

Chain Pickerel

Esox niger



What is it and Why is it a Problem?

Chain Pickerel is a highly predatory fish that feeds on native juvenile fish, insects and amphibians, and outcompetes native fish for food and habitat. They can tolerate warm and/or brackish waters and prefer to live in vegetated lakes, swamps, and quiet pools of rivers and creeks with spawning areas at flooded areas of streams, lakes, and ponds. They are a threat to the genetic diversity of native fish since they are capable of hybridizing with native species, such as Grass Pickerel, a species of Special Concern in Ontario, and Northern Pike. Although the Chain Pickerel's native range includes the U.S. side of Lake Ontario, it has expanded to the northern and eastern shores. It has potential to spread to inland lakes in The Land Between, mainly through sportfish introduction, if careful precautions are not taken.



What Does it Look Like?

- Can measure up to 95 cm long and has green sides with dark interconnecting lines over yellow-green areas resembling a chain
- Jaws are elongated with large, sharp teeth
- Dorsal fin is large and located far back towards the forked caudal (tail) fin
- Cheeks and gill covers are fully scaled
- Has a dark, vertical bar that extends from the eye to the bottom of the cheek
- Can look similar to Northern Pike (*Esox lucius*) which are larger and do not have a dark vertical bar near their eyes, but have spots on their fins, mouths that are more turned up towards their eyes, and scales only on the upper half of the gill cover



How Can it be Managed?

- Help prevent the spread of this invasive species to The Land Between by reporting sightings of any invasive species online through [EDDMapS Ontario](#), a web-based mapping system which also has an app, or through the [Invasive Species in Ontario](#) project on [iNaturalist.org](#).
- Inspect your boat, trailer and fishing gear before leaving a fishing spot and before heading to a new fishing spot to remove any mud, plant fragments and animals. Dispose of any plant and animal matter in the garbage. Refer to the [OMNRF's Boater's Action Plan](#) for more information on cleaning your boat and gear.
- Release water from your motor, live well, bilge and transom wells once on land.
- Do not release aquarium or pond contents into water bodies. Oftentimes invasive aquatic animals end up reaching water bodies when people dispose of them in lakes and rivers.

References

[Great Lakes Nonindigenous Species Information System](#), produced by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[Ontario Invading Species Awareness Program](#), developed by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF), and the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH).