

North Carolina Sport Fish Profiles



Chain pickerel

Scientific Name:

Esox niger

Other Names:

chainsides, jackpike



Illustration by Duane Raver

Identification:

A close relative of the muskellunge and other members of the pike family, the chain pickerel is named for the chain-like pattern on its sides. It is sometimes mistaken for a small muskellunge, but the muskellunge does not have the black bar beneath its eye that is present in the chain pickerel. The redbfin or “grass” pickerel is also similar in appearance, but the pattern on its sides resembles dark vertical bars rather than a chain-like pattern, and the redbfin pickerel rarely exceeds 10 inches.

Habitats and Habits:

Chain pickerel are native to the Piedmont and Coastal Plain of North Carolina, as well as other Atlantic and Gulf Coast drainages from New England to western Louisiana. They prefer relatively calm areas in lakes and rivers with lots of aquatic vegetation. Similar to muskellunge, chain pickerel are solitary fish that often hide in aquatic vegetation where they wait to ambush unsuspecting prey.

The young feed mainly on aquatic insects and crustaceans until they reach about 4 inches. At that point, they switch to a diet primarily of fish but will eat small mammals, snakes, frogs, etc.

Fishing Techniques:

Use spinners, spoons, jigs and a variety of crankbaits. Minnows are a favored live bait. Fishing is usually best around aquatic vegetation, such as lily pads and brush piles.

Good Places to Fish:

Many of the slow-flowing streams, lakes and swamps of the Piedmont and Coastal Plain are good places to fish, especially those areas with relatively clear water and abundant aquatic vegetation. Although more common in the eastern Piedmont and Coastal Plain, chain pickerel are found in good populations as far west as the upper Yadkin River below W. Kerr Scott Reservoir.

Other Information:

NCARP Minimum Requirements: 4 pounds or 26 inches

State Record: 8 pounds from Gaston Reservoir, Feb. 13, 1968

World Record: 9 lbs., 6 oz., Homerville, Ga., Feb. 17, 1961*

** Anglers provide information on their potential world-record catches directly to the International Game Fish Association, which maintains the world records for sport fishing.*