

# WATER WOLVERINES

*Toothy terrors offer thrilling sport on light tackle*



Photo by John N. Felsher

Matt Bergantino shows off a chain pickerel he caught.

BY JOHN N. FELSHER

Commonly called jackfish, duckbill, freshwater barracuda and other names -- including a few unfit to print in a family publication -- chain pickerel hit extremely hard. The toothy predators fight with speed and ferocity, but most Alabama anglers consider them a nuisance.

Sometimes erroneously called pike, chain pickerel resemble northern pike, but seldom exceed 30 inches long or weigh more than three pounds. The Alabama state record weighed 6 pounds, 6 ounces and came from Baldwin County. A similar species, redbfin pickerel range across southern Alabama, but rarely weigh more than a pound.

“Chain pickerel are native to Alabama, but not many people target them,” explained Chris Greene, an Alabama Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division biologist. “They look similar to northern pike, but get their name from the chain-like markings on the side.

Chain pickerel tend to go more in the backwaters, but anglers can find them in main channels and secondary creeks. They generally prefer more clear water and tend to orient toward aquatic vegetation.”

Abundant across the state, pickerel thrive in creeks, oxbows and other backwaters with minimal current and thick vegetation. Therefore, the Mobile-Tensaw Delta offers the best pickerel fishing in Alabama. In dense grass or lily pad patches, pickerel typically hover motionless, using their splendid splotchy green camouflage to hide as they wait to ambush enticing morsels that wander within striking range. When they spot something irresistible, pickerel viciously flash out with incredible speed to sink their needle-like teeth into flesh – or lures!

“I’ve always caught pickerel in the

See **PICKEREL**, 44

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