Is it a White Bass or a White Perch?

White Bass (Morone chrysops)
1. The body is deepest below the dorsal fin and the depth remains fairly uniform below the entire spiny dorsal fin.
2. From 6 to 10 dark lines run horizontally down the back and sides.
3. When the spiny dorsal fin is pulled erect, the soft dorsal fin remains relaxed.
4. Each of 3 bony anal fin spines is of different length and is arranged in ascending order.
5. The anal fin usually has 11 or 12 soft rays behind the 3 bony spines.

White Perch (Morone americana)
1. The body is deepest just ahead of, or at the beginning of, the dorsal fin.
2. There are no lines or stripes on the back or sides.
3. When the spiny dorsal fin is pulled erect, the soft dorsal fin also becomes erect.
4. The second and third bony anal spines are almost exactly the same lengths.
5. The anal fin usually has 8 or 9 soft rays behind the 3 bony spines.

The white bass and the white perch are members of a family known as the temperate basses, Percichthiidae, and are closely related to a very popular saltwater game fish, the striped bass (Morone saxatilis). Many anglers wrongly assume that the white perch is related to the yellow perch (Perca flavescens) but each is a member of distinctly different families.

The white bass is a native species of Lake Erie and has been a popular sport and commercial fish since Ohio’s early days. The white perch, on the other hand, is an invading species that has become permanently established in Lake Erie, the Ohio River, and a few inland lakes. Originally a native of salt, brackish, and fresh waters along the Atlantic coastal plain, the white perch apparently entered Lake Ontario in the 1940s via the Mohawk River which connects the Hudson River with Lake Ontario’s drainage basin. The first reports of white perch in Lake Erie occurred in 1953, after the fish apparently entered the lake via either the Erie Barge Canal or the Welland Canal. Several white perch were collected in Lake Erie by commercial fishermen and government agencies between 1973 and 1975 and today they are abundant throughout the lake.

Both white bass and white perch are well suited to the types of habitats found in Lake Erie. The white bass is a popular sport fish, especially during spring spawning runs in the Maumee, Sandusky, and Portage Rivers, and around the reefs and islands of western Lake Erie during the summer. Thermal discharges from electric plants attract large numbers of white bass year round, and consequently, large numbers of anglers. White perch remain very common in shallow portions of the lake, including river mouths, bays, reefs, and nearshore areas.

While white bass are abundant and widespread in many lakes, reservoirs, and large deep rivers throughout the state, white perch so far have been reported only in a few inland lakes and in the Ohio River. Also, in the Ohio River and its tributaries in southeastern Ohio, the freshwater drum is commonly but incorrectly called white perch, a situation causing occasional confusion.

Although Ohio’s state record white bass weighed 4 pounds and measured 21 inches, the usual sizes seen in the Lake Erie sport catch range from 9 to 15 inches. White perch are smaller than white bass when fish of the same ages are compared, and throughout most of their range seldom exceed 10 inches. The current Ohio state record white perch weighed 1.42 pounds and measured 14-1/16 inches.

White perch and other exotic species compete with native species in waters they invade and may reduce native fish populations. Ohio fishing regulations prohibit transporting and releasing any aquatic species from one body of water into another. Since live bait may contain unintended species, always dispose of unused bait on land.