



Photo: Alaska Department of Fish and Game



# Northern Pike



The Northern pike can grow very large. Photo: Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation



Photo: Hardyplants, Wikimedia



## What Is It?

The northern pike (*Esox lucius*) is a non-native predator of popular sport fish in Washington and is a prohibited species here. It reproduces prolifically and primarily preys on fish smaller than itself, including juveniles of other species.

## Is It Here Yet?

Yes. It has been introduced illegally and established populations in eastern Washington, in the Pend Oreille River, the Spokane River, Lake Roosevelt, and a couple of lakes in Spokane County. Northern pike also has been found in Lake Washington in King County after being illegally introduced. In 2024, northern pike was reported in a lake on the San Juan islands. This is likely another illegal introduction.

## Why Should I Care?

The northern pike harms ecological systems by preying on smaller fish, which suppresses the populations of those species and limits food sources for other species. If it reaches the Columbia River via the Pend Oreille River, it could hurt populations of native salmon and steelhead trout by preying on the juveniles. For, example, in Alaska, where northern pike has been introduced illegally, it has badly hurt populations of native salmon.

## What Are Its Characteristics?

- Elongated body shape.
- Large, wide mouth with sharp teeth.

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- Dark splotches on fins.
- Grey-green body with rows of pale oval spots.

## How Can I Distinguish It From Similar Species?

The tiger muskie, which is a sterile cross of a true muskie and a northern pike, is placed in rivers and lakes for sport fishing. Tiger muskies are patterned with darker vertical spots and bars on a lighter background. Northern pike have light spots against a darker background. It is important to know the

difference between tiger muskies and northern pike because they look similar but are regulated differently. Visit the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's website to learn more:

<https://wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/invasive/esox-lucius#desc-range>



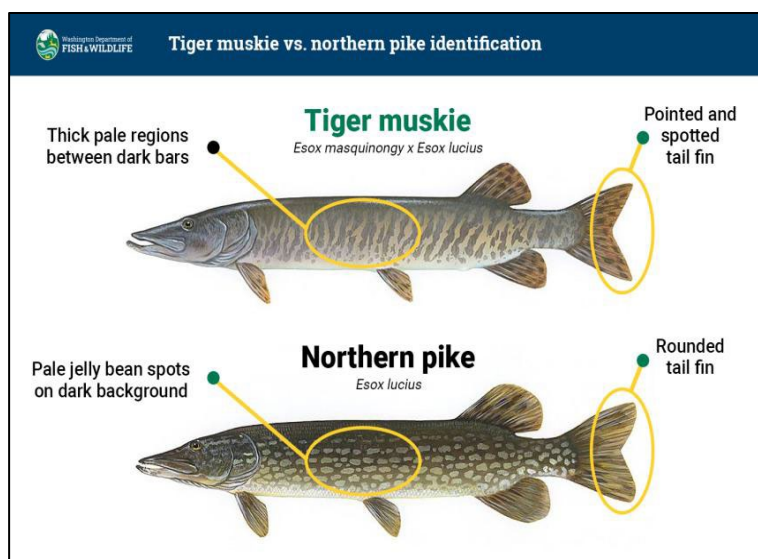
The northern pike can be identified by its pale oval spots along the body. Photo: Alaska Department of Fish and Wildlife

## How Can We Stop It?

Do not introduce the northern pike to any water body—it is illegal to do so. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife does encourage people to catch and kill it before leaving the area where they were caught. Gill netting has been the most effective method of reducing the populations so far.

## What Should I Do If I Find One?

Report immediately via the WA Invasives mobile app or reporting web form at <https://invasivespecies.wa.gov/report-a-sighting/>.



The tiger muskie and northern pike have several key differences. Photo: Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife