

## Longnose Sucker (Donts'oda)

**General Description:** The longnose sucker is the only species of sucker located in Alaska. A sucker is named for its unique fleshy mouth located on the bottom of its head. Suckers are dark red, green or gray on the top and white on the underside. In Alaska they haven't been found longer than 23 inches. Suckers also have a unique feature called the Weberian apparatus, which is five modified vertebrae in the head that connect to the swim bladder, helping monitor sound and pressure changes.



Longnose Sucker

**Habitat:** Suckers are found in clear streams and lakes where the water is cold, throughout the state. Suckers feed on the bottom, primarily, in search of insects, mollusks snails, plants, algae or fish eggs. They suck up their food with their large lips.

**Fishing:** Longnose suckers are taken occasionally throughout the summer, during other fishing activities using set nets and fishwheels. They are caught in the fall near Nikolai and throughout the region. Suckers are rather bony, but are eaten frequently to add variety to the diet.

## Burbot/Loche (Ts'onya)

**Common names:** Lawyer, loche, loache, ell pout, methy, lush, lingcod and mud shark.

**General Description:** the burbot has a thin, elongated body that tapers to a point near the tail. It's major distinguishing characteristics are a "chin whisker" or barbel, and dorsal and anal fins that run from the middle of the body almost to the tail. Burbot appear to be scaleless, but actually have small, almost microscopic scales. Burbot are long-lived but slow-growing, reaching 18 inches in about 7 years. The burbot is the only representative of the cod family in fresh water in North America.

**Habitat:** Burbot are distributed in fresh waters throughout North America and Eurasia, and occupy mostly large clear and glacial rivers and many lakes throughout Alaska.

**Fishing:** Burbot can be caught in the summer as well as through the ice in the winter. Bait-fishing with a rod-and-reel works well, as well as trot-lines, identified with the anglers name and address. Burbot are often taken with whitefish and pike in set-nets under the ice. The flesh is white and has a mild-taste.



Burbot



Northern Pike

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- River clipart from the Alaska Native Knowledge Network. [www.ankn.uaf.edu](http://www.ankn.uaf.edu)



# Non-Salmon Fish of the Kuskokwim



Whitefish

**Informational Brochure  
funded by the  
Environmental  
Protection Agency**

## Whitefish

**Species:** Candlefish or Round Whitefish, Broad or Lake Whitefish, Humpback Whitefish and Least Cisco.

**General Description:** Whitefish are the most abundant fish north of the Alaska Range. They are very important in the aquatic food chain. Whitefish in general are silver colored with large scales, fleshy fins and no teeth. They are best adapted for bottom feeding.

**Fishing:** Upper Kuskokwim whitefish are caught year round. They come down in tributaries from the lakes in the fall and head back to the lakes in the spring. Whitefish need deep, cold water to survive. When in the lakes overwinter, whitefish are caught using nets under the ice and handlines through ice-holes. In summer they are fished with rod and reel, dip nets and gill nets. The best time to catch whitefish is when they are migrating from lakes to rivers in the fall and spring.

## Alaska Blackfish (Hozrighe)

**General Descriptions:** A small fish, the blackfish are seldom larger than 8 inches. They have large paddle-like pectoral (front) fins and tail, and broad, flat heads. They are dark-green or brownish with pale undersides. Blackfish are unique because they have a modified esophagus capable of gas absorption, meaning they can exist off of atmospheric oxygen. This makes them a very hardy fish, able to survive in stagnant tundra or muskeg pools in dry seasons.

**Habitat:** Alaska blackfish are found only in Alaska and eastern Siberia. They typically live in the densely vegetated areas of lowland swamps, ponds, rivers and lakes.

**Fishing:** Alaska Natives have used blackfish extensively for food. They are very abundant and easily captured. Finding blackfish is simple. In the winter, the fish move from the tundra pools into deep lakes where there is more oxygen. Towards spring, the oxygen in the lakes deplete. A fisherman simply has to cut a hole in the ice or look for open water areas to find blackfish congregating, and simply dip them out with a net or funnel. Some Natives would keep blackfish in tubs of water, since they could survive longer and stay fresh because of their ability to breathe air. Only one other species in the world is known to have modified its esophagus for respiratory purposes, which is the tropical swam eel.

## Sheefish (Zidlaghe)

**General Description:** Sheefish are a part of the whitefish family, but distinguishable by a strong extended lower jaw. It is found only in arctic and subarctic North America and Asia. It can grow to tremendous sizes, up to 60 pounds. They are separated into five distinct “stocks” around Alaska, each stock exhibiting its own qualities of growth, life span and sexual maturity.

**Location:** Sheefish can be found in the many tributaries of the Kuskokwim. The largest sheefish are found in the Selawik-Kobuk country, north of the Arctic Circle.

**Fishing:** Sheefish were traditionally caught with spears and nets that drifted along the gravel bars between one man moving on shore and another in a canoe. Today, they are caught with set nets, fishwheels and rod and reel.



## Northern Pike

**Range:** Pike range from the Interior to the Arctic coast, the Canadian border to the Seward Peninsula.

**General Description:** The body and head are elongated with a broad, flat snout, looking somewhat like a duckbill. The jaws have numerous sharp teeth which are constantly replaced. Pike can grow up to 30 pounds and get as long as 4 feet.

**Habitat:** Most pike overwinter in the deep, slow water of large rivers because they need the oxygen. However, pike spawn in the shores of lakes or slow-moving streams in the spring, hence a short migration season to spawning areas.

**Fishing:** Pike can be taken with medium action spinning, bait casting or fly fishing gear. Almost any type of hardware will produce a strike. These monster fish are wonderful eating, having delicious firm white flesh.

## Dolly Varden (Hoch'ilmoaya)

**Range:** Dolly Varden in Alaska are harder to find than the other types of common fish. In the Kuskokwim area, they are found in the Little Tonzona and upriver from Nikolai.

**General Description:** There are both fresh-water and sea-water varieties of Dolly Varden. They belong to a group of fish called char, and the light spots on their sides distinguish them from salmon, which are usually black-spotted or speckled. Mature male Dolly Varden become brilliant red on the lower body surface. Males also develop an extended lower jaw, which hooks upward.

**Habitat:** Dolly Varden are unique, as they are the only member of the family Salmonidae, excluding salmon, that has readily adapted to the numerous small-to-medium size non-lake streams that enter our saltwater areas. Dolly Varden migrate to the sea from lakes in the spring, and back to the lakes in late August.

**Fishing:** Fishing for Dolly Varden requires knowledge of its migrating patterns. In May, June and July they can be found in salt-water. They are excellent for eating, with firm pink flesh that is full of flavor. They will strike at anything.

## Arctic Grayling (Ts'idat'ana)

**Range:** Grayling populate the Kuskokwim, South Fork, and Takotna rivers, as well as far west as the Kara and Ob rivers in Russia, and as far east as the western shores of Hudson Bay in Canada.

**General Description:** A cousin of the trout, Arctic grayling are beautiful fish. The dorsal-fin is sail-like with large, iridescent purple or red spots, the back is dark with black spots scattered down the gray sides of the fish.

**Habitat:** Grayling are highly migratory, and populate many environments, using lakes and streams to complete their life-cycle. Some grayling never leave the lake they were spawned in. Grayling have adapted, tolerating low oxygen levels. They are also generalists in the food habits, eating just about anything.

**Fishing:** Grayling are harvested almost year-round, using set nets and handlines under the ice in the spring, and then rod and reel once the ice melts. Grayling are trapped with whitefish, and will take almost any bait.