Wek'èezhìı
Renewable Resources Board

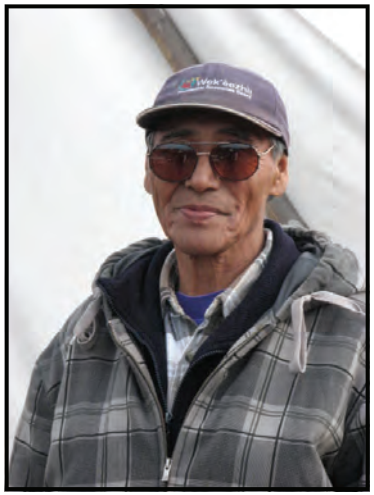
Common Fish in the Tłı̨chǫ Region

Dedication

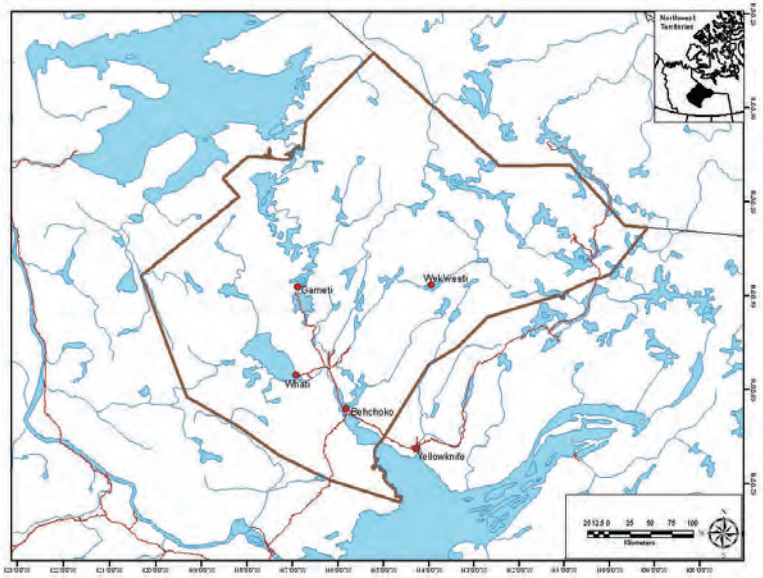
This Guide is dedicated to the memory of Harry Mantla, who wanted the stories and old ways to be remembered and used as a tool for living.

Harry was a great trapper and harvester. He dedicated his time and shared his valuable knowledge of Tłı̨chǫ cultural traditions through stories and his experiences with all people. Harry was an outstanding individual who made a difference in the community by teaching the younger generations to keep Tłı̨chǫ traditions and values alive.

The knowledge he shared will be used long into the future and we are thankful for that. We will miss his fun-loving way of being on the land and will always remember him in our prayers as a loving, kind, soft spoken person.



Map



The Wek'èezhìı boundary as defined in the Tłı̨chǫ Agreement. Tłı̨chǫ people have used this area and the surrounding region for many years, and maintain a connection to the land through the traditional use of fish and other natural resources. The four Tłı̨chǫ communities Gamètì, Wek'weètì, Behchokǫ̀ and Whatì, as well as Yellowknife, are shown.

Story

This Guide was originally published in 2012 through the initiative of Karin Clark and Paul Vecsei. It is intended as a basic guide to the fish species that are most commonly caught in the Tłı̨chǫ region of the Northwest Territories. This Guide does not include all the species that could be encountered.

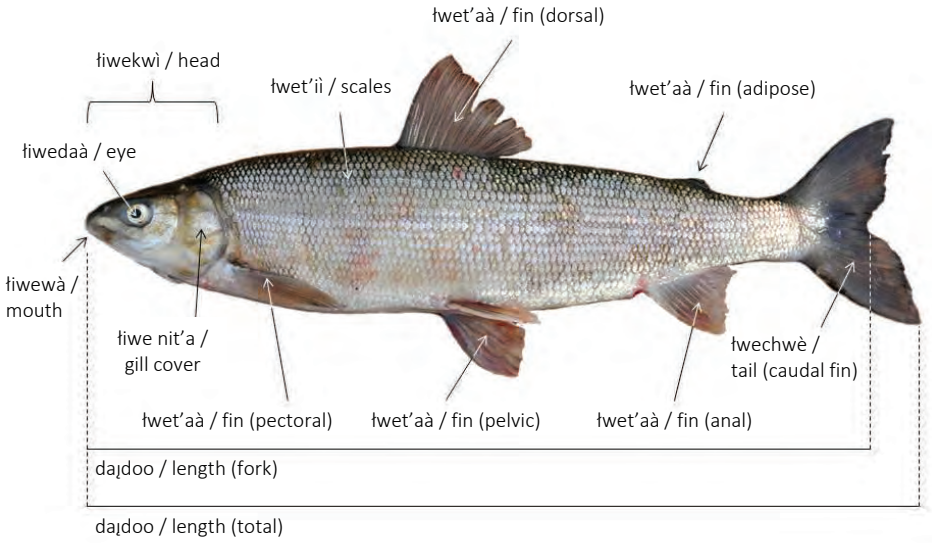
Thanks to Harry Apples, Adele Camille, Eddie Camille, Jonas Football, Nick Football, Robert Mackenzie, Harry Mantla, Elizabeth Michel, Dora Migwi, Bernadette Naskin, Elizabeth Rabesca, Celine Tatzia and Francis Williah of Behchokǫ̀, as well as Georgina Chocolate and Albertine Eyakfwo, for their contributions to the Tłı̨chǫ names of fish. Thanks also to Rosa Mantla, Tammy Steinwand, Mary Seimens and Lucy Lafferty with Tłı̨chǫ Community Services Agency for their review and comments.

