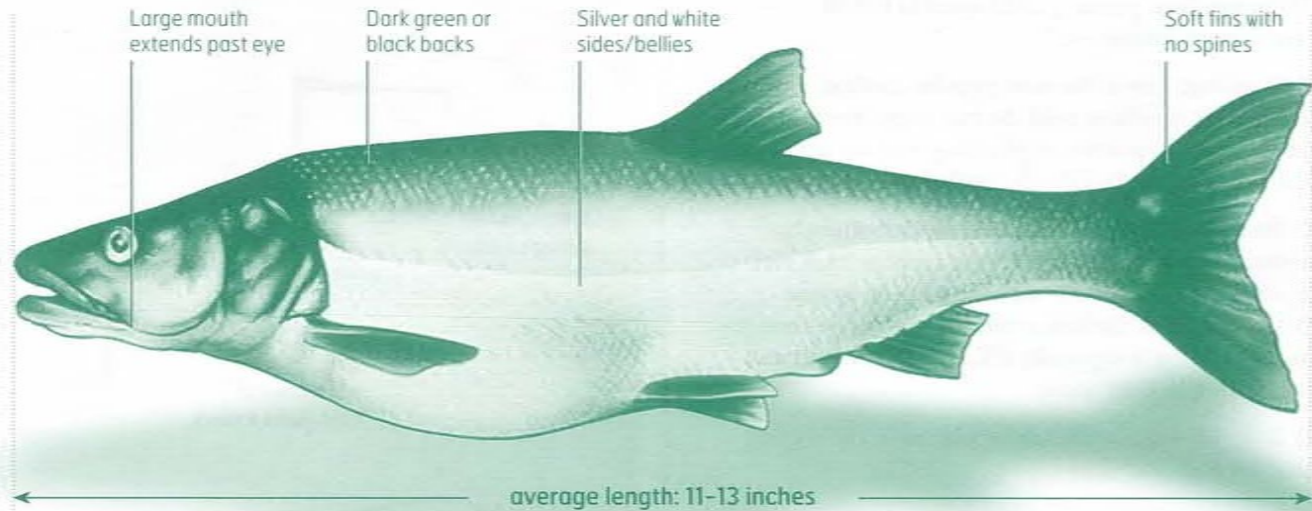


Identifying a Northern Pikeminnow:



Understanding Northern Pikeminnow

Northern pikeminnow, a native fish species inhabiting many lakes and rivers of the Pacific Northwest, have been found to be the primary fish predator of juvenile salmonids in the Columbia and Snake rivers. Until recent years, these fish were known as squawfish, until the American Fisheries Society changed the name in 1997.

Pikeminnow have soft fins with no spines and no visible teeth. They typically have silver and white sides/bellies and dark green to black backs. In warmer water and smaller tributaries they may develop a yellow tinge with orange fins as they near spawning.

Pikeminnow are not really known as a schooling fish although they will congregate in specific areas for spawning or to take advantage of feeding opportunities. They do not typically travel great distances, but they may move into tributaries or between reservoirs to feed and/or spawn.

Since 1991, the average size Northern pikeminnow turned in to the Sport Reward Fishery Program is approximately 11 inches total length and weighing

slightly more than 1 pound. The largest Northern pikeminnow turned in to the sport reward fishery was about 26 inches long and weighed nearly 7 pounds.

Locating Northern Pikeminnow

To catch Northern pikeminnow, you must first locate them. Use the information provided in this brochure on pikeminnow biology to help you find them. Plan to fish an area only a short period of time (30 minutes at most). If you are not hooking pikeminnow, MOVE! Pikeminnow will take many different baits and lures, so the real trick is to keep moving until you find them. Often, moving a short distance may be all that is needed to start hooking them.

Check the Sport Reward Hotline by calling **(800) 858-9015** each spring for any program changes, clinics, or special events.

Or visit us on the web at:
www.pikeminnow.org

Glossary of terms

Northern pikeminnow: Formerly known as Northern squawfish (*Ptychocheilus oregonensis*), was renamed Northern pikeminnow by the American Fisheries Society's Names Committee in 1997. It is the primary fish predator of juvenile salmonids in the Columbia and Snake rivers.

Current break: The line or margin created when two different speeds or directions of water come together.

Wing dam: A row of wooden pilings typically extending a short distance out from shore that is used to reduce erosion. Wing dams are most often seen in the Columbia River below Bonneville Dam.

Crank bait: A hard wooden or plastic lure, often with a flat bill near the point where the line is attached, which typically wiggles or dives when retrieved. These lures usually imitate minnows or crayfish.

Egg/bait loop: A common fishing lure knot used by salmon and steelhead anglers which allows a loop of the leader material to encircle the bait on the hook. It is used to help keep the bait on the hook when casting and to reduce the chances that a fish can take the bait without being hooked.

SPORT REWARD HOTLINE

(800) 858-9015 (Toll Free)
(360) 906-6707 (In Vancouver, Wash.)

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An Angler's Guide to Finding and Catching Northern Pikeminnow in the Columbia and Snake rivers



Feeding habits

Northern pikeminnow are predatory fish which actively stalk and ambush live prey. Northern pikeminnow feed primarily on insects and crayfish as juveniles, but begin to prey on other fishes, including salmonids, as they reach sexual maturity at 4-5 years old and 11 inches total length. The fish typically feed by cruising shoreline areas and searching for prey fish to intercept.

