



The Chain Pickerel

Esox niger

The Chain Pickerel is a species of freshwater fish. It belongs to the genus *Esox*, which includes other types of Pickerel or Pike. The fish is also known as the Southern Pike, Jackfish and Jack, as well as by a few other nicknames. Their range is along the eastern coast of southern Canada to Florida and west to Texas. They like the shallow weedy water of creeks, rivers, lakes, wetlands, and The Great Swamp. In colder weather they will move to deeper water where it is warmer.

The Chain Pickerel has a long slender yellow-greenish body with dark chain-like markings and a dark vertical mark under its eye, and scales that cover their cheeks. It has a long pointed head, long rows of very sharp teeth, and a forked tail. The average size of the Chain Pickerel is 2-3 feet long and the weight is 4-7 pounds.

Chain Pickerel are carnivores, an extremely aggressive, fast-moving, predator fish. When hunting they hide in underground vegetation and ambush their prey as they swim by, grabbing the prey with their strong sharp teeth. When younger they hunt small fish; as adults they go after exceptionally large fish. Besides fish, their diet consists of frogs, snakes, worms, insects, and crayfish. They hunt mostly during the day.

Spawning season begins when the water reaches 50 degrees. The female lays around 50,000 eggs, which attach to underwater plants, keeping the eggs safe, as the mother does not protect her eggs. The eggs hatch in 6 to 12 days. The juveniles reach adulthood in about three years and will be reproducing at about four years. They live for about 8-10 years.

Predators are ospreys, bald eagles, great blue herons, bass, and large Chain Pickerel.

These are a popular fish with anglers. The Chain Pickerel will readily go after fishing lures, making them easy to catch, though they put up a good fight if hooked. Because they have many small bones in their body they are not a popular fish for eating.

Conservation Status: Least Concern