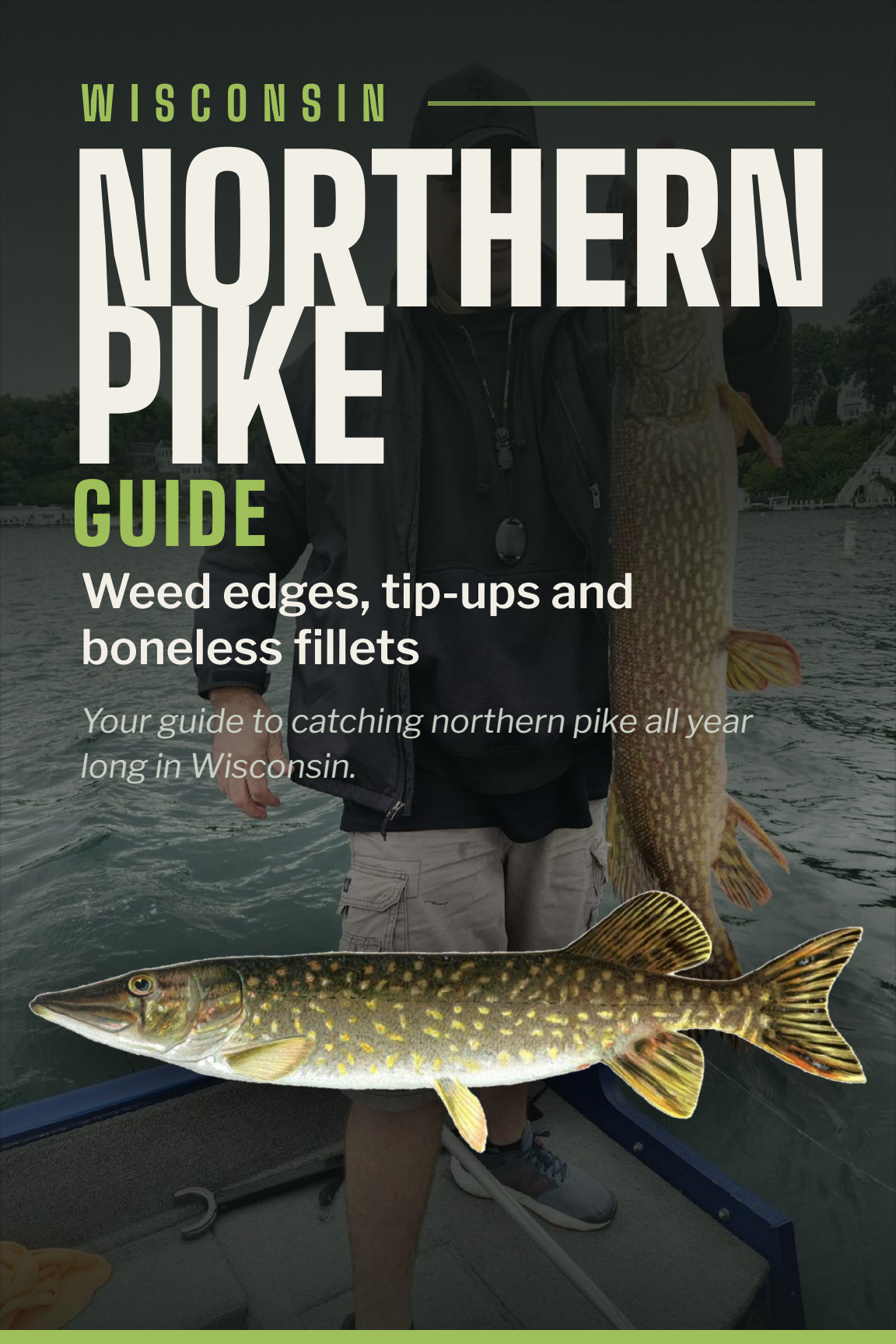
WISCONSIN

NORTHERN PIKE GUIDE

Weed edges, tip-ups and boneless fillets

Your guide to catching northern pike all year long in Wisconsin.



