

## Non-Salmonid Fish of the Boyne River

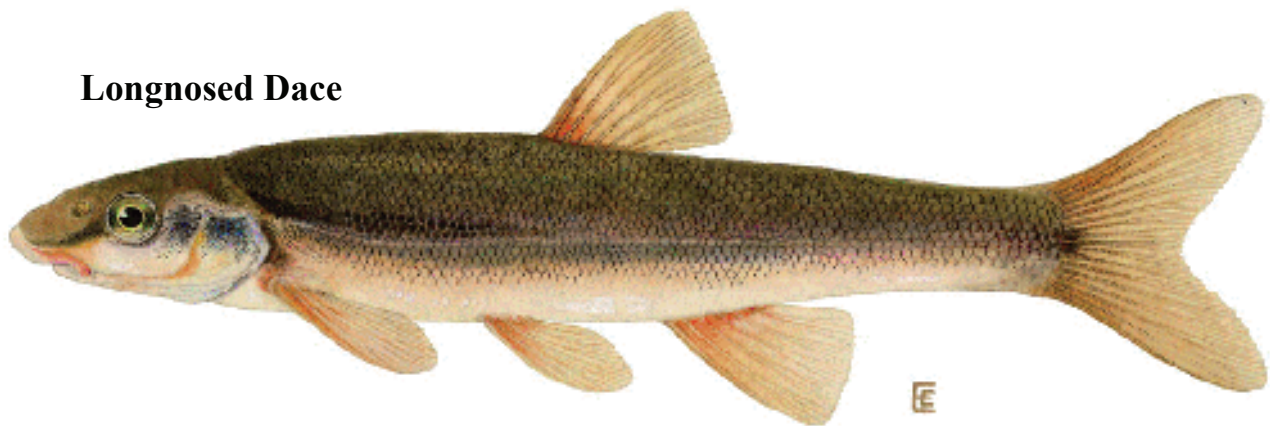
When you look at a cold, pure, free flowing stream like the Boyne River you think of trout and their relatives as being the fish population. And you would be right. Even the Michigan Department of Natural resources has this in mind and classifies these streams as designated trout streams or not. The trout is king and is felt to be the most valuable resource in these streams and the streams are managed with this priority. The streams are evaluated on the basis of water temperature, water purity, and the presence of trout to make this determination. For after all you should have trout present to be classified as a designated trout stream. All of these fish are classified in the family *Salmonidae*. But there are many more stream fish and much more to be said about them.

I have taken the results of two stream electrofishing studies performed by the MDNR on the Boyne River in 2004 and 2005 to summarize the other fish residents of the river. These studies are performed by trained DNR personnel and a length of river, usually one thousand feet is systematically treated with a sub lethal electroshock probing and the fish that are recovered are counted and identified to characterize the stream. Because many fish migrate for reasons of spawning, food, or temperature, the timing of the study can result in some difference in findings. I would suspect that the experience of the crew, the water level and general weather conditions could also cause some variations. Conditions of a river can also result in different types of counts because some areas of the river are more favorable for certain species.

The first study was taken on June 28, 2004 and represented the electrofishing results on one thousand linear feet of the river just downstream from the Boyne Country Dam. This water looks like trout water and the results showed that the predominant fish were salmonids, although other species accounted for more than one-half the count. The number of fish counted was 468 and of those nearly one-half were trout. The second study was done Sep. 1, 2005 evaluating one thousand feet of stream just downstream from the Boyne City Airport. This water is much slower, looks like a warm water stream, and is full of sediment. The total number of fish was similar, but trout represented only enough in percentage value to allow that portion of the river to be designated trout water. Taken at a different time of the year the population might look quite a bit different. The total number of fish was 329 and only six were trout. Trout fisherman will commonly look at the fish in these rivers in a simplistic way dividing them into trout, warm water game fish, trash fish, and minnows. I will try to divide them so they are understood on the basis of their scientific classification. Other than the trout the fish were from six different families of fish and they were as follows:

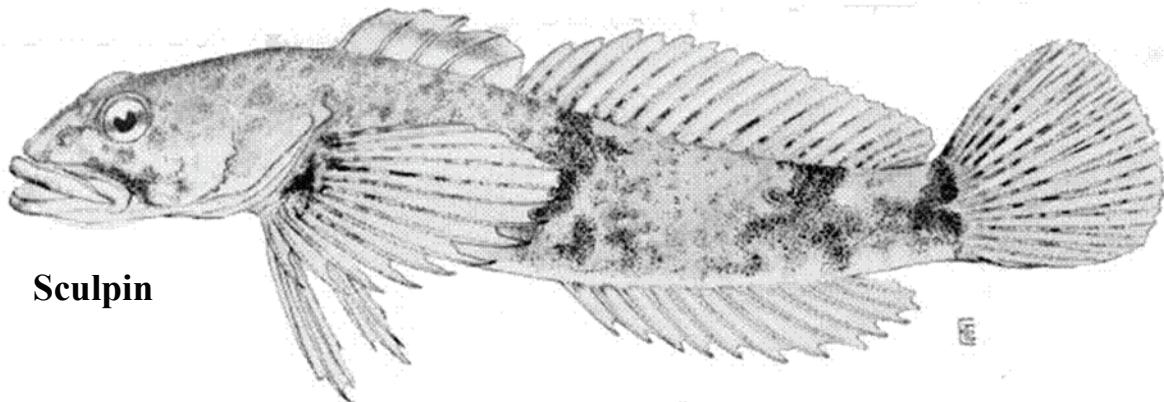
**Family *Cyprinidae*.** These fish are the minnows and carps. Most fishermen will be quite casual about minnows believing that all very small fish are minnows, whereas the truth is that the minnows comprise the largest number of species in a fish family and there are many different species of minnows here in Northern Michigan. Found in our studies were two types of chub, four types of **dace** and four types of minnows. Carp which paradoxically are in this classification, were not found in these samples although I suspect this was due to the time of year the study was done. There is one nice thing about chubs. They will often rise and get hooked on a fisherman's dry fly, which may lift an otherwise uneventful outing. The best of all times is when a sturdy chub gets hooked and while being retrieved undergoes a LDR, long distance release. This can sometimes delude the fisherman into the fantasy that he has fooled and hooked a wary trout and humanely allowed it to be painlessly unhooked thus completing the deception of both fish and fisherman.

**Longnosed Dace**



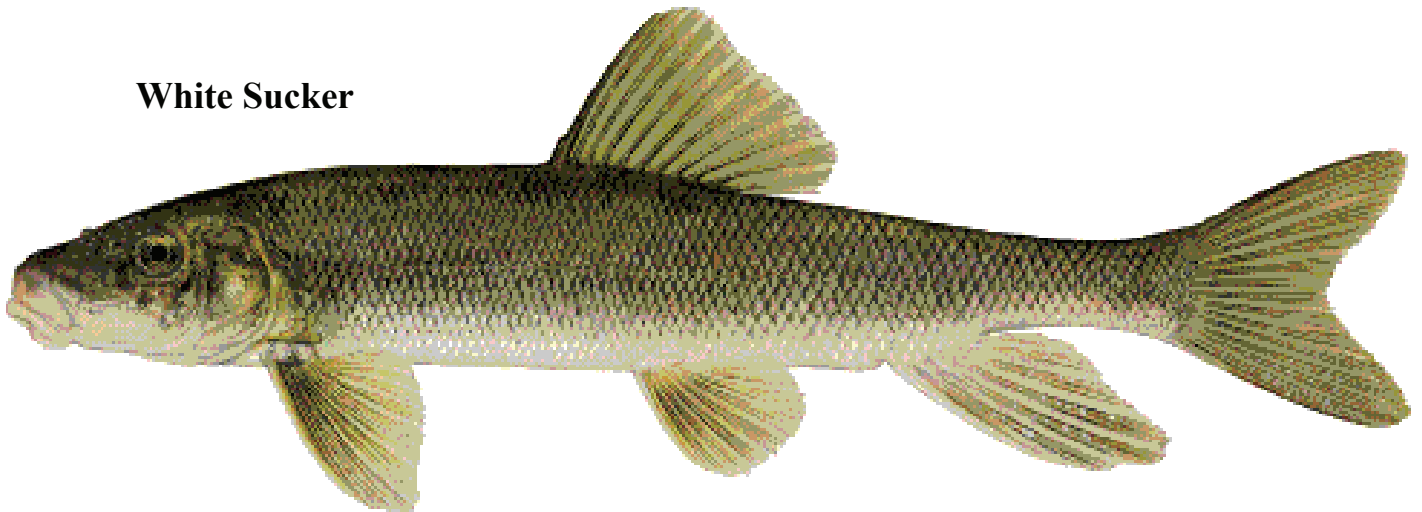
**Family *Cottidae*.** In our bag were over thirty **sculpins** in each sampling. **Sculpins** are small fish with immense pectoral fins. I have caught them with small gauge nets in tiny streams and then used them as brook trout bait. They were deadly but they were difficult to catch. We waded downstream and kicked under the banks with all purpose tennis shoes while heading toward the net across the stream. We always called them "muddlers". Lo and behold, some thirty years ago a new fly was being tied which was called the "muddler minnow" and because of its effectiveness, it has become a standard fly that all fly fishers must carry.

