



New Mexico Department of Game and Fish
Conserving New Mexico's Wildlife for Future Generations

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In recognition of the many ongoing efforts by members of New Mexico Muskies Inc., Chapter 59 to promote and protect healthy tiger muskies fisheries in New Mexico, NMDGF would like convey its appreciation. For further information about NMMI, visit online: www.newmexicomuskiesinc.org.

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Fishing New Mexico Tiger Muskies



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Why are tiger muskies in New Mexico?

Because tiger muskies are effective predators and nonnative, anglers sometimes presume that where muskies are introduced gamefish suffer. Actually, the prudent introduction of tiger muskies in selected New Mexico waters has dramatically helped re-establish healthy trout fisheries that were threatened.

In recent years, Bluewater Lake and Quemado Lake were infested with white sucker and goldfish, and exponential growth of these nonnative, nongame fish was causing steady declines of trout populations.

In response, the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish introduced tiger muskies in 2003. Although tiger muskies prey on trout, their preference for slower white sucker and goldfish was demonstrated by subsequent studies and monitoring.

As a result, trout populations have increased and nongame populations declined—such that limited harvests of tiger muskies now occur annually at these reservoirs. Each season, bag limits are adjusted based on game- and nongame-fish populations (published in the *New Mexico Fishing Rules and Information* booklet).

Tiger muskies are an exciting and challenging sportfish for anglers from New Mexico and across the country to enjoy.



What is a tiger muskie?

A hybrid between northern pike and muskellunge, tiger muskies do not reproduce and are maintained by stocking and proper catch-and-release practices. Voracious, patient and often elusive predators, tiger muskies feed almost entirely on other fishes.

What equipment do you need?

Muskie anglers throughout North America often use heavy rods and reels and large lures (8 inches or more) when casting or trolling for tiger muskies. While heavy tackle can be used, most muskie anglers in New Mexico use heavy bass tackle. A large-arbor spinning or casting reel that provides good drag, combined with about a seven-foot rod that provides a strong backbone and moderate-fast tip action, is usually adequate for absorbing muskies' long and hard headshakes.

Heavier line between 17–40 pound-test is recommended to handle a tiger's size, resist abrasion and help land fish quickly. Landing fish quickly lowers the possibility fish may escape the hook or become exhausted and improves the odds for a cleaner catch and for fish to survive after release.

No matter what type of line is used, a steel leader is essential to prevent bite-offs which can result in loss of a preferred lure and a prize fish.

Tiger muskies will strike many of the same lures that appeal to most predatory fish. Successful lures in New Mexico include jerkbaits, crankbaits, inline spinners and swimbaits between 3–8 inches. Lure colors that match sucker and goldfish forage and can be seen through algae blooms during summer are more successful.

Whatever type of lure is preferred, durable terminal gear and strong, sharp hooks are critical to penetrate this large fish's bony jaw. Though the mood of the fish will influence how a lure is retrieved, lures should appear injured and vulnerable to encourage a good strike.



Pointers from the Pros

Since tiger muskies do not reproduce, catch and release is critical to encouraging healthy fisheries. However, the large size and sharp teeth of tiger muskies makes larger hooks and the proper gear necessary for the safety of both fish and angler.

When practicing catch and release, a few key tools can be useful. Helpful tools include long-nosed pliers, small bolt cutters, hook-outs, jaw spreaders, a large landing net (hoop no smaller than 30 inches) or a cradle, floating ruler and camera.

Don't play the fish to exhaustion. Net or cradle the fish when it's ready and leave it in the water while taking measurements and removing hooks. Cut hooks if necessary. Only remove the fish from the water for a quick photograph and support the weight of the entire fish. Fish may be held by the gill plate, but keep clear of the gills. Avoid holding the fish by the gill plates only, since vertical holds will injure the fish.

To release the fish, hold the fish upright in the water until it is ready to maintain an upright position and swim away strongly. A carefully released fish has a good chance of continuing to grow and be caught again by you or another lucky angler.

With careful handling, muskies have the potential to be recaptured several times over their lifetime, ensuring angling enjoyment for others. A 40-inch tiger muskie is usually about seven years in age and has spent its life serving an important purpose—to control nongame fish while providing anglers an enjoyable challenge.

Due to predation, disease and angling mortalities, only one of every thirty muskies stocked will reach bag-limit size. This is why it is vitally important to follow New Mexico's fishing rules and regulations and return all undersized fish immediately to the water unharmed.

To keep or release a legal-sized fish is always a personal decision, but many anglers choose to carefully release all muskies caught for the benefit of the fishery and the future enjoyment of other anglers.

While muskies can be eaten, they tend to have numerous bones, are very oily, and have a large portion of red meat that is inedible.

Sport Fish Restoration Act

A 10 percent federal excise tax on your purchase of fishing equipment and boat fuels helps the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish and similar agencies throughout the nation promote and conserve sport fisheries. This includes acquiring easements or leases for public fishing, funding of hatchery and stocking programs, improving boating facilities and supporting aquatic education programs.

