

Illegal northern pike discovered in Utah Lake

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PROVO -- Local wildlife officials have discovered northern pike in Utah Lake, and they're not happy.

Introduced illegally, northern pike could harm the lake's fish populations.

"When fish are taken from one body of water, and placed illegally in another body of water, bad things can happen," according to a statement released Thursday from the Department of Wildlife Resources.

Mike Slater, DWR regional aquatic manager, said a population of northern pike, placed in Utah Lake illegally, is rapidly growing in size -- an issue that could spell trouble for sport fish and endangered fish that live in the lake.

"If anglers will help us gather the information we need, we might be able to get on top of the problem before it gets out of hand," Slater said.

Wildlife officials urged visitors to do two things:

- If you catch a northern pike at Utah Lake, kill the fish. Then, record the date and the location where you caught it. Coordinates from a Global Positioning System device are especially helpful. After you've recorded the date and the location, bring the fish to the office at Utah Lake State Park. A freezer you can put the pike in is available at the park office, 4400 W. Center St. in Provo. Pike can also be dropped off 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays at the DWR's Central Region office, 1115 N. Main St. in Springville.
- If it isn't convenient to travel to the park or the DWR office, you can place the pike in your freezer at home. Then, call the DWR at (801) 491-5678. A DWR biologist will make arrangements to get the fish from you.

Slater said recording the date and location will help biologists determine where the pike are spawning and what areas in the lake they're using.

Donating the fish will allow biologists to pass the fish along to a researcher at Utah State University, he said. Their research will help biologists learn more about pike in the lake, including which fish the pike are preying on and how many they're consuming.

Slater said a researcher needs 500 pike for a complete report.

"Any pike you catch and donate will help the study immensely," he said. "By law, pike caught at Utah Lake may not be returned to the lake alive. Every pike that's caught must be killed."

Pike sit at the very top of the food chain, Slater said.

"They eat anything they want," he says. "Adding a predator like this could hurt the bass, walleye, catfish and panfish populations that are already in the lake."

In addition to the many sport fish in the lake, June suckers — a fish listed as endangered on the federal Endangered Species list — also live in the lake.

Slater said Utah Lake is the only water in the world where June suckers live.

"The illegal introduction of northern pike could negate much of the work that has been done to recover the June sucker," he said. "Work to help June suckers has also helped sport fish in the lake. Whoever put northern pike in the lake did a very selfish and thoughtless thing."

Information about the northern pike is available from the DWR's Central Region office at (801) 491-5678.

