

Identification & Status

Identification Tips

1. Long snout.
2. Long slender body with chain-like pattern on bright green to olive green to brown background.
3. Head is long, flat and depressed above.
4. Large, long head with dark bars radiating back from the eyes. Dark vertical bar beneath each eye. Eye has yellow pupil.
5. Dorsal fin located back towards long and deeply forked caudal fin.



Status: Highly Invasive



Chain Pickerel in Nova Scotia

Esox niger

Habitat

Chain pickerel can be found in lakes and ponds that are heavily vegetated. Vegetation provides cover for their ambush style of foraging. During the summer they prefer water depths no deeper than 10 feet and temperatures of 21-30°C. In winter, chain pickerel remain active in deeper waters.

Chain pickerel images. Adjacent: Ken Hammond, US Department of Agriculture. Above: Perry Monroe.



Angling

For angling information and to review the Angler's Handbook, visit novascotia.ca/fish/sportfishing.

Spawning

Chain pickerel spawn in April or May when water temperatures approach 8-11°C. Spawning occurs in 7 to 10 days in water depths of 3-10 feet in flooded sections of lakes, streams and ponds. Males and females deposit eggs and milt simultaneously and use their tails to distribute eggs on the bottom. Eggs attach to submerged vegetation and are not cared for.

Juveniles

Eggs hatch within 6-12 days and the young use a sticky gland on their snout to fasten themselves to vegetation. While attached, they subsist on their egg yolk for approximately one week. The length of young chain pickerel ranges from 4.2 to 7.0 mm. During their first year, they grow quickly with females growing faster than males. Year of sexual maturity differs with geographic location. In the north, maturity occurs in the third or fourth year; it is reached earlier in the south. Predators

of young chain pickerel range from fish to amphibians to birds.

Food

Chain pickerel are fast swimmers that primarily consume fish but are also known to eat small rodents, amphibians, insects, small birds and snakes. In order to conserve energy, prey is usually caught as it passes by rather than by searching for it.

Similar Species

The smallest member of the pike (*Esox*) family, their chain-like pattern allows chain pickerel to be identified from relatives the muskellunge (musky) and northern pike, neither of which is common in Nova Scotia.

Invasive Species

Chain pickerel is an invasive species that was believed to be introduced to Digby County, NS from New Brunswick or Maine. They pose a threat to our native species as they are predatory and out-compete naturally occurring species for food and habitat. It is illegal to stock any body of water in the province with chain pickerel.

Quick Check on Similar Species

Chain Pickerel



Muskellunge



Northern Pike

