



Southcentral Region
Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Division of Sport Fish

Southcentral Alaska
Recreational Fishing Series

Matanuska-Susitna Valleys / Kenai Peninsula / Anchorage Bowl

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. 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 and change the entire balance of fish species 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.

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Photo Courtesy ©Ken Marsh

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. Invasive species are taking their toll on both native fish, wildlife, and plants, and are very expensive to control or eradicate.

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.

REPORT ILLEGAL STOCKING!

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

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, welcome such donations.

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, sticklebacks, rodents, ducklings, muskrats, and young beavers.

Size and growth

In the Susitna River drainage, 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 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

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 regulations 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 some 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.

Sport fishing for northern pike

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



These opportunities funded in part by Federal Aid in Sport Fish and Wildlife Restora-

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If you believe you have been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility, or if you desire further information please write to ADF&G, P.O. Box 115526, Juneau, AK 99811-5526; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4040 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 300 Webb, Arlington, VA 22203; or O.E.O., U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington DC 20240.

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With the rise of pike populations, sport fishing for northern pike has also increased in the rivers and lakes of Southcentral Alaska. In the last five years alone, inquiries to the Alaska Department of Fish and 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 clear-water 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.

On the Kenai Peninsula, Soldotna Creek and Stormy Lake have pike populations, and illegally stocked pike were recently eradicated from Arc and Scout lakes.

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.

The Division of Sport Fish is working to remove illegally stocked pike from several lakes in the Anchorage area. Rotenone treatments have already been applied to Cheney and Sand Lakes.

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.

Fly lines specially designed for pike fishing are made to throw those wind-resistant flies, and are usually weight-forward.

A few winter anglers like to spear pike through the ice, where spearing is allowed. A large hole is made in the ice, and a decoy dropped down. Eggshells in the hole help improve fish visibility. An ice-fishing shack is also usually used to cover the larger hole, for the safety of other anglers and snowmobilers.

For regulations about ice-fishing shacks, check with the land manager (State Parks, borough, municipality, for example) of the waterway you want to fish.

Spearing pike is a fun, productive method of harvest. Check your local tackle shop or dive shop for pole spears and spear points, or search online. Spears must be operated by hand (spear guns are not legal).



An 8-inch pike swallows a 4-inch Chinook smolt. That would be like a 6-foot human swallowing a piece of food 3 feet long!

Five-line ice-fishing lakes:

Susitna, West Cook Inlet

- Alexander
- Anderson Lake
- Memory Lake
- Prator Lake
- Crystal Lake
- Shell Lake
- Onestone Lake
- Long Lake
- Figure Eight Lake
- Sucker Lake
- Flathorn Lake
- Lower Vern Lake
- Upper Vern Lake
- Lockwood Lake
- Whiskey Lake
- Hewitt Lake
- Donkey Lake
- Threemile / Tukhalah Lake
- Trapper Lake
- Trail Lake
- Neil Lake

- Kroto Lake
- No Name/Cabin Lake
- Nancy Lake State Recreational Area lakes (except NOT Nancy Lake itself)
- Fish Creek (in flowing waters in lower Susitna drainage)
- Fish Creek (Kroto Slough)
- Indian Creek
- Witsoe Creek

Kenai Peninsula

- Mackey lakes
- Tote Road lakes (including 5 flowage-linked lakes)
- Derks Lake
- Sevena Lake
- Union Lake
- Stormy Lake
- Denise Lake

Ice fishers may use five lines in the lakes listed above. Gear must be closely attended, and all other fish species caught must be released.

Bow-fishing is an exciting technique that is catching on for northern pike anglers in the Southcentral region. The arrow must have a barbed tip, and be attached to the bow by a string. For equipment made especially for bow fishing, check out local archery shops or mail order catalogs for bow fishing equipment.

Additional information

For additional information concerning northern pike fishing, or if you happen to observe northern pike in lakes and streams other than those listed on the back page of this handout, please contact the ADF&G Sport Fish Information Center at (907) 267-2218.

In addition, a wealth of information, including

weekly in-season fishery reports and emergency orders are provided on the department's website. Point your browser to www.sf.adfg.state.ak.us

Recipes

Most anglers tend to release small pike, thinking there isn't enough meat to warrant the time spent cleaning them. This is not true! Small pike are actually better eating than the larger fish.

Pike have a reputation for many small bones, but the truth is they do not have any more bones than other fish. However, pike bones are forked (these are known as "Y" bones), giving them a multi-boned appearance. This series of bones runs the entire length of the fish and can be removed easily.

Pan-Fried Northern Pike

Up to 16 fresh or thawed frozen pike fillets or pieces

- 1/2 c. yellow cornmeal
- 1/2 c. all-purpose flour
- 1/2 tsp. dill weed or chili powder
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 1/2 tsp. pepper
- 1 egg
- 2 tbsp. water
- 1-2 tbsp. margarine
- 1-2 tbsp. vegetable oil

Mix ingredients into a batter. Dip fillets, then fry over medium heat until golden brown.

Easy Simmered Pike

Good over egg noodles!

