

Region 3 District Fisheries

Kansas Department of Wildlife & Parks Fisheries Division

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Crappie Fillets Anyone?

What do wiper, saugeye, flathead, redear, black crappie, green sunfish, bluegill, carp and bullhead have in common? They can all be found swimming around in the waters of southwest Kansas. While many folks do get out and specifically target these species, there are a few others that year in and year out get the most interest from anglers.

Crappies, both black and white, get a lot of attention from anglers, particularly in the spring. As is very obvious from some of the crappie fishing that has been available on reservoirs like Glen Elder the last year or so, the populations tend to be cyclic, especially in our smaller bodies of water. White crappie tend to quickly overpopulate in a small body of water, and because of this we really encourage folks to harvest them.

Crappie fishing hotspots for this coming year look to be Clark State Fishing Lake (SFL) and probably Horsethief Reservoir. Anglers have started picking up some really nice crappie at Clark lately, with fish up to 12 inches being common. Several new brush piles were constructed this winter and the crappie should be holding in them and spawning soon. Horse Thief Reservoir is new enough that the "hotspots" have not been discovered yet. The trees that were left standing during construction are obvious areas to try, as well as the stake beds and brush piles that were built before the water came.

On both water bodies, right now in late April, the fish are staging in 10–15 feet of water and will be moving shallower very soon to spawn. Anglers have been successful using minnows about 2 feet below a bobber. As the fish move shallower to spawn, minnows will still work, but a wide variety of plastic and marabou jigs will also be effective. Try a steady retrieve or for a slower presentation, work them slowly about 18 inches under a small bobber. When these fish are done spawning, they tend to move into deeper open-water areas off of long points and along channel bends. Look for concentrations of baitfish and you will find the schools of crappie.



Current water levels for the state fishing lakes and some of the larger community lakes in southwest Kansas.

The numbers in parentheses are the surface acreage when the lakes are at conservation pool

Region 3 State Fishing Lakes

Barber State Fishing Lake - Lower – (51) - 5 foot low
Barber State Fishing Lake - Upper – (26) - Full
Clark State Fishing Lake – (337) - 2 feet low
Concannon State Fishing Lake – (50) - Dry at this time
Finney State Fishing Lake – (110) - Dry at this time
Ford State Fishing Lake – (40) – 2 feet low
Goodman State Fishing Lake – (40)– 2 feet low
Hain State Fishing Lake – (53) - 1 foot low
Hamilton State Fishing Lake – (30) - Dry at this time
Hodgeman State Fishing Lake – (87) – Nearly dry at this time
Kiowa State Fishing Lake - 21 acres - full
Meade State Fishing Lake – (80) - 2.5 feet low

Region 3 COMMUNITY LAKES

Coldwater City Lake – (250) -
Dodge City Lake Charles – (1) - Full
Dodge City - Mariah Hills Golf Course Pond – (1) - Full
Great Bend Stone Lake – (50) - Full
Great Bend (Veterans Park) – (13) - Full
Jetmore City Lake – (110) -
La Crosse Warren Stone Memorial Lake – (30) – Nearly dry
Liberal Arkalon Area – (13) -Full
Pratt County Lake – (51) – Full
Larned City Pond – (2) - Full
Pratt Kid's Fishing Pond – (1) - Full
Horse Thief Reservoir – (450) – 225
Syracuse - Sam's Pond – (50) - 4 feet low

As you can see there are a good number of places to go fishing in southwest Kansas. While it may not be the big lake experience like going to Cedar Bluff or Wilson up north, there is still a chance to get out and spend some quality time with friends and family.



These channel and flathead catfish were netted, weighed, measured and released at Clark SFL last fall.

Aquatic Nuisance Species

This is just another reminder of the danger of invasive species and how to deal with them

Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS)

CLEAN DRAIN DRY: Every Lake, Every Time

Simple steps to follow; CLEAN, DRAIN, DRY EVERY TIME!

Before Leaving:

CLEAN: Inspect boat and other equipment for attached zebra mussels or vegetation and **remove** any that are found.

DRAIN all water (livewells, bilge, bait buckets, etc.) before leaving the area.

Before using again:

Wash equipment with hot water (140-degree recommended) or **dry** equipment for five days. [Click here for more information about zebra mussels.](#)

Remember: It is illegal to import, possess, or release zebra mussels.

