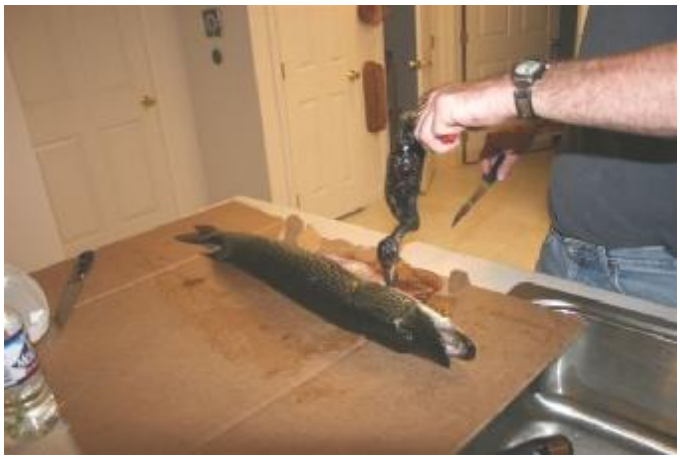
Call of the Loon

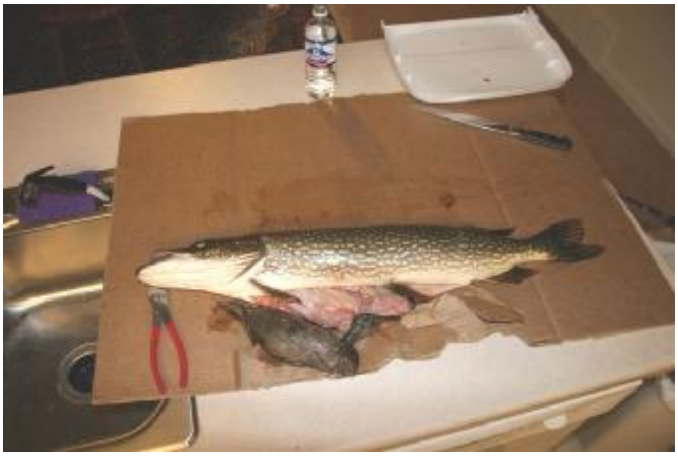
Newsletter of the COLD STREAM CAMPOWNERS ASSOCIATION, INC. **Fall, 2006**

PIKE IN THE PENOBSCOT DRAINAGE - By Nels Kramer

By now most everybody has heard that someone illegally introduced Northern Pike into Pushaw Lake. Pike grow fast and get big, very big. Pike are also good to eat. So, what's the problem?

There are many problems associated with pike in Pushaw Lake. Not the least is the details behind the rapid growth rate of pike. To grow to the large sizes that they are known for, pike must consume large amounts of food. Essentially pike are eating machines. The diet of pike changes as it grows from the larval stage to an adult. They start life consuming zooplankton and aquatic invertebrates and quickly grow at approximately ½ inch per week. At 1 inch in length, pike will start eating small shiners, sunfish, bass and trout or salmon where they occur. As they grow to an adult, pike move up the food chain and start preying upon larger perch, sunfish, trout and salmon. Because of anatomy unique to all ecocides (pickerel like), pike can consume prey slightly smaller in length than they are. I have personally observed a 13-inch pickerel with an 8-½ inch brown trout in the esophagus. That pickerel then took a lure with the tail of the brown trout sticking out its' mouth! Pike have been also been observed to exhibit the same characteristic, with a 20 inch pike able to consume a 10 to 12 inch trout. Just imagine what an older, larger pike (maybe 25 or 30 pounds) could consume!

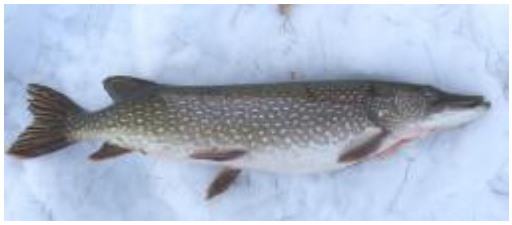




A large percentage of salmon observed in trap nets in Long Pond in the Belgrade Lake Region exhibit scars from pike attacks. These are salmon as large as 5 pounds with fresh scars from recent encounters with pike. Lagler (1956) estimated that pike on a single refuge in Michigan ate an average of 1.5 million waterfowl per year, although fish were the primary forage. It is also estimated that it takes 5 to 6 pounds of food for each pound increase in body weight of northern pike. A 20-pound pike would have to consume 100 to 120 pounds of food to get that big! Not a pleasant thought.

Another problem with pike in Pushaw Lake is some will most likely drop down the outlet and into the Penobscot River. From there, pike have access to approximately 3,500 miles of streams and 34,000 acres of lakes within the Penobscot Watershed north of the confluence with Pushaw Stream. We have moved aggressively to block their upstream migrations by installing barriers at fishways on the Penobscot River (West Enfield Dam) and on the Piscataquis River (Howland Dam). While we believe that these barriers will pass Atlantic salmon, and are effective at containing pike, this is not a permanent solution. Those barriers will not prevent someone else from moving pike from below either dam once they become abundant. Essentially a new source for further illegal introductions.

I have fielded numerous inquiries about the possibility of pike gaining access to Cold Stream Pond. We are consulting with a fishway engineer to design an upstream barrier to pike migration at Cold Stream Pond Dam fishway. To prevent any movement until an acceptable solution can be found, we have completely blocked the fishway at the outlet to any fish movement into the lake from Cold Stream. Again, this not a permanent solution, but necessary in the short term to prevent northern pike from moving into Cold Stream Pond.



Anglers must love them, right? Not all do, especially those who favor trout and salmon, the native fish Maine has been famous for. Everywhere in the United States with native salmonids that northern pike have been introduced, cold-water fishing has suffered. Everywhere! It is not unreasonable to expect that there would be very few wild brook trout in systems with pike.

It is illegal to stock any species of fish, even baitfish, in any Maine water. A minimum reward of $2,000 is offered for information leading to the apprehension of the person or persons responsible for the illegal introduction of fish into any inland water body in Maine. Please call the Fisheries Office in Enfield at 723-4131 or Operation Game Thief at 1-800-253-7887 if you have any information relevant to this or these types of incidents.