WISCONSIN

NORTHERN PIKE

Guide

Weed edges, tip-ups and boneless fillets



Wisconsin Northern Pike Guide
First edition, October 2026

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Read this first. Fishing rules change every year and differ by lake. Everything about seasons, sizes and bag limits in this book is for the 2026–27 season, checked 2026-10-08. Always check the current Wisconsin DNR rules and your lake's own rules before you fish. Depth maps are not for navigation. Ice is never guaranteed safe. You are responsible for your own safety and for following the law.

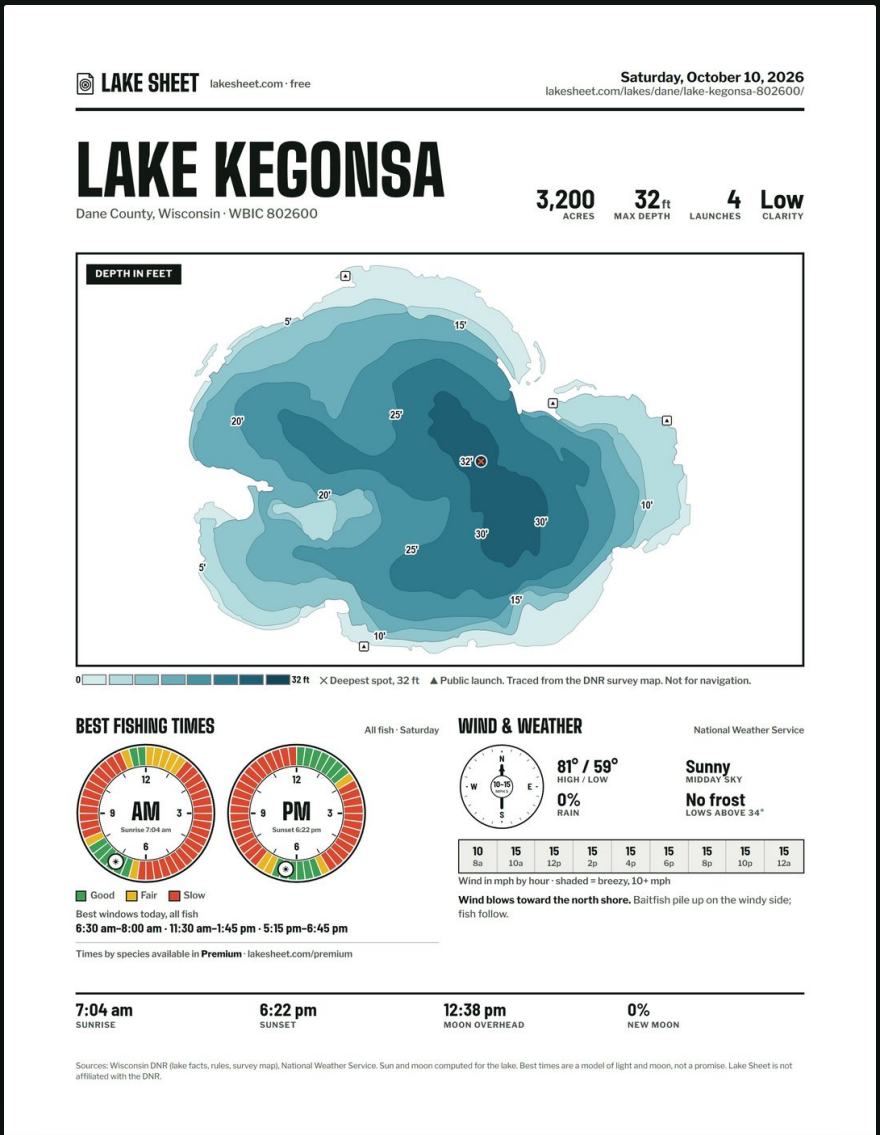
Lake Sheet is not affiliated with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Lake facts come from DNR survey and stocking records as published by Lake Sheet; see the sources at the back of the book.

lakesheet.com

FREE WITH THIS BOOK

YOUR FREE LAKE SHEET

Free for more than 4,600 Wisconsin lakes: two printable pages, made for the boat. This is the real sheet for Lake Kegonsa.



LAKE SHEET lakesheet.com · free

Saturday, October 10, 2026
lakesheet.com/lakes/dane/lake-kegonsa-802600/

LAKE KEGONSA

Dane County, Wisconsin · WBIC 802600

3,200	32 ft	4	Low
ACRES	MAX DEPTH	LAUNCHES	CLARITY

DEPTH IN FEET

5' 15' 20' 25' 32' 20' 10' 30' 30' 25' 5' 15' 10'

0 32 ft · ✕ Deepest spot, 32 ft · ▲ Public launch. Traced from the DNR survey map. Not for navigation.

BEST FISHING TIMES

All fish · Saturday

AM — Sunrise 7:04 am

PM — Sunset 6:22 pm

Good · Fair · Slow

Best windows today, all fish
6:30 am–8:00 am · 11:30 am–1:45 pm · 5:15 pm–6:45 pm

Times by species available in **Premium** · lakesheet.com/premium

WIND & WEATHER

National Weather Service

81° / 59°
HIGH / LOW

0%
RAIN

Sunny
MIDDAY SKY

No frost
LOWS ABOVE 34°

10	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15
8a	10a	12p	2p	4p	6p	8p	10p	12a

Wind in mph by hour · shaded = breezy, 10+ mph

Wind blows toward the north shore. Baitfish pile up on the windy side; fish follow.

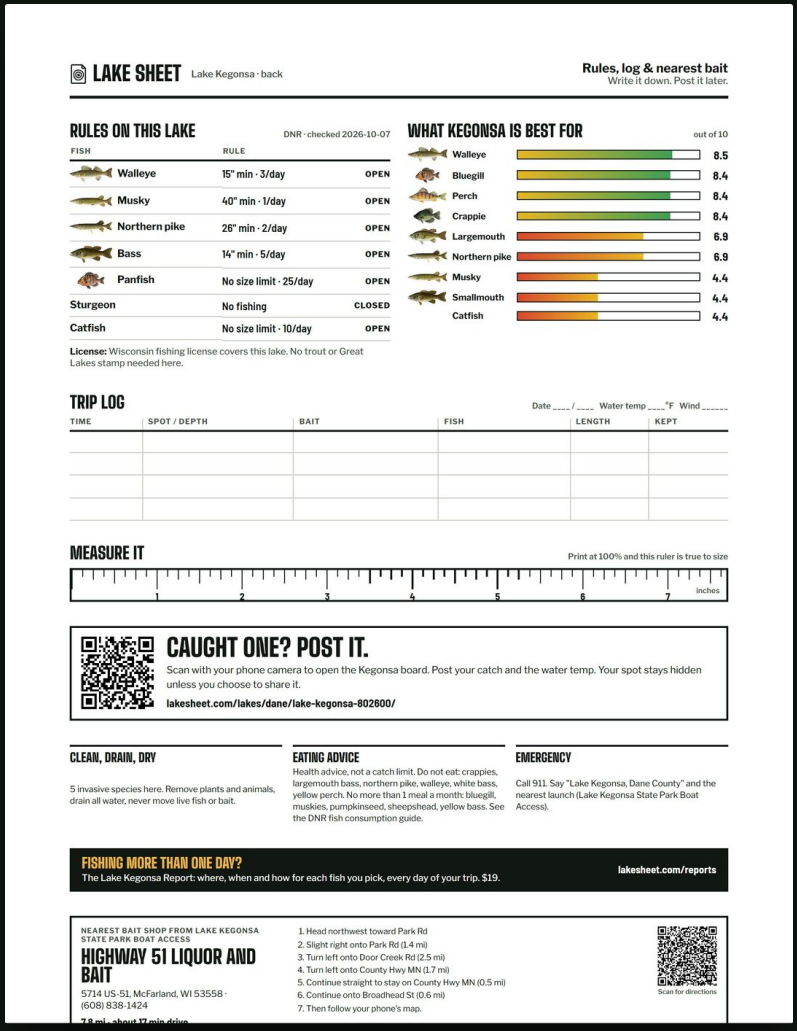
7:04 am	6:22 pm	12:38 pm	0%
SUNRISE	SUNSET	MOON OVERHEAD	NEW MOON