**Sculpin**



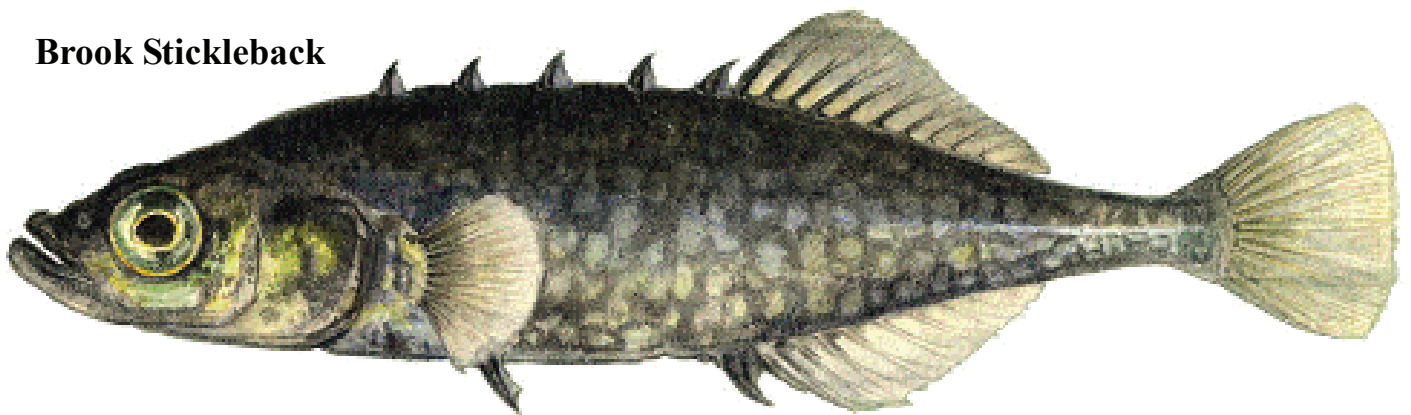
**Family *Catostomidae*.** A number of **white suckers** were captured in the downstream slow, warmer water. All trout streams seem to carry a load of suckers and they are most noticeable in the early spring when they are on their spawning runs. There are many species of sucker but the white sucker appears the most common. They are edible albeit very bony. Often families are found sitting on lawn chairs on the river bank on those sunny warm early spring days with a dough ball or gob of night crawlers drifting through a deep hole in the river, a stringer of suckers nearby. **White suckers** are often home canned or smoked for family consumption.

**White Sucker**



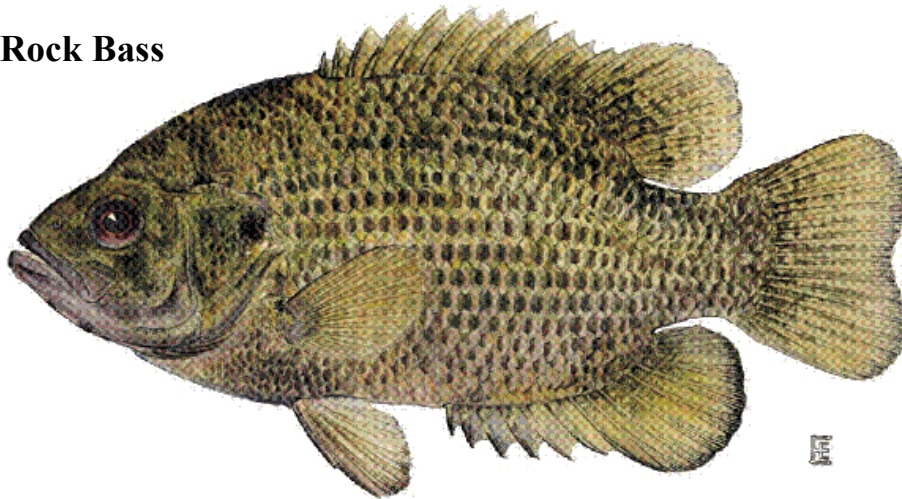
**Family *Gasterosteidae*.** A few **brook sticklebacks** were found. These are elusive little fish that look like they were designed by a futurist. They stay close to the bottom filling their assigned niche without complaint.

**Brook Stickleback**



**Family *Centrarchidae*.** These are the sunfish. They include many of the warm water sport fish, specifically sunfish bluegills, small and large mouth bass, **rock bass**, crappie, and many of the lesser, but still common, warm water species. In the Boyne River these studies found one each of bluegill, largemouth bass, and smallmouth bass. The ubiquitous and seemingly indestructible **rock bass** was found in twenty-four versions. The **rock bass** has always been an almost fish to me, almost good enough to be a sportfish and almost good enough to eat, but they are survivors and when I was a kid it was always nice to know that I would be able to catch some of them if I wanted.

**Rock Bass**



**Family *Percidae*.** Only one **yellow perch** was found. This all time favorite table fish is very migratory in its habits and one sample will not give a true picture. This is my second fish on the dinner parade. Wish there were more of them.

**Yellow Perch**



We can see that a river like our Boyne can be many things. While being a habitat for trout, it has many rooms for other worthy lodgers.

Ref: Carl L. Hubbs and Karl F. Lagler, Fishes of the Great Lakes Region , Cranbrook Institute of Science, Bulletin No. 26, July, 1949.

Images: Kraft, C. E., D.M. Carlson, and M. Carlson. 2006. Inland Fishes of New York (Online), Version 4.0 Department of Natural Resources Cornell University, and the New York State Department of Conservation.