

## Why Lake Michigan's

A comeback by the once-almost-extinct Lake Michigan perch -- easily caught and one of the tastiest fresh-water fish -- could rival the mighty salmon for fishing headlines this summer.

While perch fishing was almost non-existent during the past decade, it should draw more participants than the coho this year.

Major reason for the perch's popularity is that the green-sided, yellow-bellied fish can be caught by almost anyone from piers and breakwaters and small boats with no more equipment than a hook, sinker, drop line and a can of garden worms.

Lake Michigan's shore has numerous communities with breakwaters and piers from which good catches of perch are expected. The accompanying map pinpoints many of these places.

Jumbo perch have made a spectacular comeback, probably because of the salmon.

Perch fishing collapsed during the 1950s due to the sea lamprey invasion, intense commercial fishing and growth in the number of alewives. It was probably the alewife explosion which had most to do with the near end of the perch population.

Alewives compete with perch for food, space and spawning territory, and perch eggs are high on the alewives' list of preferred snacks. Theory is that the perch simply could not withstand the alewife pressure and lost out in the survival fight.

Making Lake Michigan capable of supporting game fish like trout and salmon was not intended to restore the perch population. It was a happy by-product for shore-line and small-boat fishermen. This year, anglers are expected to fish calm, shallow water for perch from small boats and shore as they did 20 years ago.

It was the measures taken to insure success of the coho -- lamprey control and tight restrictions on commercial fishing -- that helped the depleted perch stock bounce back.

While millions of salmon, lake trout and steelhead have been planted since 1965, not a single perch was planted.

The voracious predatory salmon and trout began to eat down the alewives to a level more nearly approaching normal numbers. Massive natural die-offs thinned the alewives further.

Signs of Lake Michigan's perch comeback were evident in 1969 when good catches of small fish were taken. The size improved during 1970. Last summer, buckets and stringers began to bulge with jumbos -- some up to 14 inches long and weighing a pound or more.





