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INSTITUTE FOR FISHERIES RESEARCH
DIVISION OF FISHERIES
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A. S. HAZZARD
DIRECTOR

ADDRESS
UNIVERSITY MUSEUMS
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DATA ON MUSKELUNGE IN MICHIGAN

The following data on the muskellunge in Michigan has been drawn up at the request of the Editor of Michigan Sportsman. The information is taken from published reports and from the files of the Institute.

The muskellunge no doubt occurs or occurred sparingly in Great Lakes waters all around the wide shoreline which bounds the state, especially in bays. There are published records for Washington Harbor, Isle Royale and for Keweenaw Point to Huron Bay. The Great Lakes muskellunge is reported to occur in Muscalonge Lake, Luce County. The Wisconsin or tiger musky is confined to waters tributary to the Mississippi, but gets into Michigan in Lac Vieux Desert on the Wisconsin border. A 51 lb., 3 oz. specimen from the lake, 54 inches long, was formerly listed as the record muskellunge for sport tackle.

St. Marys River and the associated bays and lakes are among the best-known musky waters in Michigan. So also are Les Cheneaux Islands, from which a 62-pounder was reported by Baird. That authority also mentioned Drummond Island as the habitat of this fine game fish. Baird wrote that muskellunge were taken, though rarely in the Straits of Mackinac, about the north end of Green Bay, off Cedar Vier and in Menominee River.

Muskellunge no doubt occur all along the Lake Michigan shore, at least as stragglers, for there are reports from St. Joseph, South Haven, Saugatuck, Grand Haven, Ludington and Little Traverse Bay. There are also reliable records for Pentwater Lake, Pere Marquette Lake, Hamlin Lake, Big Platte Lake and Lake Leelanau,

though the species is not really common in any of these lakes. No doubt there are records for other river-mouth lakes along the Lake Michigan shore.

In Big Platte Lake a 50 pound muskellunge was caught about two years ago (see photograph). This is no doubt one of the largest records for the state.

Elk, Torch and Clam lakes in Antrim County furnish an occasional angler with the thrill of having landed a muskellunge.

Another chain with a few muskellunge is the "Inland Waterway". We have reports from Burt Lake, Indian River, Mullet Lake and Black Lake, in Emmet and Cheboygan Counties.

Along the Lake Huron shore of the Lower Peninsula there are reports for Thunder Bay, Saginaw Bay, and for the stretch between Pointe aux Barques and Port Huron. Numbers increase in St. Clair River, Lake St. Clair and Detroit River. Exceptionally good musky fishing was formerly enjoyed in these waters, and the species is far from extinct in Lake St. Clair. It also occurs around the western end of Lake Erie.

In the inland waters of the Lower Peninsula, excluding bays and the lakes close to Great Lakes level, the muskellunge is very seldom found. It is well known for Gun Lake, Thornapple Lake and Thornapple River, though very few are caught per year in those waters.

One often hears claims of muskellunge being caught in various inland lakes of the state. One can generally bank that these reports are merely based on large examples of the northern pike, grass pike or pickerel.

The distinction of the muskallunge is a very easy matter. It has dark spots, or bars when half-grown, while the northern pike has round, light-colored (white or yellowish) spots on the body. This character is much easier to see than the scales in the cheeks--a technical character which is often figured and mentioned in popular accounts. If one wished to look carefully he will see small more or less imbedded scales covering the whole of the cheeks in the northern pike, whereas the scales on the cheeks of the muskellunge are confined to the upper part of the cheeks.

By the "cheek" of a fish, one refers to the fleshy area occupying the middle of the side of the head, downward and backward from the eye.

"How large is a muskellunge" is a question still open for argument. Van Campen Heilner and Francesca La Monte, of the American Museum of Natural History, recently gave the records known to and accepted by them in their table of "World's Record Fishes" in Field and Stream. For a sport-caught musky they list the largest as a 58 1/4 pounder from Lake of the Woods. The largest caught by any means they give as "over 75 lbs.", on the authority of the Wisconsin Fish Commission, for a fish from Minocqua Lake, Wisconsin. But Spencer Fullerton Baird, the organizer of the U. S. Fish Commission listed much larger ones from the Great Lakes, in his great volumes on "The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States" (1884). He mentioned what were claimed to be reliable reports of muskies as heavy as 80, 85 and even 100 pounds.

How old these giants may have been can only be guessed. They may even have reached the half century mark. A mere 43-pounder (53 inches long, 25 inches in girth) caught in Lake Leelanau by Roy H. Steffens in February 1932 was close to 16 years, perhaps a year younger or 2 or 3 older. Another, of about the same size, from Thornapple Lake, was about 19 years old. These determinations were made by counting the winter rings on the scales.

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Carl L. Hubbs
Director

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