Sources: Wisconsin DNR (lake facts, rules, survey map), National Weather Service. Sun and moon computed for the lake. Best times are a model of light and moon, not a promise. Lake Sheet is not affiliated with the DNR.

1. **Depth map** traced from the DNR survey, deepest spot marked (traced lakes)
2. **Lake facts:** acres, max depth, launches, clarity
3. **Best times** from the sun and moon on AM and PM dials
4. **Wind and weather** by the hour, and which shore the wind hits
5. **Sun and moon** times for the lake
6. **Sources and date** on every fact

THE BACK OF THE SHEET

RULES, LOG & NEAREST BAIT



LAKE SHEET Lake Kegonsa · back

Rules, log & nearest bait
Write it down. Post it later.

RULES ON THIS LAKE

DNR · checked 2026-10-07

FISH	RULE	
Walleye	15" min · 3/day	OPEN
Musky	40" min · 1/day	OPEN
Northern pike	26" min · 2/day	OPEN
Bass	14" min · 5/day	OPEN
Panfish	No size limit · 25/day	OPEN
Sturgeon	No fishing	CLOSED
Catfish	No size limit · 10/day	OPEN

License: Wisconsin fishing license covers this lake. No trout or Great Lakes stamp needed here.

WHAT KEGONSA IS BEST FOR

out of 10

Walleye	8.5
Bluegill	8.4
Perch	8.4
Crappie	8.4
Largemouth	6.9
Northern pike	6.9
Musky	4.4
Smallmouth	4.4
Catfish	4.4

TRIP LOG

Date ____ / ____ Water temp ____°F Wind _____

TIME	SPOT / DEPTH	BAIT	FISH	LENGTH	KEPT

MEASURE IT

Print at 100% and this ruler is true to size

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 inches

CAUGHT ONE? POST IT.

Scan with your phone camera to open the Kegonsa board. Post your catch and the water temp. Your spot stays hidden unless you choose to share it.

lakesheet.com/lakes/dane/lake-kegonsa-802600/

CLEAN, DRAIN, DRY

5 invasive species here. Remove plants and animals, drain all water, never move live fish or bait.

EATING ADVICE

Health advice, not a catch limit. Do not eat: crappies, largemouth bass, northern pike, walleye, white bass, yellow perch. No more than 1 meal a month: bluegill, muskies, pumpkinseed, sheepshead, yellow bass. See the DNR fish consumption guide.

EMERGENCY

Call 911. Say "Lake Kegonsa, Dane County" and the nearest launch (Lake Kegonsa State Park Boat Access).

FISHING MORE THAN ONE DAY?
The Lake Kegonsa Report: where, when and how for each fish you pick, every day of your trip. $19.
lakesheet.com/reports

NEAREST BAIT SHOP FROM LAKE KEGONSA STATE PARK BOAT ACCESS

HIGHWAY 51 LIQUOR AND BAIT

5714 US-51, McFarland, WI 53558 · (608) 838-1424

7.8 mi · about 17 min drive

1. Head northwest toward Park Rd
2. Slight right onto Park Rd (1.4 mi)
3. Turn left onto Door Creek Rd (2.5 mi)
4. Turn left onto County Hwy MN (1.7 mi)
5. Continue straight to stay on County Hwy MN (0.5 mi)
6. Continue onto Broadhead St (0.6 mi)
7. Then follow your phone's map.

Scan for directions

1. **This lake's rules** for every fish, from the DNR
2. **What the lake is best for,** rated by fish
3. **Trip log** and a true-size **ruler**
4. **Invasive species** and eating advice
5. **Nearest bait shop** we know of, with turn-by-turn directions
6. Scan to post your catch

lakesheet.com

Find your lake, print it, take it in the boat

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is built to be used, not just read. Read Chapter 1 once so you can tell a pike from a musky. After that, jump to the month you're fishing in Chapter 3, find a lake in Chapter 7, and use Chapter 6 to plan where to start on it. Before your first pike lands in the boat, read 8.4 on handling a toothy fish. Before your first one lands on the cutting board, read 9.3 on the Y-bones.

IF YOU HAVE ONE EVENING

1. Look up your lake's free Lake Sheet.
2. Read your month in Chapter 3.
3. Tie a leader on and clip on a spoon (Chapter 4).
4. Cast the outside weed edge on the shore the wind hits.

IF YOU'RE NEW TO PIKE

1. Chapter 1: what you're after, and how not to get bitten.
2. Chapter 4: buy the budget kit, leaders included.
3. Chapter 5: learn the spoon cast first, then the tip-up.
4. Chapter 10: the questions everyone asks.

The QR codes. The 15 lakes in Chapter 7 and the worked example in Chapter 6 each have a code. Scan it with your phone camera and you land on that lake's free Lake Sheet: the depth map (where the lake has one), best-times dials, wind by the hour, launches, the nearest bait shop when one is in our list, and the lake's own rules. Rivers, Green Bay and a few other waters named in this book don't have a Lake Sheet.

The rules. Pike rules in Wisconsin depend on which side of US Highway 10 you fish, and hundreds of lakes have their own. Rules in this book are for the 2026–27 season. Before you keep a fish, check the current rules. The fastest way is the rules box on your lake's Lake Sheet.



CHAPTER 1

MEET THE NORTHERN PIKE

The northern pike is the fish that hits hardest and gives up least, and it lives in more Wisconsin lakes than walleye or musky. The DNR calls it Wisconsin's second-largest predator fish, after its cousin the musky. It bites in daylight, it bites in cold water, and it bites all winter under the ice. Learn how it hunts and where it waits, and you'll catch pike on almost any lake in the state.

1.1 How to tell a pike · **1.2** Pike, musky and tiger musky · **1.3** Size, growth and records · **1.4** The teeth · **1.5** What pike eat · **1.6** Spawning · **1.7** How pike live · **1.8** Pike and the lake around them

1.1
HOW TO TELL A PIKE

NORTHERN PIKE

Esox lucius



TELL IT BY	Long, tube-shaped body and a flat, duckbill snout. Rows of light, bean-shaped spots on a dark olive-green body. Fins rounded at the tips.
LOOKS LIKE	Muskellunge: dark markings on a light body, pointed fin tips, and scales on only the top half of the cheek and gill cover. Tiger musky: irregular tiger-stripe bands. See 1.2.
TEETH	Long canines around the lower jaw and rows of small, sharp teeth on the roof of the mouth. Never put your fingers in a pike's mouth.
SIZE	Most Wisconsin catches are 18 to 20 inches and about 2 lb. A 36-inch pike is a fish to remember.
WISCONSIN RECORD	38 lb 0 oz, 45.5 in — J.A. Rahn, Lake Puckaway, Green Lake County, Aug. 6, 1952
EATS	Mostly fish: perch, suckers, minnows, sunfish, even smaller pike. Also frogs, crayfish, shrews and mice.

Wisconsin anglers call it a northern, a jack, a snake or a hammer handle (a small, skinny one). Older names include pickerel and jackfish. The scientific name, *Esox lucius*, joins the old European name for pike (*Esox*) with a supposed Latin name for the fish (*lucius*). The city of Kenosha takes its name from a Native American word for pike, "Kinoje" or "Ke-no-shay," according to the DNR.

