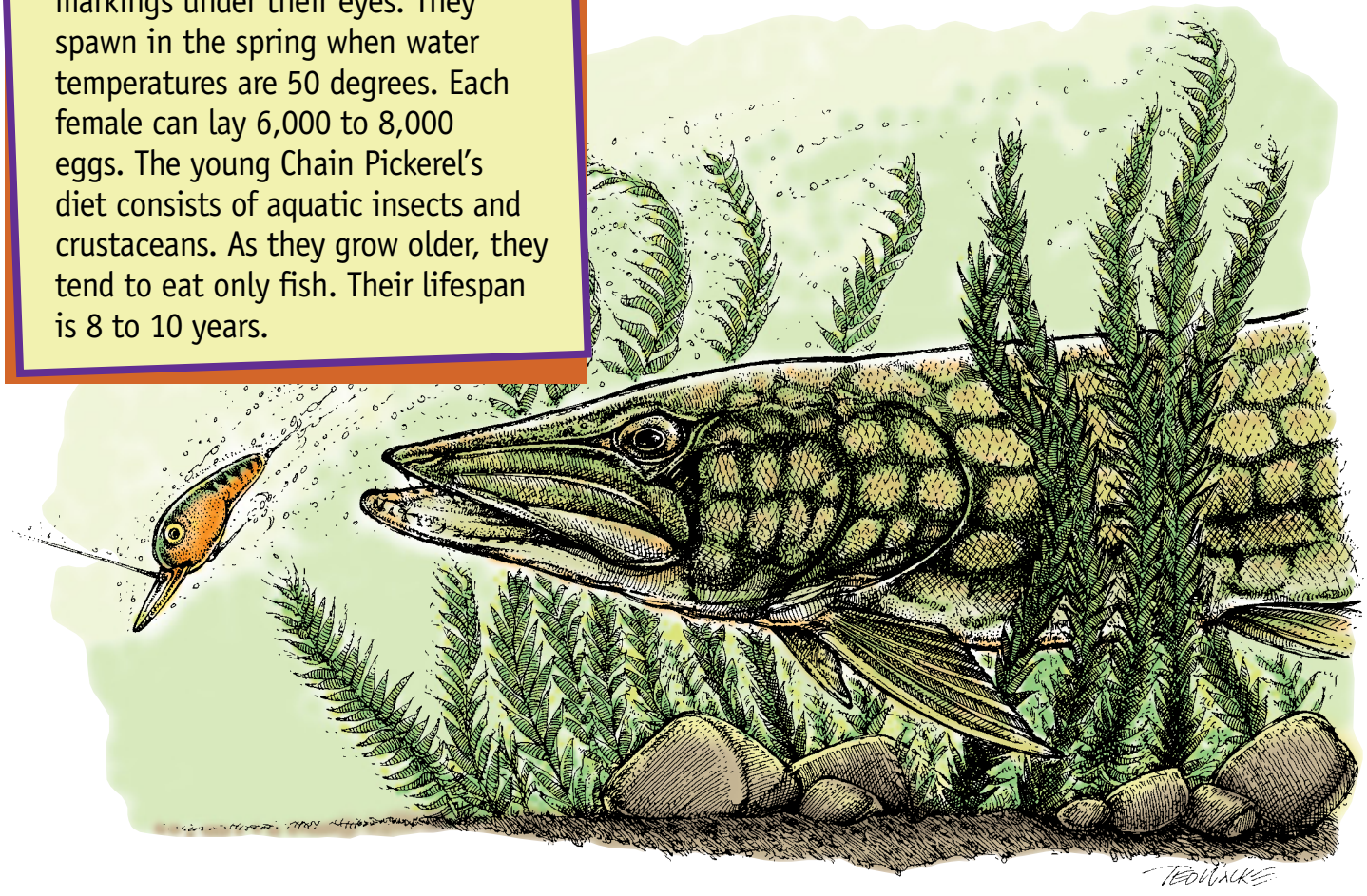
Chain Pickerel are the most abundant species of the pike family. Chain Pickerel can grow to more than 30 inches in length. Trophy Chain Pickerel can weigh 4 to 5 pounds. Pennsylvania's current state record is over 8 pounds.

Identification

An easy way to identify a Chain Pickerel is by the teardrop black markings under their eyes. They spawn in the spring when water temperatures are 50 degrees. Each female can lay 6,000 to 8,000 eggs. The young Chain Pickerel's diet consists of aquatic insects and crustaceans. As they grow older, they tend to eat only fish. Their lifespan is 8 to 10 years.

Habitat

Their habitat consists of weed beds and sunken stumps in lakes and rivers. They are commonly shallow water dwellers. However, they can live in deeper lakes.



Northern Pike

Stanley Fischli, age 7, caught this Northern Pike at Youghiogheny River Lake, Fayette County, using a shiner.

In Pennsylvania, the Northern Pike is native to Lake Erie and the Ohio and Allegheny River watersheds.

Northern Pike only feed during the day. While anglers fish for them year-round, Northern Pike can be caught by ice anglers using large live bait. Northern Pike grow extremely fast. They are eager to bite with their rows of sharp canine-like teeth. With enough food, Northern Pike can easily reach 20 pounds and can reach 40 inches. Pennsylvania's current record is 35 pounds!

Habitat

Northern Pike are coolwater fish found in clear natural lakes and rivers. Their habitat is shallow, vegetated portions of lakes and rivers.

Lifespan

Their natural lifespan is 25 years. Most spawning Northern Pike are 3- to 5-years-old.

Spawning

Spawning season is early spring for Northern Pike. An average female will produce up to 120,000 eggs.

To learn more about the Northern Pike, check out the Commission's web page at **www.fishandboat.com/pike.htm**

Scales

Muskellunge has no scales on lower half of cheek and gill cover.

Northern Pike has fully scaled cheek with half of the gill cover scaled.

Tiger muskellunge has scales covering two-thirds of the cheek and gill cover area, intermediate between the Muskellunge and Northern Pike.

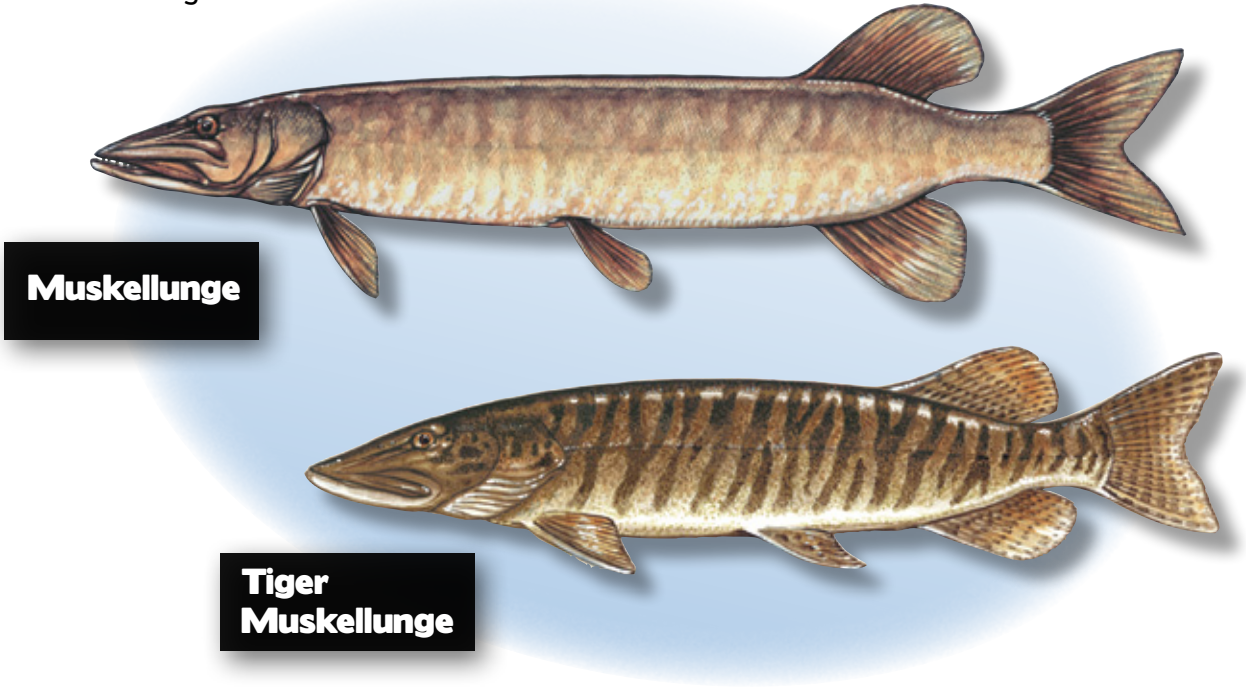
Jaw Pores

Muskellunge has 6 to 9 pores. Northern Pike has 4 to 5 pores.

Muskellunge

What do you think is the largest sportfish in Pennsylvania? Flathead Catfish? No. Northern Pike? No. **Muskellunge**? Yes, you guessed it. The current Pennsylvania state-record Muskellunge was caught at Conneaut Lake, Crawford County, in 1924. It weighed over 54 pounds!

This Muskellunge was caught by Hunter Rocuskie, age 13, on the Juniata River, Mifflin County.

Muskellunge are coolwater fish found in clear natural lakes and rivers. Most Muskellunge can reach over 48 inches long. Muskellunge don't swim far in search of their prey. They are known to be a top predator. Their main diet is fish. However, they won't pass up a snake, muskrat or even waterfowl for food. The average age of a caught musky is 3- to 6-years-old. Their natural life span is up to 20 years. The tiger muskellunge *(Esox lucius x Esox masquinongy)* is a result of crossbreeding the male Northern Pike with the female Muskellunge. This happens under hatchery conditions. They respond better to hatchery rearing than their purebred parents. Some anglers believe tiger muskellunge are easier to catch. Tiger muskellunge can grow 36 to 48 inches long.

Visit the Commission's Muskellunge webpage at **www.fishandboat.com/musky.htm**.