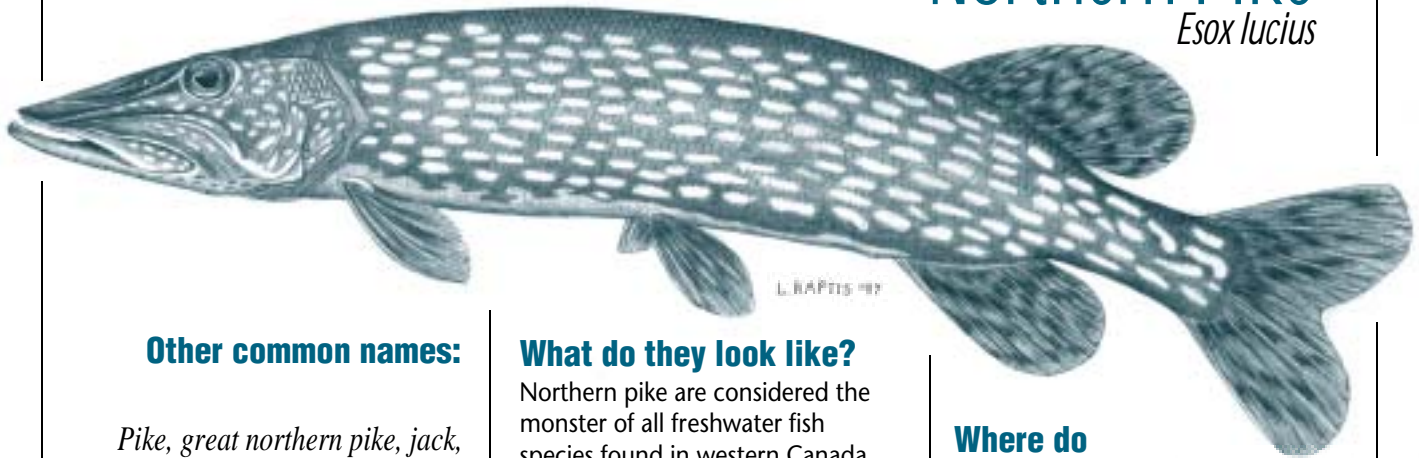


B.C. Fish facts

Northern Pike *Esox lucius*



Other common names:

Pike, great northern pike, jack, jackfish, pickerel

Typical range in length for adults: 45-75 cm
Maximum length: 117 cm
Typical range in weight for adults: 0.5 - 4 kg
Maximum weight: 13 kg

What do they look like?

Northern pike are considered the monster of all freshwater fish species found in western Canada. This fish has a long, slimy, snake-like body, slightly flattened towards the tail. The head is long with a long depressed snout and a large mouth. The lower jaw is longer than the upper jaw (somewhat like an alligator). The clamp-like jaws, roof of the mouth, and tongue are lined with sharp teeth. It has brilliant yellow eyes. The dorsal fin, on its back, is set very far back towards the tail. Northern pike are usually bluish to greenish gray in colour, although occasionally completely silver, with rough horizontal rows of light irregular spots on its sides. The belly is whitish or yellowish. Large oblong dark spots can be seen on the dorsal, anal (single fin on the bottom of the fish nearest the tail), and tail fins. Females are generally larger than males.

Where do they live?

Pike are found in shallow weedy lakes and bays, and slow, winding, rivers with thick underwater vegetation. The species has a circumpolar distribution in the Northern Hemisphere and occurs throughout Canada. In British Columbia, the northern pike is most commonly found in the northeastern corner of the province. This includes the Peace and Liard river systems that eventually flow into the Arctic via the MacKenzie River. Northern pike are not found upstream of the Peace Canyon, in the Williston Lake watershed. It has been introduced into Charlie Lake near Fort St. John. It is also found in the Yukon River system and upper Alsek and Taku river systems. It appears to be absent from the Iskut-Stikine river system.

What do they eat?

A voracious feeder, the northern pike consumes large numbers of other fish species, insects, and other animals including frogs, small birds, and small mammals (such as mice and muskrats). Young pike feed on large zooplankton and the immature stages of insects. By the time they have reached 5 cm in length, fish make up most of their diet. Pike remain active and continue feeding under the ice throughout the winter.

What is their life cycle like?

Northern pike spawn during the day in early spring shortly after the ice breaks up. Males and females come together as spawning time approaches. When ready, the female, usually accompanied by one or two smaller males, enters a stream or moves into the aquatic vegetation at the flooded margin of the lake. The male and female roll onto their sides, and eggs and milt (sperm) are shed simultaneously during rapid body vibrations. After spawning, the fish thrust their tails, scattering the drifting eggs. Each female may lay tens of thousands of eggs. Spawning is repeated several times over 2 to 5 days. The

eggs, which are clear, amber in colour, and very sticky, remain attached to submerged vegetation at the spawning site until hatching. It takes about 2 weeks for the eggs to hatch, depending on water temperature. The young attach to aquatic vegetation by sticky glands on their heads and feed on stored yolk for 6 to 10 days. Growth is rapid during the first 1 to 3 years. Females generally mature at 6 years and males at 5, and may live to spawn many times. Under cold conditions, northern pike can live more than 20 years.

How are they doing?

The northern pike is a yellow-listed species, which means it is not at risk in British Columbia.

How you can help:

- Never transport live fish or other organisms from one body of water to another. This could transfer diseases and parasites from one ecosystem to another, or upset the natural balance in the ecosystem where they are released.
- Be aware that what you dump down the sink or into your septic tank, roadside storm drains or sewers may find its way into streams or lakes. Help keep water quality high by using detergents and soaps minimally and by not dumping harsh chemicals, such as bleach, paint thinners or antifreeze, into drains.
- Form a group of water stewards and volunteers to monitor local water quality.
- Obey angling regulations and

habitat protection bylaws, guidelines and regulations, since they are designed to protect fish and their habitat. You should also Observe, Record and Report violations of the regulations by phoning 1-800-663-9653.

- Remember, the largest pike are usually the most productive females - consider catch and release.

No kidding!

- Moving northern pike into lakes or rivers where they do not occur naturally may do considerable harm to the ecosystem. These fish are top predators and eat large numbers of young fish. They also eat frogs, crayfish, mice, muskrats, and ducklings, and can also be cannibalistic.
- Northern pike can eat an enormous amount of food. One study estimated that a population of northern pike ate an average of 1.5 million waterfowl in one wildlife refuge in Michigan.
- They often ambush their prey, lying in wait and attacking from cover. Their body shape and fin placement gives them superb burst speed.
- Northern pike are intermediate hosts to a tapeworm that can be transferred to salmonids. This tapeworm forms unsightly cysts in the muscle tissue making the flesh undesirable.
- Northern pike are excellent eating, especially when baked without the skin, as the skin can give the flesh a muddy flavour.