Look at three things. The bean-shaped light spots in rows along a dark green side; the rounded tips of every fin; and the scales on the cheek and gill cover. On a pike the whole cheek is scaled, plus the top half of the gill

cover. Northern pike are the only members of their family with those light, bean-shaped markings.

Some Wisconsin lakes also hold the rare **silver pike**: a solid silver or gray form of the northern pike with the same body and fins but none of the spots. It's still a northern pike under the rules.

1.2
PIKE, MUSKY AND TIGER MUSKY



FIG 1.1 Muskellunge. Dark bars or spots on a light body and pointed fin tips. Same family, very different rules.

Pike and musky look alike at a glance, and the rules for them are very different: in most of the state a musky must be at least 40 inches to keep, and on many waters 50. Learn the difference before you keep a fish.

	NORTHERN PIKE	MUSKELLUNGE	TIGER MUSKY (HYBRID)
Markings	Light, bean-shaped spots on a dark body	Dark bars, spots or none, on a light body	Irregular tiger-stripe bands
Fin tips	Rounded	Pointed	Rounded
Cheek and gill cover	Whole cheek scaled; top half of gill cover scaled	Top half of cheek and top half of gill cover only; both lower halves bare	Cheek fully or partly scaled
Pores under the jaw (each side)	Usually 5; 5 to 7 (WI DNR)	6 to 9 (WI DNR)	5 to 7
Size	Most 18–20 in	Grows larger than pike	Like a musky
Wisconsin record	38 lb 0 oz	69 lb 11 oz	51 lb 3 oz

Rules	Pike rules (Chapter 8)	Musky rules	Counts as a musky

The fast check. Light spots on dark = pike. Dark marks on light = musky. Then check the pores: the Iowa DNR's rule is 5 or fewer on each side = pike, 6 or more = musky. The Wisconsin DNR's leaflets give pike 5 to 7 and musky 6 to 9, so a count of 6 or 7 settles nothing: go by the markings, the fin tips and the bare lower half of a musky's cheek and gill cover. If you're still not sure, measure it, take a photo and let it go. A tiger musky (a cross between a male northern and a female musky) is counted as a musky under Wisconsin rules.

1.3
SIZE, GROWTH AND RECORDS

Pike grow fastest in their first few years. Males may mature at age 1 and always do by age 2, at about 16 to 18 inches. Females may mature at 2 and always do by 3, at about 20 to 22 inches. Most pike live about 7 years, but some reach 25 in the wild.

How fast do Wisconsin pike really grow? Recent DNR lake surveys age pike from a fin ray and compare them with the state average. Two good pike lakes:

PIKE LENGTH	AGE FOUND BY THE DNR	LAKE AND SURVEY
17.4 in	4 years (male, average)	Jordan Lake, Adams Co., 2024
18 in	about 3 years (males and females)	Pigeon Lake, Waupaca Co., 2025
19.3 in	4 years (female, average)	Jordan Lake, 2024
21 in	about 3½ years (male), about 4 (female)	Pigeon Lake, 2025
26 in	about 5 years (female; range 4 to 7)	Pigeon Lake, 2025

DNR survey reports, Adams-Jordan Lake 2024 and Pigeon Lake 2025. The DNR rated growth in both lakes about average for Wisconsin. Growth varies a lot from lake to lake. An older DNR leaflet (2008) printed a much faster table (28 inches at age 4); recent lake surveys don't support it.

So a 20-inch pike is about 4 years old, and a 26-inch female, the smallest you can keep in the Southern Zone, is about 5. The biggest pike in those two surveys were 39 inches (Jordan) and 38 inches (Pigeon).

How heavy? A common anglers' rule of thumb (not a DNR figure) estimates weight from length: length × length × length ÷ 3,500 gives pounds. By that rule a 30-inch pike is about 7.7 lb, a 36-inch pike about 13 lb and a 40-inch pike about 18 lb. Thin spring fish weigh less, fat fall fish more; weigh it if it matters.

