



Chain Pickerel (*Esox niger*)

Fishes in the Pike family are all predators.* Some members of the Pike family may grow to a large size, but native pikes found in Alabama are relatively small. The chain pickerel is the larger native pike in Alabama.

A pickerel is a long, slender fish with a duckbill-shaped snout and lots of teeth. A chain pickerel has a large mouth; the distance from the tip of the snout to the center of the eye is noticeably longer than the center of the eye to the back edge of the gill cover.* A chain pickerel has a black bar below its eye that is almost vertical. The fish is named for the green rectangular pattern on its sides. An adult chain pickerel is often 15 inches to 30 inches long. The fishing record for a chain pickerel in Alabama is more than six pounds.

Found throughout Alabama, a chain pickerel will dart out from its weedy hiding place to eat almost anything that swims by it. It is most often found in oxbow lakes and larger backwater tributaries to rivers that have vegetated banks.*

A chain pickerel likes cold water, and anglers often catch one early in the year. Through sales of Alabama fishing and hunting licenses and taxes on their equipment, anglers and hunters pay for fish and wildlife management in Alabama.

***Vocabulary**

Gill cover – the area that covers the gills; it is flexible to allow water to move over the gills.

Oxbow lake – when a river bends and over time separates from the bend, an oxbow lake is formed.

Predators – animals that eat other animals.

Tributaries – streams that flow into larger streams.