



S O U T H C E N T R A L R E G I O N

D e p a r t m e n t o f F i s h a n d G a m e



Northern Pike in Southcentral

Northern Pike

Northern pike in Southcentral Alaska Northern pike are an important subsistence and game fish in their native waters of Interior and Western Alaska, outside the Southcentral Region. In their home ranges, north of the Alaska Range, pike have established a balance with other native species.

Northern pike, however, are not native to Southcentral Alaska. They have been illegally released into lakes and streams on the Kenai Peninsula, in the Anchorage area, and in the Matanuska-Susitna valleys. These illegally-stocked pike spread through connected water bodies



Photo Courtesy Ken Marsh WildNorthwestImages.com



and change the entire balance of species — the “species complex” — in their new environment.

Illegally-stocked northern pike have especially devastating impacts on juvenile fish, particularly coho salmon

and rainbow trout. And because pike were illegally stocked into Southcentral lakes, the Department of Fish and Game has had to discontinue stocking at those lakes, thus reducing fishing opportunities.

When introduced into a new system, pike grow and reproduce rapidly. Within a few years, pike illegally stocked into a lake can wipe out all other fish species. Once this happens, pike begin feeding on other pike, until only smaller “hammer handle” pike are left.

Illegal stocking is becoming more and more problematic, not only in Alaska, but also in other states. “Exotic” species are taking their toll on both native fish, wildlife, and plant populations, not to mention taxpayer dollars in state and federal budgets.



Fish transport and stocking laws

At the time of statehood, Alaska adopted laws affecting the introduction of non-native species. Alaska now has some of the toughest laws in the United States governing the movement of fish and wildlife. Even the Department of Fish and Game must obtain permits before moving and stocking fish.

- **IT IS ILLEGAL** to move or transport any live fish from the waters of Alaska without a permit from the Department of Fish and Game. You are also not allowed to introduce any live fish into the waters of Alaska without a permit from the Department of Fish and Game. These actions are against the law, and are punishable by fines and/or a year in prison.
- No live fish (other than tropical fish for aquariums) are permitted to enter Alaska.
- No live fish are allowed to be used as bait in fresh waters.

How you can help

Recognize your Southcentral Alaska fisheries are at risk from illegally-introduced pike! There are significant concerns to freshwater productivity for juvenile salmon and native species.

Catch and keep pike

Your fishing efforts can directly reduce the impact pike have on both native and stocked fish. There is evidence that intensive fishing can help reduce pike. In a few lakes, anglers have been able to catch 80-90% of pike over 12 inches.

We encourage anglers to catch and retain as many pike as possible, keeping in mind that Alaska's laws are strict about wasting sport-caught fish. If you can't eat all the pike you catch, clean them and donate them to an appropriate charity.

Local food banks or homeless shelters, for example, may welcome such donations.

REPORT ILLEGAL STOCKING!

Alaska Fish & Wildlife
Safeguard
1-800-478-3377
or
your local
Alaska State Troopers
office

Feeding habits

Northern pike are known to travel extensively in search of food. They will attempt to eat any prey up to (and sometimes over) one-half their own size.

One study on the Susitna River indicated pike prefer to eat juvenile fish, including rainbow trout, coho and sockeye salmon, and other pike. Stomach contents of Southcentral Alaska pike have also revealed insects, rodents, ducklings, muskrats, and young beavers.

Size and growth

In the Susitna drainage system, anglers have harvested pike in the 20-pound (39 - 43 inches) range, with occasional pike caught in the 30-pound range (47-52 inches). In February 1997, a pike 54 inches long and just a few ounces shy of the state record of 38 pounds, was caught in Red Shirt Lake.

Generally, though, the size of harvested northern pike is decreasing.

The Nancy Lake canoe system, which includes



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Photo Courtesy Ken Marsh WildNorthwestImages.com

more than 20 lakes, is one of the systems where the size of harvested pike has declined. In examining stomach contents from more than 100 northern pike captured in this system during August 1995, almost 95% contained only insects, indicating favorite food items (other fish) are scarce.

At one time this system produced fine catches of rainbow trout, grayling and salmon, but during two weeks of test netting in 1995 and 1996, only pike, a few suckers, sticklebacks, and one whitefish were caught.

Southcentral pike management

Some Southcentral anglers prefer that ADF&G manage northern pike for a trophy fishery. Other anglers have recognized that pike are decimating popular fisheries for salmon and trout and want all the pike completely eliminated.

Northern pike create somewhat of a dilemma to fishery managers. How can we hold pike impacts on other species to an acceptable level while at the same time maintain a well-balanced pike fishery for

those who enjoy it?

The threat to a productive pike fishery is that anglers are primarily interested in keeping large fish. Anglers are encouraged to catch and retain as many pike 20 inches or smaller as possible to help maintain a pike fishery.

Regulations

Regulations are different for each waterway you fish. In Southcentral Alaska, northern pike often have more liberal limits and more gear types allowed. This is not the case in the rest of Alaska, so please read the regulation booklet before heading out to fish.

Generally, there are no bag and possession limits for northern pike in Southcentral Alaska waters. In most Southcentral waters, anglers may use spears, bow and arrow, bait, spinning tackle, and fly-fishing gear. On a few lakes in the Susitna/West Cook Inlet area and on the Kenai Peninsula, ice-fishing anglers can use five lines when fishing for northern pike.



Photo Courtesy Ken Marsh WildNorthwestImages.com

Sport fishing for northern pike

Northern pike are sought by sport anglers because of their size potential and fierce strikes.

With the rise of pike populations, sport fishing for northerns has also increased in the rivers and lakes of Southcentral Alaska. In the last five years alone, inquiries to the Alaska Department of Fish & Game about northern pike fishing have increased tenfold.

Anglers are also becoming more aware of the area's pike population. During the last 10 years, angler catches have nearly tripled.

Where are the pike?

In Upper Cook Inlet drainages, northern pike were not present before the 1950s. They were probably able to gain a stronghold in the Susitna River drainage through a series of illegal stockings.

However, in 1997 and 1998, the harvest of northern pike from the Matanuska-Susitna valleys surpassed the harvest from the state's interior areas, which was previously the leader, and a region where indigenous pike populations are found.

The Susitna River drainage covers tens of thousands of square miles, and contains myriad shallow lakes, sloughs, and clearwater tributaries, many of which are prime northern pike spawning and rearing habitats. Pike have been documented in scores of lakes and streams in the Susitna River drainage.

A list of known and suspected pike waters is provided in this handout. For more information, see the Sport Fish Division Web site at www.adfg.alaska.gov/region2/lakemaps/pikewaters.cfm

Not much is known about northern pike

populations on the Kenai Peninsula. Soldotna Creek, Scout Lake, and Stormy Lake have pike populations.

Northern pike are now established in the Moose River drainage. The Mackey Lakes also have pike, but public access to those lakes is difficult. A dead pike was found at the confluence of the Russian and Kenai rivers in 2000.

Several lakes in the Anchorage area have illegally-introduced pike. Stocking has been stopped or reduced at these lakes and a reclamation program implemented.

Fishing techniques

The highest catch rates and best fishing opportunities are in lakes and streams right after ice-out. Pike are spawning at this time, and they become more aggressive. Also, after spawning, pike are actively rebuilding fat reserves reduced by the long winter months as well as the rigors of spawning.

Pike tend to stay in weedy waters full of snags. When sending lures below the surface, choose strong tackle and/or weedless hooks, so that you have a better chance of recovering your lure when you get snagged up.

Top-water lures are an option in heavily weeded areas, and are good producers.

Large, bright spinners, spoons, diving plugs, and surface plugs all work well for northern pike.

"Buzz baits," or spinner baits, are becoming more popular, as are top-water poppers. Try a fast retrieve and watch the action.

Herring suspended under a bobber also works well. Remember: Wait to set the hook until you are sure the pike has swallowed the bait.

Whatever lure you choose, a steel leader ensures sharp pike teeth will not cut through your line.

Ice fishers prefer fresh herring as bait (in waters where bait is legal). A popular setup is a flasher fished above a baited hook, which is tied above a weight. Also, try jigging with spoons or jigs in shallow waters. Decoys also work well when jigged.

Fly-fishing anglers use heavier salmon rods so they can throw bulky salmon smolt, frog, or mouse imitations fished on 20-pound-test or 40-pound-test wire tippets. Sinking line or floating lines are effective, depending on the type of fly used.

Confirmed and Reported Pike Waters in Southcentral

Susitna Basin Lakes

- Alexander Creek
 1. Alexander Lake (see special regulations)
 2. Sucker Lake
 3. Trail Lake
 4. Rabbit Lake

Lower Susitna

1. Figure 8 Lake
 2. Flathorn Lake

Mid -Susitna

1. Ding Dong
 2. Lady Slipper
 3. Lockwood Lake
 4. Unnamed
 5. Unnamed
 6. Unnamed
 8. Vern Lake
 9. Witsol Lake
 10. Witsoe Lake

Yentna River

1. Bulchitna Lake
 2. Cabin Lake
 3. Chelatna Lake
 4. Dog Leg
 5. Donkey Lake
 6. Fish Creek Lake 1
 7. Fish Creek Lake 2
 8. Fish Creek Lake 3
 9. Fish Creek Lake 4
 10. Hewitt Lake
 11. Pear Lake
 12. Stickleback Lake
 13. Whiskey Lake

Skwentna River

1. Bob Lake (Shell Creek drainage)
 2. Eight Mile Lake
 3. No Name (east of Shell Lake)
 4. No Name (Herk Strip)
 5. One Stone Lake
 6. Seven Mile Lake
 7. Shell Lake

Deshka River

1. Amber Lake
 2. Kroto Lake
 3. Neil Lake
 4. No Name Lake
 5. No Name (1mi SW

- Parker Lake)
 6. No Name (2mi SW Parker Lake)
 7. No Name (Moose Creek)
 8. No Name (Moose Creek)
 9. Parker Lake
 10. Rocky Lake
 11. Trapper Lake

Upper Susitna

1. Caswell Lake*
 2. Fish Lake*
 3. Kashwitna Lake*
 4. Sawmill Lake*
 5. Swan Lake

Nancy Lake Area

1. Ardaw Lake
 2. Bains Pond #1
 3. Bains Pond #2
 4. Bains Pond #3
 5. Big No Luck Lake
 6. Candle Stick Lake
 7. Char Lake
 8. Chicken Lake
 9. Cow Lake
 10. Echo Pond #1
 11. Echo Pond #2
 12. Echo Pond #3
 13. Frazer Lake
 14. James Lake
 15. Little Chicken
 16. Little Frazer Lake
 17. Little No Luck Lake
 18. Lynx Lake
 19. Milo Lake
 20. North Rolly Lake
 21. Owl Lake
 22. Phoebe Lake
 23. Red Shirt Lake
 24. South Rolly Lake
 25. Tanaina Lake
 26. Nancy Lake

Susitna Tributaries

1. Alexander Creek
 2. Anderson Creek*
 3. Birch Creek*
 4. Bottle Creek
 5. Caswell Creek
 6. Chulitna River*
 7. Deshka River

8. Donkey Creek
 9. Eightmile Creek
 10. Fish Creek (Flathorn)
 11. Fish Creek (Kroto)
 12. Fish Lake Creek
 13. Hewitt Creek
 14. Indian (Chulitna)*
 15. Indian Creek (Yentna)
 16. Johnson Creek
 17. Kutna Creek (Yentna)
 18. Lake Creek
 19. Montana Creek
 20. Moose Creek
 21. Otter Creek
 22. Rabideux Creek
 23. Rolly Creek
 24. Shell Creek
 25. Skwentna River
 26. Sucker Creek
 27. Sunshine Creek*
 28. Talachulitna Creek*
 29. Trapper Creek
 30. Trapper (Talkeetna)*
 31. Tokositna
 32. Unnamed (Lower Susitna)
 33. Wiggel Creek*
 34. Witsoe Creek
 35. Yentna River

Knik Arm Drainages

1. Fire Creek
 2. Fish Creek (Big Lake)
 3. Jim Lake
 4. Knik Lake
 5. Little Susitna River
 6. Meadow Creek (Big Lake)
 7. Mink Creek
 8. Swan Lake*

West Cook Inlet

1. Chuit River
 2. Chuitbunga Lake
 3. Nikolai River
 4. Threemile (Tukhallah Creek)

5. Threemile (Tukhallah Lake)

Mat-Su Valley Lakes

1. Crystal Lake
 2. Finger Lake
 3. Horseshoe Lake (Little Susitna)
 4. Long Lake (Willow area)
 5. Memory Lake
 6. Rainbow Lake*
 7. Wasilla Lake
 8. Anderson Lake
 9. Wallace Lake
 10. Big Lake
 11. Baptist Pond