Thanks to Paul Vecsei for his descriptions of the fish, and all his photographs.

This 2014 version builds on the original and was updated by Paul Vecsei and Boyan Tracz. Georgina Chocolate and Jonas Lafferty provided additional translation and comments. Susan Beaumont, Hilary Machtans and Jody Snortland Pellissey assisted with the final review.

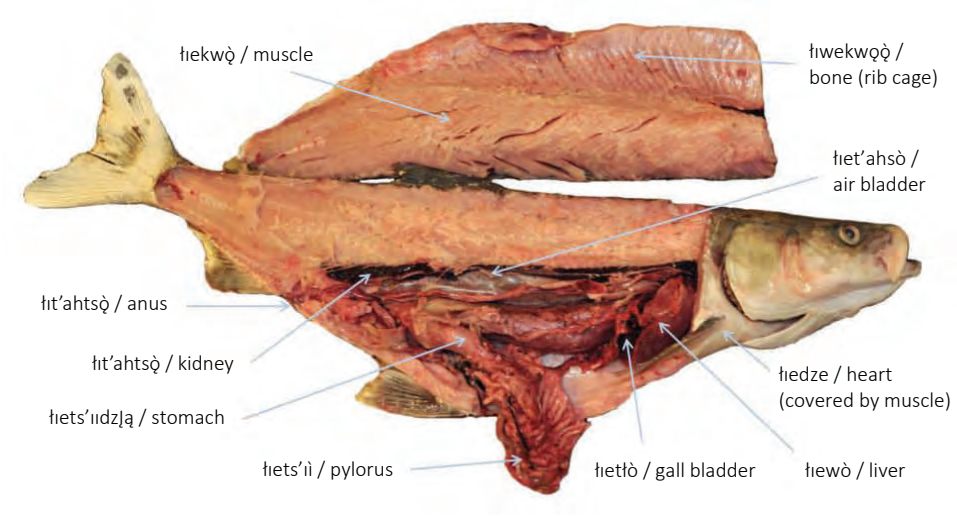
Contents

Fish Anatomy - External (Tłı̨chǫ / English)



NOTE: This figure shows generalized fish anatomy; there may be slight differences among species. The labels are Tłı̨chǫ terms for Lake Whitefish anatomy.

Fish Anatomy - Internal (Tłı̨chǫ / English)



NOTE: This figure shows generalized fish anatomy; there may be slight differences among species. The labels are Tłı̨chǫ terms for Lake Whitefish anatomy.

Nǫhkwèe - Burbot (Loche)

HABITAT: Deep cold, clear lakes with rocky bottoms. Also occurs in large rivers. In late winter, can be caught in shallow water under the ice.
In summer, they are known to live at depths of up to 330m (1000 ft).
BIOLOGY: A deepwater species, spawning takes place in late winter when lakes are still ice covered. Adult Burbot eat other fish, but also scavenge along the bottom for invertebrates.
SIZE: 1-2 kg, rarely over 5 kg; 50-70 cm.
FOOD VALUE: A much appreciated food fish for most community members. Liver is consumed by Tłı̨chǫ people.

Łiwezǫǫ̀ - Lake Trout

HABITAT: Deep cold, clear lakes and rivers with rocky bottoms. Usually found in shallow water in late fall and winter.

BIOLOGY: Lake Trout spawn in fall, usually over rocky shoals in lakes. Some populations enter rivers and spawn in shallow rapids over rocky substrates. Lake Trout are fish eaters and may reach an age of 50 years.

SIZE: 2-4 kg common, but may reach 15-25 kg; 50-80 cm (in the NWT).

FOOD VALUE: Valued as a food fish, it can be made into "split fish" and smoked for future cooking over the fire, boiled, or fried. Food value is greatly affected by the season they are caught. For example, fish taken after spawning may have no fat and the meat is mushy or "rubbery".

ļhdaa - Northern Pike (Jackfish)

HABITAT: Shallow weedy waters in back bays of large lakes. Also common in slow-moving, weedy areas of rivers.

BIOLOGY: Northern Pike move into shallow weedy bays and streams for spawning in spring. They are ambush predators feeding on a variety of things, including other fish, frogs, insects and even ducklings!

SIZE: 2-4 kg common, but may reach 7-15 kg; 50-110 cm (in the NWT).