The records. Wisconsin's hook-and-line record northern pike weighed 38 lb 0 oz and measured 45.5 inches. J.A. Rahn caught it on Lake Puckaway in Green Lake County on August 6, 1952. The live-release (length) record is 46.25 inches, caught by Joseph Berg on Green Bay in Oconto County on September 7, 2019. The Lake Puckaway record has stood since 1952, more than 70 years. A live-release record is measured and photographed, then the fish goes back.

1.4

THE TEETH

A pike's mouth is lined with weapons. Long, pointed canine teeth ring the wide lower jaw. Short, sharp, brush-like teeth cover the roof of the mouth and the tongue, all slanted back toward the throat so prey can go in but not out. Worn or broken teeth are replaced all year by new teeth that grow in beside the old ones.

That one fact decides most of your gear and handling:

- **Leaders.** Pike teeth cut monofilament, fluorocarbon under about 40 lb, and even braid. Use a leader (4.2).
- **Pliers.** Never reach into a pike's mouth with your fingers. Use long-nose pliers, 8 inches or longer (4.6).
- **The gill rakers.** The gills are as sharp as the teeth. Don't slide fingers under the gill cover unless you know exactly where the gap is (8.4).

THE SUMMER TEETH MYTH

Pike don't lose all their teeth in August. The DNR explains that teeth are replaced a few at a time all year. Pike bite less in late summer because food is plentiful and the biggest fish have moved to cooler, deeper water.

1.5
WHAT PIKE EAT

The DNR calls the pike a fish "dedicated to gluttony." It hunts by sight, hiding alone in weeds until prey swims past, then lunging out to grab it. A pike will eat any animal that fits down its throat: perch, suckers, minnows, sunfish, bass, other pike, frogs, crayfish, shrews and mice, and the DNR has records of pike eating squirrels and sandpipers. A young pike eats five to six pounds of food for every pound it grows.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR BAIT

Pike like a meal. Use lures and baits from 3 to 8 inches long, with flash or a wide wobble: spoons, spinners, jerkbaits, swimbaits, and suckers or shiners from 4 to 8 inches. In clear water, perch and silver colors; in stained water, firetiger and chartreuse. Keep it moving: the DNR's tip is that pike strike moving baits.

1.6
SPAWNING

Pike spawn earlier than any other Wisconsin game fish, as soon as the ice starts breaking up: late March to early April in the south, mid-April to early May in the north. They move in at night when the water is 34 to 40°F, with 36 to 37°F their favorite.

- **Where:** marshes and flooded wetlands with grasses, sedges, rushes and cattails, in water a foot deep or less. Flooded shoreline grass and marshy inlet creeks are prime.
- **How:** one female swims with one to three males. With every spawning act, 3 to 10 seconds long, she drops 5 to 60 sticky eggs that cling to plants. She repeats it about once a minute for an hour or more. Pike don't build nests or guard eggs.
- **The eggs** hatch in 12 to 14 days. More than 99% of eggs and fry are eaten by insects and fish, including other pike, before fall.

Inland pike season is closed during spawning; it opens the first Saturday in May. In the south the fish are done by then and back in the bays, feeding

hard. In the far north, after a late ice-out, pike can still be near the marshes, or even spawning, on opening day (Chapter 3).

PROTECT THE MARSH
The DNR names loss of spawning marsh as the biggest danger to Wisconsin pike. Lakes with healthy marshes and flooded shoreline grass make their own pike. Lakes without them depend on stocking.

1.7
HOW PIKE LIVE

Pike are made for cool water. The DNR says they're most active when the water is cool and are caught more easily in winter than in summer. They also handle low oxygen better than most game fish, so they survive winters that kill other fish.

