

Gallery of Pennsylvania Fishes

Chapter 17

Cods

Family Gadidae

Family overview: The Burbot (*Lota lota*) is Pennsylvania's only true freshwater representative of the primarily marine Cod family and the only Cod found within Pennsylvania. Inland populations of Burbot are listed as an endangered species in Pennsylvania. Though reaching a length of 46 inches, Burbot average only about 23 inches in length. The Allegheny River population is a relict distribution. This small population has persisted, but it is more vulnerable to physical habitat destruction and water quality degradation, specifically increased stream temperatures, sedimentation, and toxic chemical spills.

Burbot prefer the deep, cold waters of lakes and rivers. During late winter and early spring, after spawning, they often migrate from lakes to tributary rivers. The only Pennsylvania populations occur in Lake Erie and the Allegheny River headwaters. Even though Burbot are found in several streams in the Allegheny River watershed, they are rarely abundant at any given location. The Burbot's inland populations are listed as endangered.



ENDANGERED

Identification: The hindmost dorsal fin and the anal fin are long and nearly equal in length. A rounded tail fin separates both of these long fins. A pair of pelvic fins is located in the throat region in front of the large pectoral fins. A barbel-like tube extends from each nostril. A single barbel extends from the tip of the lower jaw.

Life history: The Burbot is one of only a few Pennsylvania freshwater fishes to spawn in midwinter. Spawning may take place at night, over a sand-gravel bottom in the shallow portions of lakes or tributary streams under a covering of ice. Eggs drift along the bottom and hatch within 30 days. The young grow rapidly for their first four years, feeding mostly at night on a variety of invertebrates. They spend most of this time in lake shallows or stream channels. Adults more than 20 inches long feed almost entirely on other fishes during the summer, when in deeper water, and on invertebrates in the winter.

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