Habitat

Studies have found that Northern pikeminnow are not strong swimmers for any extended length of time. This means that, in rivers, they are not typically found holding in areas of heavy flow without some type of structure available for them to find shelter from the current. Northern pikeminnow find that these sheltered areas also serve as ideal spots in which to dart out and ambush juvenile salmonids. The same structures that provide shelter to Northern pikeminnow, are often fairly obvious for anglers to find. Look for visible current breaks which are always associated with some type of structure. Many anglers find these current breaks by looking around obvious geographic features (which also serve as structure) such as boulders, docks, wing dams, pilings and tributary mouths. In addition, Northern pikeminnow anglers often rely on sonar (fish finders) to locate underwater structures such as trenches, holes, rocks and drop-offs.

Spawning

Northern pikeminnow begin to spawn when water temperatures reach about 60 degrees. As spawning approaches, Northern pikeminnow move toward shore areas as shallow as 1-2 feet deep with males typically arriving in these areas first, and females arriving when ripe. The ratio of male to female Northern pikeminnow may reach 50:1 during this period. Eggs and sperm are broadcast over gravel and adhere to substrate after fertilization. After the spawning period, these groups of pikeminnow typically break up and move into deeper water for a week or two, most likely to recuperate from the rigors of spawning.

Fishing with tackle

There are three basic types of tackle used by sport reward fishery anglers to catch Northern pikeminnow.

Bait: Common baits include worms, crayfish, cut-bait, grasshopper or crickets, and the most popular bait of all, fresh chicken liver. Baits are usually fished on a bait-type hook tied with an egg/bait loop (see *illust. b*) or on a small treble hook (see *illust. a*). Weight varies with the speed of the current, but is typically rigged to slide on the main line. For the most part, baits are cast into likely pikeminnow holding areas and drifted in an arc downstream as in steelhead back-bouncing or drift fishing. Once pikeminnow are located plunking baits can also be effective.

Lures: Common lures include crank baits, spinners and spoons. They are most effective once the water temperature has reached 60 degrees. Recommended colors imitate juvenile salmonids or other small fishes. Examples of effective colors are silver with a dark colored (black, blue, green) back, black and white, and prism colors such as a rainbow trout. Spinners and spoons should have a silver, nickel or brass blade and a blue, green, black and gray colored body. Lures are either cast from the shore or from a boat towards the shore. They may also be trolled behind a moving or anchored boat.

Soft-plastics with lead-head jigs: These include tube jigs, curly-tailed worms and plastic minnow imitations. Cast above likely pikeminnow holding areas and drift the lure along the bottom in a drift-fishing manner. Use grubs or worms (3 to 6 inches long), tube jugs (3 to 4 inches long), or shad-type bodies (1-1/2 to 4 inches long). Jig size is determined by the water velocity of the area to be fished. The jig head should be heavy enough for the lure to reach bottom and then touch bottom several more times during the drift, but not so heavy that it sticks and stays in one spot on the bottom. One-eighth or one-quarter ounce jig-heads are commonly used. Jig-heads of one-half ounce or more are occasionally used from a boat, you may also want jig-heads as heavy as 1-1/2 ounces or bottom walkers (wire "arms" weighted with leads).

Effective colors include blue and black with chartreuse, white, silver with black and dark greens. A good basic rule is, for bright light and clear water, use light colors; for low light and cloudy water, use dark colors.

Fishing techniques

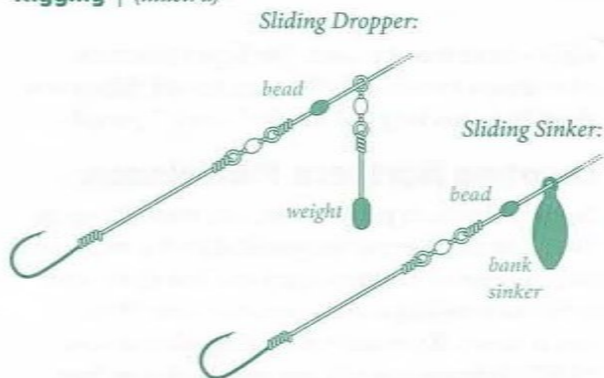
There are three primary techniques to fish for Northern pikeminnow:

1) Plunking: This is the most popular method. Use just enough weight to hold the bait in position against the current. A variation of plunking is to use a little less weight so the bait slowly "walks" with the current.

2) Back-bouncing: Lift the bait off the bottom by raising the rod tip 1 to 2 feet. Free spool or back reel to allow the bait to move with the current. Repeat these steps when the bait settles back to the bottom. Back-bouncing is especially effective from a boat and can be used in deep water.

3) Drift-fishing: Use the same technique and rigging used for steelhead drift-fishing.

Rigging | (*illust. a*)



Plunk bait: Use lead weights from one-half ounce to 2 ounces, depending on the current. Bank sinkers are most commonly used. Number 2 hooks are recommended.

Sliding Sinkers: With two swivels, rig a sliding dropper (see *illust. a*). Plastic beads can be used between the weight and swivel to protect the knot. For drift-fishing baits, use weights ranging from one-eighth to one-half ounce. Use pencil lead wire pinched on the drop-line, or lead shot inside a "slinky." If necessary, use a corky or small float to keep the bait off the bottom.

How to tie an egg/bait loop knot | (*illust. b*)