- **Spring and fall:** pike roam the shallows and weed edges, often in less than 10 feet.
- **Summer:** small pike stay in the weeds; big pike look for cool water near springs, inlet creeks, and on deep lakes near the bottom of the drop-offs.
- **Winter:** pike feed under the ice all season, often in shallow weeds at first ice.
- **Time of day:** pike feed by sight and bite best in daylight. Unlike walleye, they rarely make you fish at dawn or after dark.

REMEMBER
- Most pike sit where green weeds meet deeper water.
- In cold water, pause the lure; in warm water, keep it moving.
- In July and August, look for big pike on the deepest weed edge or near springs and creek mouths.

COMMON MISTAKES
- Fishing without a leader.
- Reaching into the mouth to unhook a pike.
- Calling a 42-inch "pike" a pike before you've checked the markings.

1.8

PIKE AND THE LAKE AROUND THEM

Pike sit at the top of the food chain. The DNR's leaflet says that the young pike that survive "swim to the top of the aquatic food chain," where they dominate other species, musky included. Young pike have a hard start: the DNR says fingerlings are eaten by aquatic mammals, waterfowl, diving birds and many other fishes, so few make it.

- **Pike and musky.** In many lakes that were once musky lakes, the DNR says, the more aggressive northern pike has become the dominant species.
- **Pike and panfish.** Pike eat perch, sunfish and small bass. The DNR calls the pike "a key to maintaining the balance of other fish populations."
- **Pike and walleye.** Pike and walleye share many lakes. Small walleye are prey; big walleye compete with pike for perch.

Fish stories. A famous legend tells of a 19-foot, 550-pound, 267-year-old pike pulled from a German lake in 1497. Its "skeleton" turned out to hold bones from several fish. The DNR's leaflet calls it the Mannheim Hoax. The real numbers are smaller: the Wisconsin record is 38 pounds, and the leaflet gives the national record as a 46-pound pike from a New York reservoir in 1940.

IN ONE LINE

Pike are hungry, hard-hitting ambushers that live in weeds and cool water, bite in daylight, and grow fast in their first years. Every chapter in this book builds on that.



CHAPTER 2

WHERE PIKE LIVE IN WISCONSIN

Northern pike are native to Wisconsin and live in every part of the state: lakes, flowages, rivers, backwaters and both Great Lakes. If a lake has weeds and a marsh, it probably has pike. This chapter shows where the most pike are, how the state splits into two pike zones at Highway 10, and how to tell in two minutes whether your lake has them.

2.1 A fish of the whole state · **2.2** The pike counties · **2.3** Two zones: Highway 10 · **2.4** Rivers, flowages and the Great Lakes · **2.5** Stocking · **2.6** Does my lake have pike? · **2.7** Which kinds of lakes have pike

2.1
A FISH OF THE WHOLE STATE

The DNR says northern pike live in all three of Wisconsin's big drainages, the Mississippi River, Lake Michigan and Lake Superior, and are widely spread across the state. Two exceptions:

- **The unglaciated southwest (the Driftless Area).** Few natural lakes, so pike are scattered, mostly in the big rivers and in reservoirs.
- **The southeast.** The DNR says pike are rarely caught here; populations are "seriously depressed" by fishing pressure and lost wetlands. Many southeastern lakes now have special rules to rebuild them (Chapter 8).

Pike do best in shallow lakes with large weed beds. They put up with low oxygen better than most game fish, so they survive in shallow, weedy lakes that other fish can't.

2.2
THE PIKE COUNTIES

Lake Sheet has free sheets for more than 4,600 Wisconsin lakes as of October 2026 (4,631 when we counted), with more added each week. The DNR fish survey lists northern pike in 2,409 of them, more than any other game fish. The survey labels pike **abundant** in 95, **common** in 803 and **present** in 1,511. The counties with the most:

COUNTY	LAKES WITH PIKE IN THE DNR SURVEY	LAKES WHERE PIKE ARE "ABUNDANT"
Vilas	198	9
Oneida	182	3
Burnett	145	15
Washburn	128	15
Bayfield	115	8
Polk	95	1
Barron	80	–
Oconto	78	–