***Zebra mussels have recently been found in several locations across the region.

Missouri: Lake of the Ozarks, Taneycomo, and Pomme de Terre Nebraska: Base Lake-Offutt Air Force Base, Omaha's Zorinsky Lake Oklahoma: Kaw Reservoir, Keystone Reservoir, Oologah Lake, Skiatook Lake, Grand Lake, and Lake Texoma



Spring and Summer Bluegill Fishing

If I was a betting man, I would bet that the most common early experience for many anglers involved worms, bobbers, and bluegill. I know that in my case, the bluegill is an important part of my childhood fishing memories. My brothers and I would spend hours at our Uncle Nick's sand pit catching them just as fast as we could. Although the bluegill doesn't grow to enormous weights, what it lacks in size is more than made up for in fight.

What is a bluegill?

The name "bluegill" comes from the fact that the lower portion of the gill cover is blue. Common characteristics of bluegill are the deep-bodied, slab-side with a small mouth. Probably a couple of the most recognizable physical traits of bluegill are the orange belly, the dark lobe on the gill cover, and the black spot near the base of the soft dorsal fin. Common in most farm ponds and smaller community and state fishing lakes, the bluegill is one of the most widely distributed and abundant members of the Family Centrarchidae - the Sunfish Family. Although the term "sunfish" is often used when referring to the bluegill, this family also includes green sunfish, crappie, and largemouth and smallmouth bass.

Catching bluegill

Bluegill do not grow to huge sizes so select your tackle accordingly. An ultralight rod and spinning or spincast reel with light line will allow you to feel the bluegill's bite more effectively, and you will catch more fish. Line weights from 4- to 8-pound test work best. Early in the spring, before they get on the spawning beds, bluegill can often be taken with ultralight spinning gear. A small (sixteenth-ounce or less) jig suspended under a small bobber is a good rig for spring fishing. Work the bait slowly, ski the bobber a few inches across the water, then let it sit for half a minute. This will give the jig a subtle action that should attract sluggish fish.

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Anglers can really fill a stringer when bluegills are on their spawning nests or “beds” in shallow water during late May and early June.

The biggest fish can usually be found on the beds next to the bank and near or even under some sort of structure like a bush or tree limb. A No. 8 hook baited with a piece of worm, cricket, or grasshopper, a single small split shot for weight, and a bobber just big enough to float the rig is all that is generally needed.

Ultralight tackle and small curly-tail jigs or spinners also work well in the summer after the fish have come off their beds. Bluegill move into deeper water during the day and come into the shallows to feed at both dawn and dusk. Just like during the spawn, fishing with a cricket or small worm works well through the summer.

Where to Catch bluegill

In Region 3, we have a couple of spots that should provide some really good angling for bluegill. Jetmore City Lake (JTCL) and Pratt County Lake (PRCL) are both always pretty strong contenders when it comes to catching bluegill. At JTCL, anglers can find good numbers of big bluegill, up to 10 inches, on the west side of the lake in the boat ramp area. While the fish are not quite as big at PRCL, there are still good numbers of fish in the 6-8 inch range as well as good numbers of green sunfish. At PRCL, any of the numerous rock lined piers or even the island that you can walk out on should provide plenty of action.

Other areas worth checking out are Clark State Fishing Lake and both Veteran’s Memorial Lake and Stone Sandpit, in the city of Great Bend.

Horsethief Reservoir Update

A quick update on Horsethief Reservoir

We dropped a few nets in last fall just to check on the fish that were stocked in the first year. Fingerling bluegill that were stocked shortly after the lake filled (see photo below) should be grown by now and will hopefully get a good spawn this coming spring. The fingerling walleye that were stocked a year ago were running in the 10.5- to 11.5-inch range and hopefully will be 15-plus inches by the end of the summer, so you can take some home. Fishing for channel catfish was pretty darn good last year and should be this year, as well. **Just remember that the creel limit on channel catfish is no longer 10 fish per day but is now five per day.** Largemouth bass have been stocked, including some larger fish, but it is still going to take a year or two for the population to be strong enough to support much harvest.



These bluegill were 1 – 2 inches long when they were stocked on the fall of 2009

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