FOOD VALUE: Tłı̨chǫ people enjoy the rib-belly flap section and some even favour the fillets. Overall, not a primary target in the subsistence fishery, but highly appreciated by a few.

Ehts'ęę / Ehch'ęę - Walleye (Pickerel)

HABITAT: Shallow waters in lakes or large rivers.
BIOLOGY: Walleye migrate from lake habitat into shallow streams for spawning in early spring. They are predators and feed on other smaller fish.
SIZE: 1-2 kg common, rarely over 7-15 kg; 40-65 cm (in the NWT).
FOOD VALUE: Valued by communities and as a commercial species. Favored by many.

Wıìle - Inconnu (Coney)

HABITAT: Shallow clear or turbid waters. Common in Great Slave, Marian and Russell Lakes. Seasonally abundant in Marian Lake and large inflowing rivers throughout the Great Slave Lake basin.

BIOLOGY: Inconnu have long spawning migrations from lakes into rivers in the fall (such as in the Marian River). Inconnu feed on other fish, primarily ciscoes. Fast growing fish, but relatively short-lived.

SIZE: 3-8 kg common, but may reach up to 20 kg; 60-100 cm.

FOOD VALUE: Valued food fish by the Tłı̨chǫ people. It is often shared among communities.

Ts'étįą - Arctic Grayling

HABITAT: Shallow clear streams, rivers and lakes.

BIOLOGY: In spring, Grayling migrate from lakes into shallow streams for spawning. Larger rivers have year-round Grayling populations. They feed on other smaller fish, but prefer insects.

SIZE: 0.5-1 kg typical, rarely 2 kg; 35-50 cm.

FOOD VALUE: Not specifically targeted, but a welcome change if captured. Cooked in similar fashion to Lake Whitefish. Usually too small for dry-fish method of preparation.

Łih - Lake Whitefish

HABITAT: Shallow to deep clear waters in lakes and rivers.

BIOLOGY: Lake Whitefish are fall spawners and usually spawn over rocky shoals in lakes. Some populations enter rivers and spawn in shallow rapids over rocky substrate. They eat tiny fish, snails and insects.

SIZE: 1-3 kg common, but may reach up to 6 kg; 35-70 cm.

FOOD VALUE: Lake Whitefish is the most important food fish for the Tłı̨chǫ people. The eggs, "pipe", and łıets'ıì (pyloris) are delicacies. It can be cooked fresh or dried.

Łih - Round Whitefish

HABITAT: Shallow, clear waters in lakes and rivers.
BIOLOGY: Round Whitefish are fall spawners in both lakes and rivers over rocky substrate. Eats small insects and benthic invertebrates.
SIZE: 0.5-1kg, never larger than 1.5 kg; 30-50 cm.
FOOD VALUE: Used in a similar fashion as Lake Whitefish (but not caught as often as Lake Whitefish; not as common).

Łìhtsoa - Cisco

HABITAT: Deep, cold, clear lakes with rocky bottoms. Also occurs in more turbid areas like Marian Lake. A small "dwarf" form is encountered in the North Arm of Great Slave Lake and inland lakes of the Tłı̨chǫ region.

BIOLOGY: Fall spawner. Certain populations have well-known migrations; for example into Great Slave Lake tributaries like the Snowdrift, Beaulieu and Yellowknife Rivers.

SIZE: Usually less than 1 kg, but sometimes up to 1.5 kg; 20-45 cm (in Great Slave Lake).

FOOD VALUE: If caught, it is sometimes used as bait for trap lines.

Dehdoo - Longnose Sucker

HABITAT: Prefers cold, clear deep lakes with rocky bottoms.

BIOLOGY: Spring spawner entering small streams or rivers shortly after ice-out. The Longnose Sucker is a bottom feeder, sifting through pebbles and muck in search of food.

SIZE: 1-2 kg, rarely 3 kg; 40-55 cm.

FOOD VALUE: Not targeted as a food fish but often cooked on an open fire if caught.

Kwìezhìı - White Sucker

HABITAT: Common in shallow, warm bays in large lakes and rivers.

BIOLOGY: Spring spawner entering small streams or rivers shortly after Walleye and Longnose Suckers. The White Sucker is a bottom feeder, sifting through pebbles and muck in search of food.

SIZE: 1-2 kg rarely 3 kg; 40-55 cm.

FOOD VALUE: Favoured by some Tłı̨chǫ community members. The body and head is split open and cooked over an open fire.

Dahts'a - Ninespine Stickleback

HABITAT: Shallow streams, lakes, ponds and rivers with thick submerged vegetation.
BIOLOGY: Spawns in the spring in stagnant water among aquatic plants; the male builds an elaborate nest. Feeds on tiny invertebrates.
SIZE: Very small (5 cm).
FOOD VALUE: Not eaten.

Dahts'a - Spottail Shiner

HABITAT: Shallow lakes or stream habitat. Avoids strong currents in rivers, but are often present in large numbers in pools or along the shoreline.

BIOLOGY: Summer spawner, feeds on plants and aquatic invertebrates.

SIZE: Very small (5 cm).

FOOD VALUE: Not eaten.

With support from: