

March 2011

Invasive Species of the Month

Pike (Muskellunge, Tiger Muskie, and Northern Pike) (*Esox* species)



Northern pike (*Esox lucius*).

What? The pike species include the grass pickerel, northern pike, muskellunge, chain pickerel, and Amur pike freshwater fish species. The northern pike gets its name from its resemblance to the pole-weapon known as the pike (from the Middle English for pointed). Muskellunge are the largest member of the pike family and a tiger muskie is a hybrid of a muskellunge and a northern pike (males are sterile and females are fertile). Pike can grow to a maximum recorded length of six feet, a maximum recorded weight of 77 pounds, and individual fish have been reported to live 30 years. They are elongated and torpedo-shaped, and have sharply pointed heads and sharp teeth. Coloration is typically grey-green with a mottled or spotted appearance with stripes along the back, making it exceptionally camouflaged in weeds. The pike feeds on a wide range of food sources, but their primary prey is fish, including members of their own species. They also eat insects and amphibians, water-borne small mammals, small birds (e.g., ducklings), and swimming snakes.

Where? They are native across northern North America and from western Europe to Siberia in Eurasia. Within North America, there are northern pike populations in North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, Michigan, Montana, Maryland, West Virginia, Wisconsin, Indiana, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, Iowa, Northern New Mexico and Arizona, Illinois, New York, New Jersey, Idaho, northern New England, most of Canada (pike are rare in British Columbia and east coast provinces), Alaska, the Ohio Valley, the upper Mississippi River and its tributaries, the Great Lakes Basin and surrounding states, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado and parts of Oklahoma. They are also stocked in, or have been introduced to, some western lakes and reservoirs for angling purposes, although some fisheries managers believe this practice often threatens other species of fish such as bass, trout and salmon. Northern pike (*Esox lucius*).

Lookalike? Pike are totally unmistakable in appearance to any other freshwater fish because of the long streamlined body with camouflaged sides and needle-like sharp teeth.

Muskellunge (*Esox masquinongy*). Artwork credit: Cornell University.



What can you do?

Be on the lookout for pike species in Oregon, and report suspected invaders to 1-866-INVADER or www.oregoninvasiveshotline.org.

Know the Law

Oregon classifies northern pike as a prohibited species, which means it is illegal to import, sell, possess, exchange or transport northern pike (Oregon's Wildlife Integrity rules DIVISION 056). Oregon Revised Statute 498.222 requires a permit to transport or release any fish into any Oregon waters. Violators can be subject to all costs associated with control and eradication of an illegally introduced species.