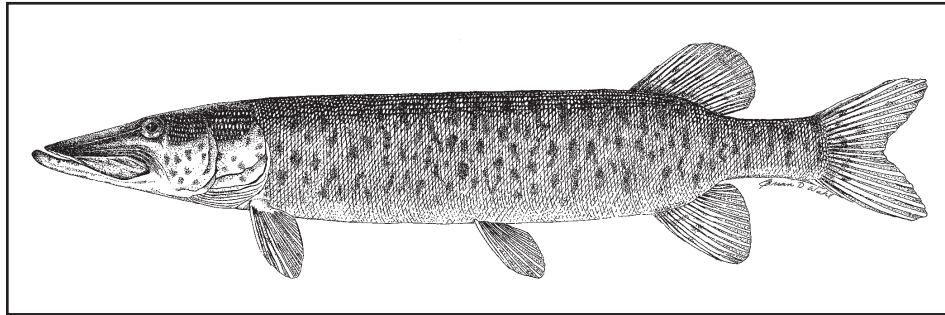


Life History Notes

Muskellunge

Common Names: Muskie

Scientific Name: *Esox masquinongy*



Publication 66
(R999)

Identification

Muskellunge are long, slender fish with a large duckbill shaped mouth and needle sharp teeth. The dorsal fin is soft and located near the tail. In contrast to Northern pike and chain pickerel, only the upper half of the cheek and ear flap, or opercle, have scales.

Range and Habitat

The muskellunge is native to Ohio and is found in both major drainage basins of the state. Historically, it was abundant in the bays and tributaries of Lake Erie and in many streams in the Ohio River drainage. Currently, it is also found in several impoundments around the state. Prime muskellunge habitat is found in heavily vegetated lakes with lots of tree stumps and bays. Prime stream muskellunge habitat is generally considered to be long pools (at least 0.2 miles in length) with a minimum depth of at least 3 to 4 feet and an abundance of submerged woody structure.

Life History

Muskellunge usually spawn in April and early May when water temperatures are in the low to mid-50s. Females will drop as many as 200,000 eggs on soft shallow substrate where they adhere to vegetation and other objects. After hatching, young muskellunge feed on microscopic animals. Adult muskellunge prefer soft-rayed fish such as suckers and gizzard shad as prey.

Adult Size

Typically, male muskellunge range from 22 to 39 inches long and weigh from 3 to 21 pounds. Females can range from 22 to 50 inches in length and weigh from 3 to 40 pounds. The state record muskie is 50.25 inches long and weighed 55 pounds, 2 ounces.

Fishing Methods

Bait casting and trolling are the most popular ways to catch Ohio muskies. A great variety of lures are used successfully, including pikie minnows, bombers, daredevils, spoons and various spinners and artificial worms. Casting to the edge of vegetation beds and submerged cover and using a fast retrieve is often productive. Trolling with deep running lures, like the bomber, during the summer months takes numerous muskies. Muskies are strong fighters and provide a great thrill to anyone lucky enough to hook one.