

SMALLMOUTH BASS

(Micropterus dolomieu)

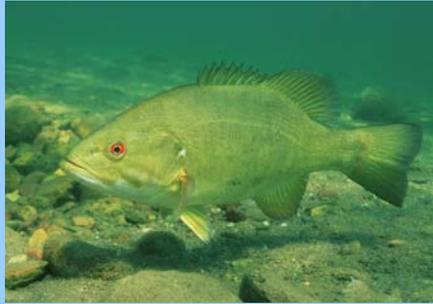
**Oneida Lake Status:
Abundant**

- Popular sport fish in the Northeast
- Prefer clear, cool water
- Rising populations in Oneida Lake

The smallmouth bass is a member of the sunfish family. Smallmouth bass may grow to 22 inches in length and weigh as much as 5 pounds in Oneida Lake. Key features for identification include 8 to 11 thin, dark, vertical bars on their sides, and a mouth that does not extend past the rear edge of the eye (see photo below).

Smallmouth bass prefer clear, cool water in habitats with rock or gravel bottoms. In Oneida Lake they eat yellow perch, gizzard shad, crayfish, insects, zebra mussels, and will occasionally eat frogs and tadpoles. Over the past 20 years, increased water clarity from zebra mussel introductions and increased food availability has led to record smallmouth bass populations in Oneida Lake.

Originally limited in New York to select waterways, smallmouth bass were introduced into Oneida Lake in the nineteenth century. Since their introduction, smallmouth bass have become a favorite target of anglers, and a number of local tournaments are held each year. Smallmouth bass are renowned for their fighting ability when hooked, and have the reputation for being inch-for-inch one of the best sport fish around. Unfortunately for local anglers, they are inactive during the winter months, and are not good for ice angling.



A smallmouth bass in the wild



Bass boats during a recent fishing tournament on Oneida Lake



Drawing of smallmouth bass swimming in a natural habitat

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January 2007



In smallmouth bass, the rear edge of the mouth does not extend past the back of the eye