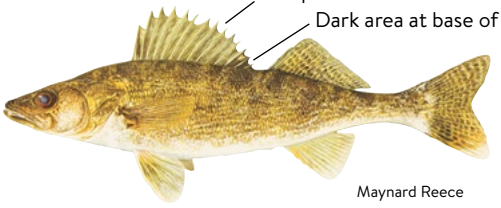
ILLUSTRATED FISH OF MINNESOTA

Knowing what fish species you are catching is not only fun, but in many cases it's required by law. It is particularly important to know how to distinguish walleye from sauger (and saugeye), to know the difference between northern pike and muskellunge, and to be able to tell what species of trout or salmon you catch.

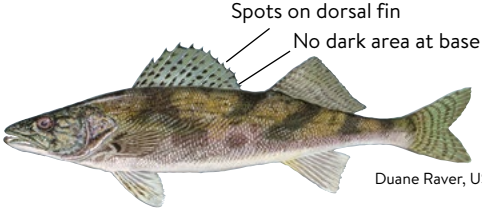
Walleye and Sauger

Walleye



Maynard Reece

Sauger



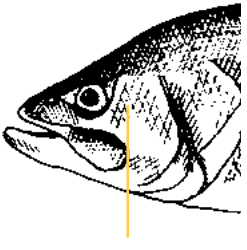
Duane Raver, USFWS

Walleye and sauger hybrid fillets are counted as part of a walleye possession limit during transportation.

Largemouth and Smallmouth Bass

Largemouth

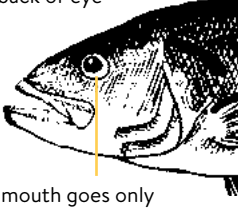
Duane Raver, USFWS



Back of mouth goes way beyond back of eye

Smallmouth

Duane Raver, USFWS



Back of mouth goes only to middle of eye

Northern Pike and Muskellunge

Muskellunge

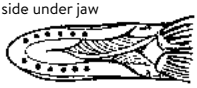
Muskie illustrations courtesy of ©Muskies Inc.

Clear

Paired fins having more pointed tips

Tail with pointed tips

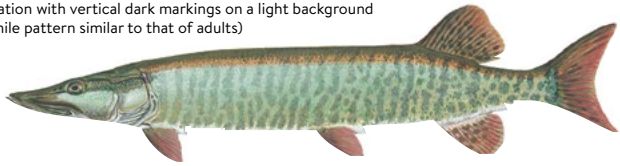
Six or more pores on each side under jaw



Spotted

Barred

Coloration with vertical dark markings on a light background (Juvenile pattern similar to that of adults)



Tiger (hybrid) Muskellunge *(Esox masquinongy X Esox lucius)*

Tail with rounded tips

Coloration having irregular narrow vertical dark markings on a light background with stripes merging onto the back in an interlocking pattern

Paired fins having rounded tips

Northern Pike *(Esox lucius)*

Tail with more rounded tips

Coloration with pattern of horizontal rows of light round to oval spots on a dark background

Five or fewer pores on each side under jaw

Paired fins having more rounded tips

(Juvenile pattern has white, oblique bars which extend from the white belly)

©MN DNR, C. Iverson

Catfish

Flathead Catfish

Square tail

Channel Catfish

Forked tail

Trout and Salmon

Brown Trout
Large dark spots and red dots on brown body

Square tail

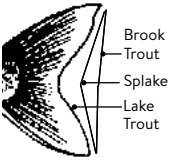
Duane Raver, USFWS

Brook Trout
White leading edge on lower fins

Light, wormlike markings on dark upper body

Duane Raver, USFWS

To tell a brook trout from a splake from a lake trout, look at the tail. A splake is a cross between a brook trout and a lake trout.



Lake Trout
White spots on grayish body

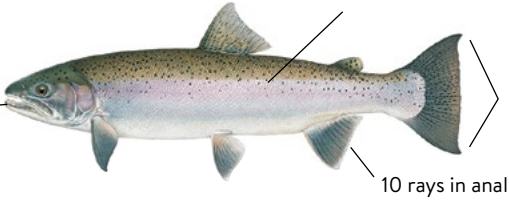
Forked tail

White leading edge on lower fins

©MN DNR, C. Iverson

Usually a pink stripe on silvery body

Steelhead (Rainbow Trout)
Inside mouth is white

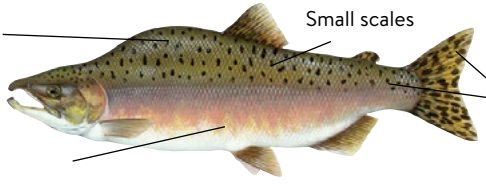


Small spots throughout tail

10 rays in anal fin

Joseph Tomelleri

Pink Salmon
Spawning male has hump on back.



