

Northern Pike—An Unwelcome Invader to Southcentral Alaska



Problems with Pike!

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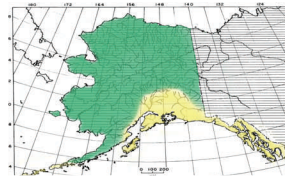
If you talk to anglers in Southcentral, you will inevitably hear stories about lakes that used to provide good fishing for rainbows and salmon—that is until northern pike were introduced. This is the problem with northern pike in Southcentral. They destroy fisheries.

The northern pike (*Esox lucius*) is actually native to most of Alaska, but it does not naturally occur south of the Alaska Range except for a small population near Yakutat.

Pike are top-level predators in aquatic food chains, and they reproduce quickly. In Southcentral, populations of trout, salmon and other fish have not had time to adapt defenses against pike's predatory tactics. Here, the northern pike is an invasive species capable of causing tremendous amounts of ecological and economic damage.

The northern pike is a popular and valuable sport fish in its native range. The desire for a local pike fishery likely prompted the first illegal introductions to Southcentral. It's suspected that pike were first introduced to the Susitna River Basin in the 1950s. Since then, they have spread throughout an area roughly the size of Indiana. ADF&G Sport Fish Division biologists in Palmer have con-

firmed their presence in over 70 lakes and 30 streams. Pike have also been found in several urban lakes in Anchorage, and they have also been illegally introduced to the Kenai Peninsula where they are established in 12 lakes as well as the Moose River and Soldotna Creek. Their continued spread on the Kenai could damage areas of pristine wilderness and severely impact some of Alaska's most valuable fisheries.



Areas of Alaska where pike are invasive (yellow). They are native to all areas in green.

So what makes pike so problematic? They are voracious predators and eat anything from waterfowl and small mammals to juvenile salmonids, and, eventually, each other. Pike prefer shallow, slow-moving, weedy areas. The vegetation provides cover for juvenile pike to grow, and adults can hide there before ambushing their prey. Juvenile salmon rear in shallow, vegetated lakes or slow back waters of creeks for a few years before going to the ocean as smolts, and are vulnerable to pike during this entire time. When pike are introduced to a lake in Southcentral, they

eventually consume all the juvenile salmon and trout. When the salmon and trout are gone, they start cannibalizing each other. Eventually the large pike are harvested or die, and the remaining pike population consists of "hammer-handles" - small pike that won't grow because there is no longer a prey base to support them. This pattern has repeated itself over and over in Southcentral Lakes, many of which used to be stocked by ADF&G. When pike become established in a stocked lake, ADF&G often has to stop stocking it. It is too expensive to supply fish that will end up as pike food instead of providing the angler opportunities they are intended to.

ADF&G is working to restore these fisheries by eliminating pike where possible and trying to prevent their spread. With funding from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Aquatic Nuisance Species Program, ADF&G developed a management plan for invasive northern pike (<http://www.sf.adfg.ak.us/region2/pike/>). The plan explains ADF&G's protocol for pike eradication and describes some of the removal methods that may be considered. ADF&G encourages public feedback and comment on the plan. You are welcome to read it and let us know your thoughts.

There are other things you can do to help, too. Sport fish regulations have been liberalized for pike in Southcentral. There are no bag limits. You can help reduce pike numbers by harvesting as many pike as you can use. You can spread the word that pike damage our fisheries. Lastly, never put live fish, pike or otherwise, into a water body, and never move fish between water bodies. This is a class A misdemeanor. If you witness someone other than ADF&G stocking personnel putting fish in a lake or stream, or if you catch an unusual fish, please report it right away to your local ADF&G office or call Fish and Wildlife Safeguard at 1-800-478-3377.

Northern Pike...

- are not native to Southcentral Alaska.
- can cause ecological and economic damage where they are not native.
- can damage fisheries where they are not native

NEVER RELEASE NON-NATIVE FISH !!

NEVER MOVE FISH BETWEEN WATER BODIES!!

For the full text of our OEO/ADA statement, visit www.sf.adfg.state.ak.us