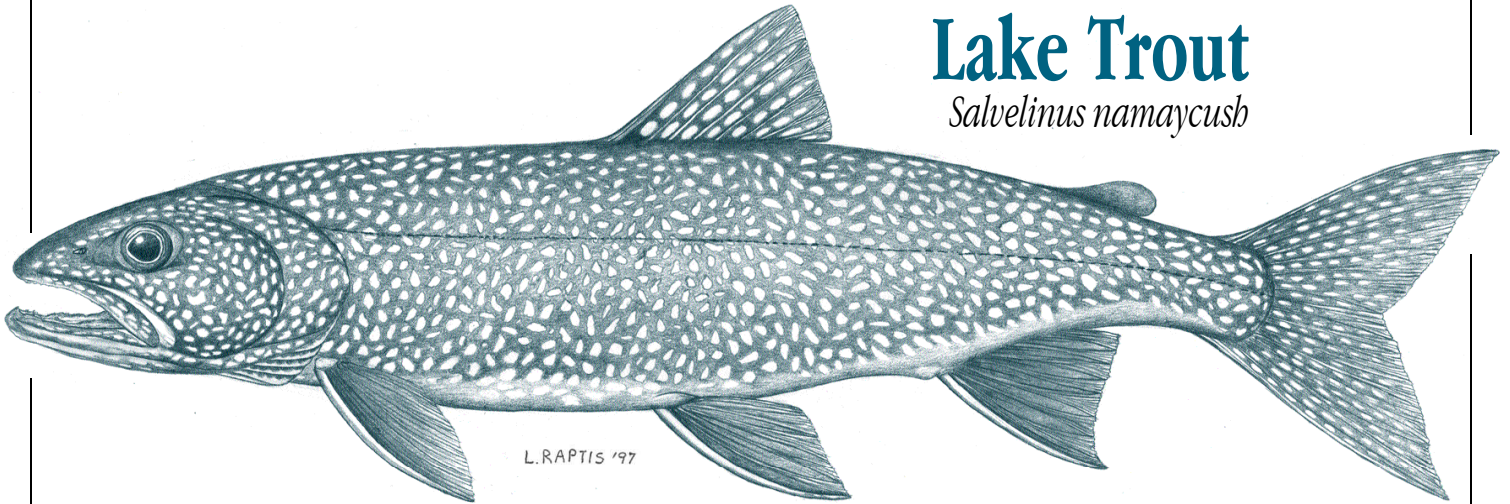


# B.C. Fish facts

## Lake Trout

*Salvelinus namaycush*



### Other common names:

*Char, grey trout, lake char, laker*

Typical range in length for adults: 45 - 65 cm

Maximum length: 125 cm

Typical range in weight for adults: 1- 3 kg

Maximum weight: 21 kg

### What do they look like?

Lake trout have a typically trout-like body, elongate, with a deeply forked tail. The colouration is variable, depending on size and habitat, but generally it is dark green to gray or brown on the back, fading to pale underparts that are dirty white or pale yellow. The tail is more deeply forked than in other char or trout and has light coloured spots on both halves. The head and body are covered in whitish (never pink) irregular spots. Sometimes there are irregular light markings on the back that are shaped like worms (called vermiculations). The eyes are large, round, and protruding.

### Where do they live?

Lake trout are found in cold water, most often in deep lakes. The species is widely distributed across northern North America, including some Arctic islands, south to New York, the Great Lakes, and the northern Mississippi basin. In B.C.,

natural populations are widely scattered in lakes from Shuswap Lake northward. The species is absent from Vancouver Island and the Columbia system, but has been introduced to the lower Columbia, lower Kootenay, and Okanagan regions.

### What do they eat?

Large lake trout prey on other fish such as kokanee, whitefish, burbot, and sculpins. During the spring and fall, when in shallow water, they will also eat crustaceans, aquatic insects, and shore-dwelling minnows. At first, young lake trout feed on zooplankton. As they grow they gradually change their diet to larger items such as insects, shrimps, and small fish.

## What is their life cycle like?

Lake trout tend to be solitary animals coming together only at spawning time. They spawn at night from early September to mid November. Unlike most salmonids, they do not require running water for spawning, though some stream spawning has been recorded. They usually lay their eggs over cobbles and boulders in relatively shallow areas of lakes, like shoals or along the shoreline. Males arrive first to clean the spawning grounds by brushing loose sand and silt away with the body, tail fin, or snout. No nest is built; eggs are simply shed over the bottom in the presence of two or more males. The males press against the sides of the female and begin quivering with dorsal fins (fins on their backs) erect, as they fertilize the eggs. The fertilized eggs, which are quite large, become lodged in crevices in the rubble bottom, where they remain for months before hatching. A large female may contain up to 17,000 eggs. A single female may spawn several times during a spawning season but will probably not reach spawning condition again for 2 or 3 years. After spawning, the adults disperse great distances from the spawning ground. There is evidence that lake trout return to the same spawning ground each year. Young lake trout remain in shallow water along the shore for several years before moving into deeper water. Lake trout are late maturing, long-lived fish. Age at maturity varies widely from around 5 years of age in southern areas to more than 20 years in

northern B.C. Males typically mature younger than females.

## How are they doing?

The lake trout is a yellow-listed species, which means it is not at risk in British Columbia. Some populations are considered vulnerable to forest harvesting practices. Lake trout require special management, as they are the top predator of their aquatic ecosystem. There are never very many older, large fish and these trophy fish can be easily overfished.

## How you can help:

- Retain natural vegetation and shore material and limit shoreline development to protect spawning, rearing and feeding areas.
- Never transport live fish or other organisms from one body of water to another. This could transfer diseases and parasites from one ecosystem to another, or upset the natural balance in the ecosystem where they are released.
- Be aware that what you dump down the sink or into your septic

tank, roadside storm drains or sewers may find its way into streams or lakes. Help keep water quality high by using detergents and soaps minimally and by not dumping harsh chemicals, such as bleach, paint thinners or antifreeze, into drains.

- Form a group of water stewards and volunteers to monitor local water quality.
- Obey angling regulations and habitat protection bylaws, guidelines and regulations, since they are designed to protect the fish and their habitat. You should also Observe, Record and Report violations of the regulations by phoning 1-800-663-9653.
- Limit your catch! Remember that large lake trout may be well over 20 years old and form an essential part of the spawning population.

## No kidding!

- Despite its name, the lake trout is not a true trout, it is a char.
- Lake trout can live more than 40 years.
- Artificial hybrids between lake trout and brook trout called "splake" were stocked in some lakes of Kootenay and Yoho national parks in B.C.
- Lake trout have been known to eat small mammals.
- Lake trout and bull trout do not seem to be able to live together, perhaps they are too much alike in diet and behaviour.