- 3 lbs skinless pike cut into bite-sized chunks
- 1 whole yellow or white onion, peeled and cut into thick slices
- 1-1/2 tbsps. salt
- 20 peppercorns
- 2 tbsps. vinegar
- 2 tbsps. sugar
- 2 bay leaves
- Melted butter

Place the onion slices, salt, peppercorns, vinegar, sugar, and bay leaves in 3 quarts of water and bring to a boil. Lower heat, and simmer for 15 minutes.



Add fish chunks, bring mixture to a boil, and cook 10 minutes or until done. Remove fish with a slotted spoon; serve with melted butter over noodles or rice.

Breaded Pike with Soy Sesame Sauce

- 1 lbs pike fillets
- 1/4 c. breadcrumbs
- 1/2 c. unsalted peanuts, finely chopped
- 1 egg, beaten
- 1/4 tsp. salt
- 1/4 tsp. pepper
- Sauce:
- 1/4 c. rice vinegar
- 2 tbsp. soy sauce
- 2 tbsp. honey
- 1 tsp. sesame seed oil

Preheat the oven to 450 F. In a small bowl, combine the rice vinegar, soy sauce, honey, and sesame seed oil. Set aside. Cut the fish into 6 fillets. In a shallow bowl, mix the breadcrumbs and peanuts. In another small bowl, add the egg, salt and pepper, and beat lightly. Dip the fillets in the egg mixture, then into the crumb mixture, shaking off excess crumbs.

Arrange in a single layer on a lightly greased baking sheet. Bake for 10 minutes or until fish flakes easily with a fork. Serve with sauce.

Pickled Pike

When pickling northern pike you only have to remove the backbone, so keep those small northern pike!

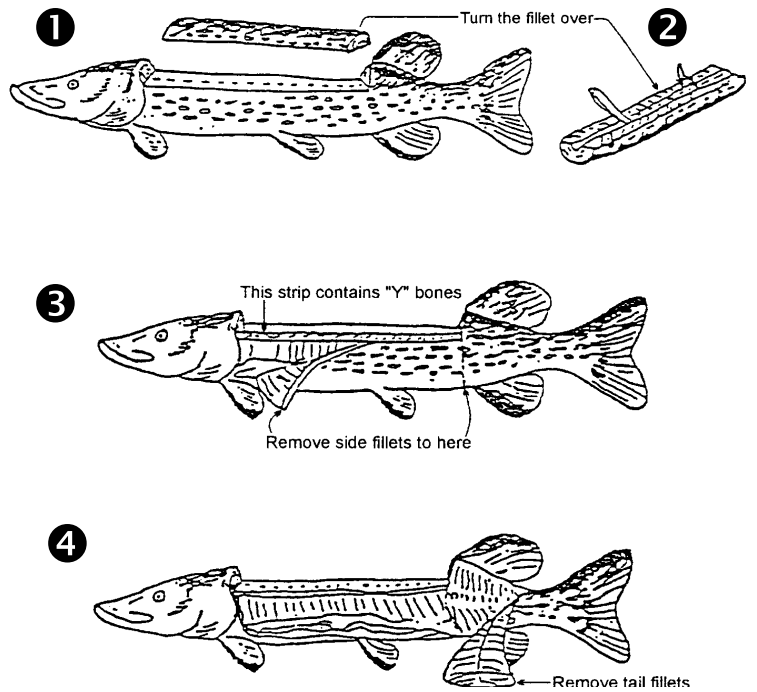
Remove scales and cut fillets into approximately 2 inch squares. Make a brine of 1/2 cup non-iodized salt or pickling salt to 1 quart of water.

Place fillets in crock, glass jar, or other non-reactive container and cover completely with brine for 24 hours. After 24 hours, drain and discard brine.

Cover fillets with white vinegar for 12 hours. Drain and discard vinegar. Pack fish in sterilized jars and add raw onion slices in alternate layers. Add enough cooled pickling solution (below) to cover fish, then seal jars.

Keep refrigerated. Fish should be ready to eat in about two weeks.

Boneless Northern Pike Fillets



1. Make a cut around the head, cutting down to (but NOT through) backbone. Now turn the knife horizontal and cut toward the tail along the top.

2. There is a row of small bones down the center of this fillet. Remove them with a V-shaped lengthwise cut along the middle.

3. With the backbone exposed, a series of bones will be seen running parallel to it on either side. Make a cut down and slightly inward along the outer edge of these bones. Work down and over the ribs and remove the flank fillet. Repeat for other side.

4. Cut fillet free from each side of dorsal fin back to tail. There are no "Y" bones here.

5. Skin each fillet. You now have five bone-free fillets!

Drawings and narrative - Jerry Perkins

Keep refrigerated. Fish should be ready to eat in about two weeks.

Pickling Solution

- 4 cups white vinegar
 - 3 cups sugar
 - 3 cups sugar
 - 1 cup white wine or water
 - 2 raw onions, thinly sliced
 - 1/4 cup pickling spice, or try a combinations of bay leaves, peppercorns, whole allspice, mustard seeds, or whole cloves
- In large non-aluminum pan, mix sugar into white vinegar, and heat, but **do not boil**. Add white wine or water, onions, and pickling spice. Now bring to a boil, then cool.

