

## **Tiger Muskie Challenge – Finding Fish that are Free of Disease**

*(This is from DWR's Utah Wildlife News 5-22-08)*

Aquatic diseases in other parts of the country could affect tiger muskie fishing here in Utah.

A tiger muskie is a cross between a Northern pike and a muskellunge (more commonly referred to as a “muskie”). Tiger muskies are sterile fish that can't reproduce.

Utah has a disease-free population of Northern pike in Recapture Reservoir in southeastern Utah. But the state doesn't have any muskies. And finding disease-free muskies outside of Utah is getting harder.

“We recently learned that muskies we were going to get from Nebraska have a virus that could harm many of Utah's native fish species,” says Drew Cushing, warm water sport fisheries coordinator for the Division of Wildlife Resources.

“Leatherside chub and least chub—two species that are on Utah's Sensitive Species List—are among the fish in Utah that could be affected by this virus,” he says. “We know a lot of anglers are going to be disappointed, but we can't afford to bring this virus into the state.”

DWR biologists are continuing to look for muskies outside the state. But diseases that are spreading through the Midwestern and Eastern parts of the country are making it difficult to find muskies that are free of disease, Cushing says.

### **Northern pike**

If the DWR can't find muskies to continue its tiger muskie-stocking program, the agency might switch to stocking sterile Northern pike.

Sterile Northern pike are created by taking eggs from Northern pike and treating them with a heat process. The pike that hatch from the eggs are sterile. It's easier for biologists to control a fish population if its fish can't reproduce.

“Northern pike don't grow as big as tiger muskies, but they can still reach 40 inches in length. That's a big fish,” Cushing says.

Cushing says tiger muskies are often referred to as the “fish of a thousand casts” because that's how many casts it can take to catch one.

“Northern pike, on the other hand, feed more aggressively and are easier to catch,” he says. “They put up a great fight. They also taste a lot like walleye, so they're great to catch and eat.”

For more information, call the nearest Division of Wildlife Resources office or the DWR's Salt Lake City office at (801) 538-4700.