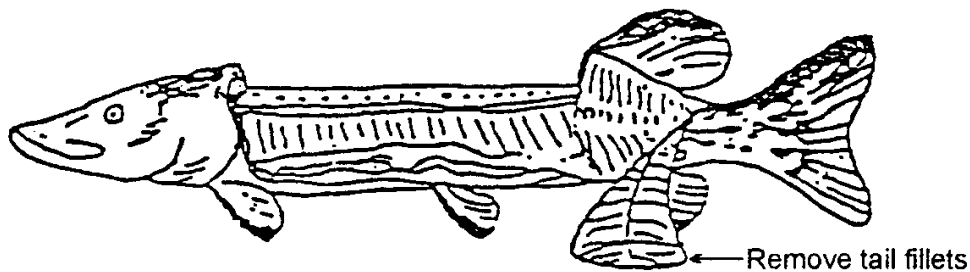
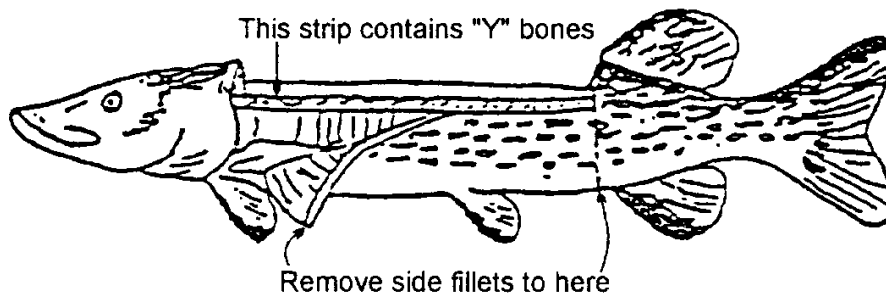
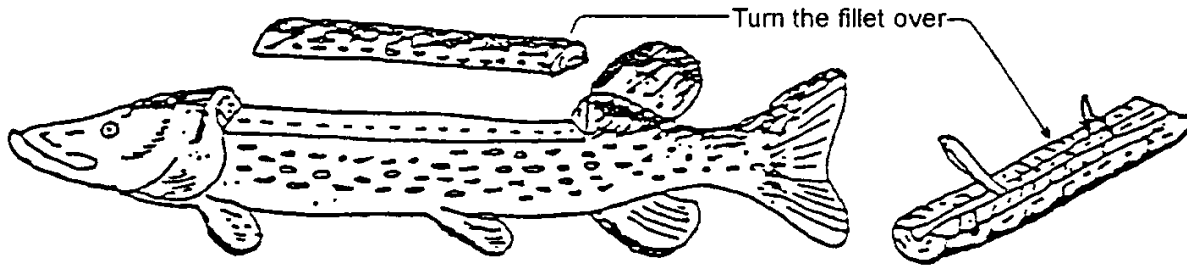
Anchorage Lakes

1. Campbell Lake
 2. Gwen Lake
 3. Lower Fire Lake
 4. Otter Lake
 5. Sand Lake
 6. Upper Fire Lake

Kenai Peninsula Lakes

1. Denise Lake
 2. Derks Lake (Soldotna Creek)
 3. Egumen Lake (Moose River)
 4. Mackey lakes, East and West
 5. Moose River
 6. Peterson Lake*
 7. Scout Lake
 8. Sevena Lake (Soldotna Creek)
 9. Stormy Lake
 10. Tree Lake (Soldotna Creek)
 11. Union Lake (Soldotna Creek)
 12. Tote Road Lakes (Including the 5 flowage-linked lakes near Stubble field Road)
 13. Engumen Lake*
 14. Soldotna Creek
 15. Kenai River

Boneless Pike Fillets



For information about camping, accommodations, fishing guides, and other visitor services, contact the agencies listed in this publication, or the Alaska Travel Industry Association at 2600 Cordova Street, Suite 201, Anchorage, Alaska, 99503
web: www.travelalaska.com email: info@AlaskaTIA.org



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