

Q&A: Mandatory Retention Order – Chain Pickerel Hunters Lake, Pictou County Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture

July 18, 2024

Key Messages:

- We are taking steps to protect native species in the East River watershed since confirming the presence of invasive chain pickerel in Hunters Lake, Pictou County.
- In collaboration with Conservation and Protection Branch at DFO, we have issued an order under Section 22 of the Aquatic Invasive Species Regulations that requires anglers to retain all chain pickerel caught in the East River watershed.
- We're committed to working collaboratively with partners on options for appropriate actions as we continue to assess this situation.
- We all have a role in protecting our native species and the waters they call home. If you suspect an introduction of invasive species, report it to our Inland Fisheries Division at 1-902-485-5056 or inland@novascotia.ca or the Conservation Officer Service of Natural Resources and Renewables at 1-800-565-2224. You can also report it to Fisheries and Oceans Canada at 1-800-565-163, or Nova Scotia Crime Stoppers at 1-800-565-TIPS (8477).

QAs:

What does the NS order do?

This order requires anglers who catch chain pickerel in the East River watershed to retain the fish and not return it to the water. As with any fish, chain pickerel should be euthanized in a humane manner.

Why was the order made?

We are taking steps to protect our native fish species in the East River watershed, after having confirmed the presence of invasive chain pickerel in Hunters Lake. Our order is intended to help stop the spread of this species, and hopefully reduce the negative impacts on native fish populations, amphibians and overall biodiversity.

Who issued this order and under what authority?

Minister Kent Smith has delegated authority for the management of chain pickerel through a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the federal government (DFO) on recreational fisheries. In this situation, the order was issued by DFO under the federal *Aquatic Invasive Species Regulations* to support our efforts to respond rapidly to this situation.

How often do you issue mandatory orders?

This is the first time we and our federal partners have issued an order under the Aquatic Invasive Species Regulations in Nova Scotia. (*Note: Parks Canada implemented a*

similar measure in 2019 in Kejimikujik National Park, under their own authority, when chain pickerel first occurred within park boundaries).

Why hasn't an order like this been made before?

The *Aquatic Invasive Species Regulations* are relatively new, so this is one of the first opportunities to pilot this approach.

Will you use similar orders in other areas with invasive species?

At this time, our focus is on Hunters Lake as invasive chain pickerel has just been confirmed in this part of the East River watershed (east branch).

How effective do you expect this order to be?

This mandatory retention order as a tool to reduce the spread of chain pickerel or even control new occurrences of invasive species will be assessed.

Is enforcement involved?

Enforcement of sportfishing regulations falls under the jurisdiction of the Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the Conservation Officer Service of Natural Resources and Renewables. Both agencies take the spread of aquatic invasive species very seriously and support the approach being taken on the East River.

If the order doesn't stop the spread, what other measures are you considering?

We've just confirmed the presence of invasive chain pickerel in Hunters Lake. We're committed to working collaboratively with partners on options that may be appropriate as we continue to respond to this situation.

Do you plan to use rotenone?

Rotenone can be an effective measure in some circumstances, and it's one we know from our recent experience(s) works. Every situation is different, and the use of rotenone needs to be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Is chain pickerel found in the East River watershed now?

We recently confirmed the presence of chain pickerel in Hunter Lake, Pictou County, after receiving a report. They have been present on the west branch of the East River since 1996, however, this is the first time this invasive species has been found on the east branch of the East River.

How did the chain pickerel get in Hunters Lake?

This is being looked into. But, often with invasive species there are two possibilities: 1) the species migrated from another area of the watershed; or 2) it's the result of an illegal introduction.

What about penalties?

Potential fines for illegally possessing live fish can be up to \$1 million dollars under the *Fisheries and Coastal Resources Act*. Fines for unauthorized release of fish into fish habitat – or not complying with a Fisheries Office Notice – can be up to \$100,000 dollars

(first offence) or up to \$500,000 or a prison term of up to 2 years (subsequent offence), under the federal *Fisheries Act*.

Is this species found elsewhere in Pictou County?

Chain pickerel was illegally introduced in some lakes on the west branch of the East River in the late 1990s.

What else have you done to stop the spread of chain pickerel in Pictou County?

This is the first time that chain pickerel has been confirmed to be present on the east branch of the East River watershed. On the west branch, measures were taken about 25 years ago in Black Lake, where the species was first introduced. However, those measures (electro-fishing) did not prove effective in eradicating chain pickerel.

Where are chain pickerel found in Nova Scotia?

Chain pickerel were illegally introduced in the mid 1940s into south western Nova Scotia and became established in some watersheds. They are less prevalent in north eastern Nova Scotia, but, where they do occur are the result of illegal introductions and pose a significant threat to the ecosystem.

Where has rotenone been used before? How effective was it?

Dobsons Lake, near Canso – September 2022 (invasive smallmouth bass)

Piper Lake, Pictou County – October 2020 (same species)

Post-project monitoring is ongoing, but at this point, we are on track to successfully eradicate smallmouth bass from Dobsons Lake and Piper Lake, and there is no further need for additional treatment of the lakes.