

# AIS

## Aquatic Invasive Species

### WHITE PERCH



**COMMON NAME:** White Perch

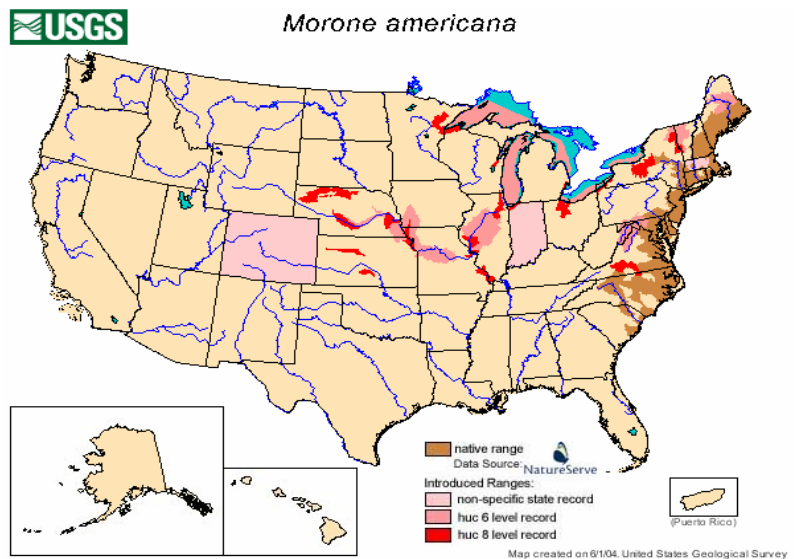
Other names, such as sea perch, silver perch, gray perch, blue nose perch and wreckfish, may be used to describe the white perch.

**SCIENTIFIC NAME:** *Morone americana*

White perch belongs to the Moronidae family, which are the temperate basses. Gmelin first named the white perch in 1789.

**DISTRIBUTION:** White perch are semi-anadromous; they migrate from coastal waters to fresh or brackish water to spawn. Its native range is the Atlantic Slope drainages from Maine to South Carolina. They have expanded their range to the west to now include the Great Lakes as well as a number of waters in the Midwest and Great Plains..

**Indiana:** White perch have been found in Indiana's portion of Lake Michigan, Wolf Lake, Cedar Lake and Fancher Lake.



**DESCRIPTION:** The white perch is a deep-bodied fish that lacks any dark stripes on its sides (Gionfriddo, 2002). It has an oblong, compressed head, a pointed snout, terminal mouth, and some small teeth. The white perch has a silvery greenish gray body that is nearly black above. They can reach approximately 11 inches in length and weigh up to 13 ounces. It may be confused with the native white bass but the white bass has dark horizontal lines on its sides. There are other morphological differences between white perch and white bass (See description of both species)



Images: White perch pictured at left. White bass pictured at right.

**LIFE CYCLE BIOLOGY AND LIFE HISTORY:** White perch can spawn in water that is clear or turbid, fast or slow, tidal or non tidal, and on any substrate. Eggs and sperm are released at the same time and the fertilized eggs attach to a substrate. A female white perch can release 20,000 eggs during each spawning period and they can spawn up to three times a year. Newly hatched larvae will drift downstream if hatched in rivers. As juveniles they will feed on zooplankton until large enough for larger prey. Males mature in 2 years and females mature anywhere from 2 to 4 years. As adults they will eat aquatic insects, crustaceans, fish eggs and fishes. The white perch is a prey species for salmon, brook trout, chain pickerel, smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, and other piscivores. Many birds and terrestrial animals also will prey on the white perch. This fish prefers areas with fairly level bottoms of silt, mud, sand or clay. They are found in estuaries and in freshwater ecosystems.

**PATHWAYS/HISTORY:** The white perch first entered the Great Lakes in 1950 apparently through the Erie Canal. They first gained access into Lake Ontario and from here they expanded into all of the Great Lakes. In 1967, white perch were accidentally released in Nebraska into the Missouri River. Many states have since intentionally released individuals for sport fishing. Other introductions appear to be the result of illegal stockings by anglers.

**DISPERSAL/SPREAD:** Once the white perch gains access to a new body of water, they will expand their population very rapidly. They will then distribute to other areas provided there are no barriers to block movement. In Indiana, anglers are the likely culprits for the spread into some of the invaded waters. Indiana has three known inland waters that contain white perch. This species likely invaded Wolf Lake via a waterway connection with Lake Michigan. Cedar Lake and Koontz Lake however have no waterway connection with Lake Michigan. Therefore, it is likely that anglers intentionally moved this species to these two waters in hopes of creating additional fishing opportunities. While some states have stocked this species to create additional

fishing opportunities, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources has never stocked white perch.

**RISKS/IMPACTS:** Because white perch prey heavily on the fish eggs they pose a threat to those species that they prey upon. Walleye eggs and white bass eggs seem to be the preferred diet of white perch. At the times when each of these fish are spawning, their eggs can make up 100% of the white perch diet. It was believed that the devastated population of walleye in the Bay of Quinte (Lake Ontario) was directly related to the increased population of white perch. When it is not spawning season, white perch will feed on a great deal of minnows. Not only does the white perch prey upon the eggs of some of our native fishes, they also compete with other native fishes. One study found that white perch compete with native yellow perch for zooplankton and that their diets significantly overlap. It has also been said that they compete with forage fishes, which in turn hurts the larger predators. White perch are also degrading the gene pool of white bass by hybridizing with them.

**MANAGEMENT/ PREVENTION:** In Indiana, it is illegal to import or possess live white perch. If a white perch is caught, it must not be released alive. Once the species invades a body of water, the only effective option to eliminate the species is to completely eradicate the fishery. However, public support for projects like this can be difficult at times. Prevention of the further spread of the white perch is the main management objective. There are things you can do to prevent spreading this invasive species to new waters.

- ✓ Learn to correctly identify white perch, and know the difference between white perch and white bass.
- ✓ Kill all white perch caught. IT IS THE LAW!
- ✓ Dispose of unused bait in the trash or on land. Never dump unused bait into the water.
- ✓ Never transfer fish from one body of water to another.
- ✓ If you suspect you have caught a white perch from a body of water where they are not yet known to occur, preserve the catch and contact the district fisheries biologist immediately.

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Images compliments of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Geological Survey.

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