Small scales

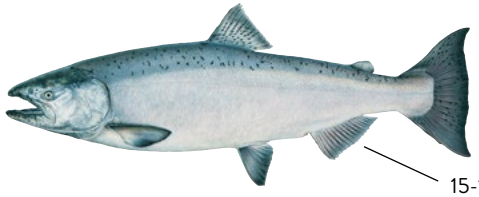
Some eye-sized spots in tail and on back

Green and white blotches on spawning fish

Tim Knepp, USFWS

Chinook Salmon

Inside mouth is dark



Spots throughout tail

15-17 rays in anal fin

Joseph Tomelleri

Coho Salmon

Inside mouth is gray

Spots in top half of tail only

13-15 rays in anal fin

Tim Knepp, USFWS

Rainbow Trout

Pinkish stripe on silvery body

Small black dots throughout the body that extend into tail

Duane Raver, USFWS

Rainbow Trout and Salmon Identification Guide

Rainbow trout: white mouth

Coho salmon and Chinook salmon: grayish to black mouth

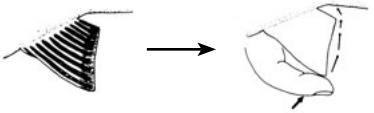
The shape of the anal fin is another way to identify these species. This can easily be seen by depressing the front edge of the anal fin to its base.

Rainbow trout: tail has many small spots in distinct rows.

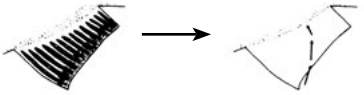
Coho salmon: tail has some large spots mostly on the upper half.

Chinook salmon: Tail has large spots throughout, especially in the silver area at the base of the tail.

Rainbow trout: tip falls to or beyond end of base



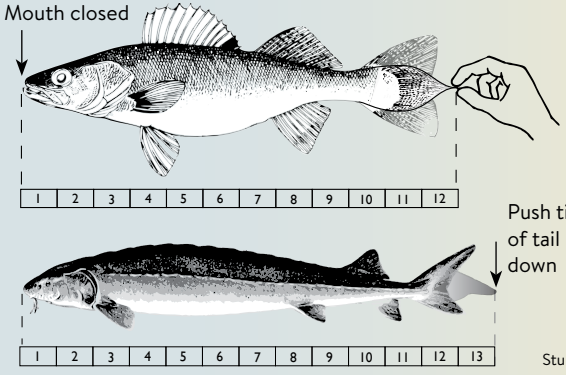
Coho salmon: tip falls slightly past middle



Chinook salmon: tip falls short of middle

How to Measure the Total Length of a Fish

To determine the legal length of a fish, lay it flat on its side, pinch or squeeze the tail to maximize length, and measure from the nose or jaw, whichever is longer, to the farthest part of the tail when fully extended.



Sturgeon image by Maynard Reece

Weigh Your Fish With a Ruler

Fish are sometimes injured when weighed. With this chart, you can quickly determine the approximate weight of your fish using a ruler or tape measure.

Crappie length (inches)	Crappie weight (lbs.)
8	0.3
9	0.4
10	0.6
11	0.8
12	1.1
13	1.4
14	1.8
15	2.2
16	2.7
17	3.3

Trout length (inches)	Trout weight (lbs.)
8	0.2
9	0.3
10	0.4
11	0.6
12	0.8
13	0.9
14	1.1
15	1.4
16	1.6
17	1.8
18	2.3

Bass length (inches)	Bass weight (lbs.)
12	1.0
13	1.3
14	1.7
15	2.1
16	2.5
17	3.0
18	3.6
19	4.2
20	5.0
21	5.7
22	6.6
23	7.6

Walleye length (inches)	Walleye weight (lbs.)
14	0.9
15	1.1
16	1.3
17	1.6
18	2
19	2.3
20	2.7
21	3.2
22	3.6
23	4.2
24	4.8
25	5.4
26	6.2
27	6.9
28	7.9

Northern length (inches)	Northern weight (lbs.)
18	1.2
19	1.4
20	1.6
21	1.9
22	2.2
23	2.5
24	2.9
25	3.3
26	3.8
27	4.2
28	4.7
29	5.3
30	5.8
31	6.5
32	7.1
33	7.9
34	8.7
35	9.3
36	10.4
37	11.5
38	12.2
39	13.2
40	16

Sunfish length (inches)	Sunfish weight (lbs.)
6	0.2
7	0.3
8	0.4
9	0.6
10	0.9
11	1.1
12	1.5
13	1.9
14	2.4

Muskie length (inches)	Muskie weight (lbs.)
48	29
49	32
50	34
51	36
52	39
53	41
54	44
55	47
56	50

These figures are rough estimates only. Actual weights vary slightly by season and waterbody.