

Menominee River Pike

Northern Pike have a reputation of cooperating when other fish have lock jaw in the spring. Although they do tend to be easier to catch at times than walleye or bass, catching the larger pike is seldom easy. The problems is most pike anglers get into a rut and use the same presentations and thus have only a fair success rate. Pike, like other species, relate to weather changes and seasoned anglers need to adapt to these changes. The good news is that spring northern pike are the easiest predator fish to pattern and even the novice angler can catch big fish if they follow a few basic patterns. As a guide, northern pike have come to my rescue to salvage many a poor fishing day.

One main reason that big pike are vulnerable in spring is because pike have completed spawning many large females won't venture very far from the actual spawning areas. However, on any given water, there is a percentage of big pike that head for deep water. The big pike that return to deep water remain lethargic for an extended period of time and the cold water of their environment does nothing to stimulate feeding. You can mark them with your electronics all you want, but don't waste any time pursuing them.



On many flowages and river backwaters, weeds and wood may be present, or weeds may be absent and wood will be the only available cover. Regardless of whether you are dealing with weeds, wood or, both remember that cover is, cover. In spring, cover is at a premium and all cover must be fished effectively. I see too many anglers passing up productive structure. I look for even the smallest bit of cover in spring.

I do very little northern pike fishing in summer, but when the water temperatures drop in the fall big pike move shallow and feed heavily. In spring, the big pike can be a bit lethargic due to weather changes and recovering from spawning. In fall, the only mission that they have is to bulk up for the long winter.

Some of the largest fall pike I have encountered was when I was pursuing smallmouth or walleyes. The largest Northwoods pike was caught one cold October morning when Rick Lieberg booked a trip for big smallmouth. We were having a great day when I decided to try a deep hole on the downstream side of a rock pike. Rick caught a few 18 inch smallmouth on a red tail chub and we had been hoping of catching a 20 inch plus smallmouth.

Rick was in the process of reeling in another smallmouth when he said, "I think I am snagged." I watched as Rick's line started to move and I said, "That doesn't look like a snag to me."

Ricks 6'6" medium action rod was stressed to the maximum and he was gaining slowly on the fish. After about five minute we saw a huge northern pike at boat side with an 18 inch smallmouth T-boned in its mouth. Before we could react the pike opened its mouth and swam away. I told Rick to open the bail and let the smallmouth swim away. It did not take long and the pike struck again. This time I was ready even though I only had my smallmouth bass net. As Rick carefully brought the pike alongside the boat I reached into the cold water and grabbed the big pike. The behemoth measured 45" and after a few photos it was released along with the unharmed 18 inch smallmouth. This is not to say that the pike did not make a third attempt at filling its belly! This is the largest pike, I have ever had in my boat in the Northwoods.

Book a spring or fall pike trip on the Menominee River in 2020!



Delete those deep inactive pike and don't pay any attention to your locator. If you want to catch big early season northern pike, think shallow! Pike that remained in shallow water are on the feed and often easy to catch. The shallow back bays in which pike spawn warm quickly and attract a variety of fish species. Minnows will spawn in these bays along with perch. As water temperatures continue to rise, different species of fish will move into the shallows each day. With food being plentiful northern pike have the option of eating anything they desire.

While pike will hit a variety of live and artificial baits, using the proper presentation will work to your advantage. The preferred bait will vary from day-to-day but for the most part, I rely on spinnerbaits, small bucktails and swimbaits. Although they can all be productive, each bait has their time and place. Spinnerbaits and swimbaits are excellent search baits. Most anglers tend to fish spinnerbaits and swimbaits too quickly in the cold water in spring. Soft plastic jerkbaits are also great baits for spring northern pike.