

# CHAIN PICKEREL

*(Esox niger)*

**Oneida Lake Status:  
Common**



*A chain pickerel in the wild:*

[http://www.nae.usace.army.mil/recreat/i/hel/ContoocookRiverWebsite/UnderwaterLife/ChainPickerel/FI0023\\_1m.jpg](http://www.nae.usace.army.mil/recreat/i/hel/ContoocookRiverWebsite/UnderwaterLife/ChainPickerel/FI0023_1m.jpg)



*Chain pickerel are a fun target for anglers on Oneida Lake: Photo courtesy of Captain Tony Buffa*



*Line drawing showing the chain pickerel's color pattern*

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*Edited June 2013*

- Good target for Oneida Lake ice anglers
- Voracious Oneida Lake predator
- Member of the pike family

The chain pickerel is a modest-sized fish that is a member of the pike family. In Oneida Lake, they may reach lengths of 25 inches, and may weigh up to 3.5 pounds. A chain pickerel is green to bronze in color, and its fully scaled cheeks and gill covers distinguish it from the northern pike and muskellunge. Additionally, its larger size and distinct chain link marks differentiate it from other pickerels. The chain pickerel has 8 sensory pores on the underside of the lower jaw and a dark bar beneath each eye that extends downward.

Chain pickerels prefer quiet, slow moving habitats of Oneida Lake that are known for heavy weed growth. Sometimes they can also be found in deeper water that lacks vegetation. In Oneida Lake, juvenile chain pickerel prey on crustaceans and insects, while adults feed mostly on fish, crayfish, and other slow moving prey. Chain pickerel tolerate high acidity levels, and have not been adversely affected in Oneida Lake by regional acid rain.

In Oneida Lake, chain pickerel are sometimes caught ice fishing, and are capable of exciting, explosive runs when hooked year-round. The meat of the pickerel is delicious, and is often ground up and formed into patties because of their many tiny bones.

Historically, chain pickerel were abundant in Oneida Lake, but populations significantly declined because of the draining of local marshes and wetland habitats.



*Close-up of a chain pickerel after being hooked by an angler*