Confirmed and reported northern pike waters in the Mat-Su Valleys, Anchorage Bowl, and Kenai Peninsula

Susitna Basin Lakes

Alexander Creek

- Alexander Lake (see *special regulations*)
- Sucker Lake
- Trail Lake
- Rabbit Lake

Lower Susitna

- Figure 8 Lake
- Flathorn Lake

Mid-Susitna

- Ding Dong
- Lady Slipper
- Lockwood Lake
- Unnamed
- Unnamed
- Unnamed
- Vern Lake
- Witsol Lake
- Witsoe Lake

Yentna River

- Bulchitna Lake
- Cabin Lake (Big Bend)
- Chelatna Lake
- Dog Leg
- Donkey Lake
- Fish Creek Lake 1
- Fish Creek Lake 2
- Fish Creek Lake 3
- Fish Creek Lake 4
- Hewitt Lake
- No Name (Big Bend)
- Pear Lake (Upper Skwentna)
- Stickleback Lake
- Whiskey Lake

Skwentna River

- Bob Lake (Shell Creek drainage)
- Eight Mile Lake
- No Name (east of Shell Lake)
- No Name (Herk Strip)
- One Stone Lake
- Seven Mile Lake
- Shell Lake

Deshka River

- Amber Lake
- Kroto Lake

- Neil Lake
- No Name Lake
- No Name (1mi SW Parker Lake)
- No Name (2mi SW Parker Lake)
- No Name (Moose Creek)
- No Name (Moose Creek)
- Parker Lake
- Rocky Lake
- Trapper Lake

Upper Susitna

- Caswell Lake*
- Fish Lake*
- Kashwitna Lake*
- Sawmill Lake*
- Swan Lake

Nancy Lake Area

- Ardaw Lake
- Bains Pond #1
- Bains Pond #2
- Bains Pond #3
- Big No Luck Lake
- Candle Stick Lake
- Char Lake
- Chicken Lake
- Cow Lake
- Echo Pond #1
- Echo Pond #2
- Echo Pond #3
- Frazer Lake
- James Lake
- Little Chicken
- Little Frazer Lake
- Little No Luck Lake
- Lynx Lake
- Milo Lake
- North Rolly Lake
- Owl Lake
- Phoebe Lake
- Red Shirt Lake
- South Rolly Lake
- Tanaina Lake
- Nancy Lake

Susitna Tributaries

- Alexander Creek
- Anderson Creek*
- Birch Creek*
- Bottle Creek

- Caswell Creek
- Chulitna River*
- Deshka River
- Donkey Creek
- Eightmile Creek
- Fish Creek (Flathorn)
- Fish Creek (Kroto)
- Fish Lake Creek
- Hewitt Creek
- Indian (Chulitna)*
- Indian Creek (Yentna)
- Johnson Creek
- Kutna Creek (Yentna)
- Lake Creek
- Montana Creek
- Moose Creek
- Otter Creek
- Rabideux Creek
- Rolly Creek
- Shell Creek
- Skwentna River
- Sucker Creek
- Sunshine Creek*
- Talachulitna Creek*
- Trapper Creek
- Trapper (Talkeetna)*
- Tokositna
- Unnamed (Lower Susitna)
- Wiggel Creek*
- Witsoe Creek
- Yentna River

Knik Arm Drainages

- Fire Creek
- Fish Creek (Big Lake)
- Jim Lake
- Knik Lake
- Little Susitna River
- Meadow Creek (Big Lake)
- Mink Creek
- Swan Lake*

West Cook Inlet

- Chuit River
- Chuitbunga Lake
- Nikolai River
- Threemile/Tukhallah Creek
- Threemile/Tukhallah Lake

Matanuska-Susitna Valley Lakes

- Crystal Lake
- Finger Lake
- Horseshoe Lake (Little Susitna)
- Long Lake (Willow area)
- Memory Lake
- Rainbow Lake*
- Wasilla Lake
- Anderson Lake
- Wallace Lake
- Big Lake
- Baptist Pond

Anchorage Lakes

- Campbell Lake
- Gwen Lake
- Lower Fire Lake
- Otter Lake
- Upper Fire Lake

Kenai Peninsula Lakes

- Denise Lake
- Derks Lake (Soldotna Creek)
- Egumen Lake* (Moose River)
- Mackey lakes, East and West
- Moose River
- Peterson Lake*
- Sevena Lake (Soldotna Creek)
- Stormy Lake
- Tree Lake (Soldotna Creek)
- Union Lake (Soldotna Creek)
- Tote Road Lakes (Including the 5 flowage-linked lakes near Stubblefield Road)
- Leisure Lake
- Soldotna Creek
- Kenai River

* Reported but not confirmed northern pike populations . Remember: Not all waters have public access.

For information about camping, accommodations, fishing guides, and other visitor services, contact the agencies listed in this brochure, or the Alaska Travel Industry Association at 2600 Cordova Street, Suite 201, Anchorage, Alaska 99503; Web: www.travelAlaska.com E-mail: info@AlaskaTIA.org



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