

Pittsburg District Fisheries Newsletter

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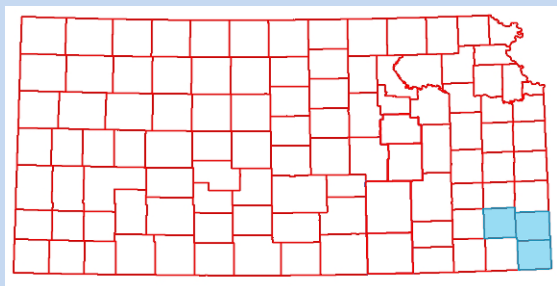
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2015 Spring Bass Sampling Results

Five lakes in the Pittsburg district were sampled by electro-fishing in 2015. I also got the opportunity to sample Bourbon State Lake at Elsmore and Ft. Scott City Lake in Bourbon County. Electro-fishing is a tool used by fisheries biologists to sample fish. Fish are stunned by a controlled electrical field, then netted, weighed, measured, and returned to the water. Catch rates, length distributions, and body condition are closely monitored. Data from these samplings are used to make recommendations for future length and creel limit regulations, fish stockings, as well as to inform anglers where the best fishing can be expected through KDWPT's annual spring [Fishing Forecast](#). The forecast summarizes and prioritizes biologists' fish sampling catch rates for all size groups of sportfish from around the state. My bass catch rates reported here are for stock-size bass, or those fish 8-inches and larger.

Bone Creek Lake – A total of 178 largemouth bass were collected by electrofishing at Bone Creek Lake on May 12, 2015. The resulting catch rate 58 fish/hour is well below the near record high of 94 fish/hour last year.



Bass catch rates had shown a steady increase from 39 fish/hour in 2010 to a record high 96 fish/hour in 2013. The 5-year average catch rate from 2010 to 2014 is 68 fish/hour. The quality of the fishery is good, as all size groups fell within management objectives. Twenty-eight percent the catch was greater than 15 inches in length. This is below the five-year average (2010 – 2014) of 37 percent, but within the 20 percent to 30 percent objective. Sixty percent of the 8-inch-plus catch were 12 inches or larger. This is consistent with recent samplings. The five-year average for the 12-inch-plus catch is 66 percent. Body condition of all size groups remained good.



Bass anglers know the fishing at Bone Creek is often good, as Thursday night tournaments are very well attended. Fishing starts at 6:00 p.m. and ends at dark. Only one fish can be weighed in, and it must be over 18 inches. The biggest fish wins half the proceeds from the \$8 entry fee. Kids 12 and under fish for free. There are 30 tournaments scheduled in 2015.

Bonecreektournaments.com photo



(Bone Creek Lake continued)

Kevin Shaffer, organizer of the Thursday night bass tournaments at Bone Creek, was recently quoted in the summer edition of SEK Scene magazine as saying, “We fish a lot of tournaments, and it’s always nice to come back to Bone Creek. Bone Creek will spoil you. You’ll always catch fish up there.” He continues, “It’s the best bass lake in Kansas by far. For one, it just has all the ingredients to make a good fishery. There’s lots of weeds that you can see as you go out because it’s so clear. There are several creeks feeding into it. It has good depth. All the ingredients are there to grow good fish”.

Bone Creek does have extremely clear water, with clarity sometimes exceeding 10 feet. With the exception of the springtime spawn, fish generally stay in deeper water, making them harder to find. This is exemplified as Shaffer talks about successful fishing following the spawn, “The biggest mistake people make the first time out is they stay on the bank. The fish are just starting to move out, and there are lots of structures for fish. Take the time to find the sweet spots.”



Kevin Shaffer (center kneeling) and several Thursday night bass tournament regulars are shown here working on the recently completed pavilion. Kevin, an avid bass angler and pro-staffer at Alber’s Marine, has organized these tournaments for many years. When tournaments were held at Crawford State Lake, he worked hard to provide KDWPT with valuable catch results to supplement our electrofishing data. With Kevin’s experience, when he says Bone Creek is “the best bass lake in Kansas by far”, you know the fishing has got to be pretty good.



This proud 5-year old angler stopped by KDWPT’s Chanute office this past April to show off the 5-pound bass he caught at Santa Fe Lake (aka Chanute City Lake). With desirable catch rates and 27 percent of the electro-fishing catch over 18 inches, this small lake is a good choice for bass anglers.

Chanute City Lake – Bass density remains very good, even though the May 27 electrofishing catch rate of 89 fish/hour was a slight decline from the 96 fish/hour recorded in 2014. A near record high 121 fish/hour was recorded in 2013. The lake management objective is to maintain a catch rate around 100 fish/hour. The five-year average catch rate from 2011 to 2015 is 99 fish/hour. The length distribution of the bass sample remained good. Fifteen- to 18-inch fish again exceeded management objectives with 27 percent of the 8-inch plus catch falling into this largest size group.

The quality of the fishery has historically been good. In the four preceding years, 15- to 18-inch fish comprised an average 29 percent of the catch. Body condition of all size groups remains excellent. Chanute City Lake has an abundance of bass forage in the form of shad and small crappie, and even when bass density has been relatively high, body condition of all size groups has remained excellent.

Bass are the primary predator in Santa Fe Lake, and maintaining a high-density population is desirable in order to better control excessive numbers of crappie, bluegill, and gizzard shad.

Get your friends, get your family
... and FISH KANSAS!



(2015 Spring Bass Sampling Results continued)

Crawford State Lake - Largemouth bass numbers at Crawford State Lake (CRSL) remain low. The May 11, 2015 bass electro-fishing catch rate of only 29 fish/hour is relatively unchanged from the 28 fish/hour last year, which was the lowest since 2009. Bass numbers at CRSL have been very low since 2004. The initial cause of the bass density decline was verified as largemouth bass virus in June 2007. The average catch rate from 2005-2015 is only 31 fish/hour. In contrast, the highest catch rate ever recorded was 119 fish/hour in 2002. It was hoped that largemouth numbers would steadily improve following the bass virus epidemic, but they have failed to increase to the 50-75 stock fish/hour objective. Spotted bass are also common at CRSL, and the 2015 catch of 21 spotted bass/hour raises the total black bass catch to 51 fish/hour.

The quality of the low-density largemouth fishery remains good. The percentage of quality-size fish (12"+) remained high in 2015, with 60 percent of the catch exceeding 12 inches in length. The population continues to have a very high percentage of preferred-size (15"+) fish, as a whopping 44 percent of the catch was preferred-size fish. Body condition of all size groups was very good.

Neosho State Fishing Lake - Bass numbers at Neosho State Lake are very good. A total of 155 bass were collected by electro-fishing in the May 18, 2015 sampling. The catch rate increased to 106 fish/hour, up from the 81 fish/hour last year. The lake management objective is to maintain the catch rate near 100 stock-size fish/hour. The average catch rate from the previous five years (2010-2014) is 105 fish/hour.



Bryan Sorenson, former Neosho State Lake manager, displays a 6.8-pound bass collected by electro-fishing. Neosho State Lake supports an abundant bass population, and catching bass there should not be a problem.

Maintaining a substantial bass population is imperative to exert the predation necessary to control abundant shad and sunfish populations at Neosho State Lake. An 18-inch minimum length limit was implemented in 1999 to promote and maintain adequate predation

The quality of the 2015 sample was good. Sixty-seven percent of the catch was 12 inches or larger. Density of 15-inch and larger fish remained relatively high with 22 percent of the catch falling into this preferred size group. Twenty-three percent of the catch was in this size group last year. Body condition of all size groups can be classified as good.



The 2015 bass sampling at Thayer resulted in a high catch rate for fish in the 8- to 12-inch size group, but lower than normal numbers of fish 15-inches and larger. City employee John Dean, on left, is shown here with his friend Cooter Trout displaying some of the bigger fish that were sampled.

Thayer City Lake - Bass density at the old Thayer City Lake remains good. A total of 125 largemouth bass were collected in the May 21 electro-fishing sample for a catch rate of 80 fish/hour. This catch falls within the lake objective 75-125 bass/hour. Catch per unit effort averaged 74 fish/hour in the two previous samplings in 2011 and 2013.

The length distribution of the 2015 catch was not so good if you are interested in big fish. Sixty-five percent of the catch was 8 to 12-inches in length. Only 35 percent were 12 inches or larger. The percentage of the catch over 15 inches in length was 10 percent, down from an average of 22 percent in the two previous samples. Only one fish over 18 inches was collected. Body condition of the 8- to 15-inch fish was good, while 15-inch and larger fish were in excellent condition.

More Brown Trout to be Stocked in Mined Land Area Trout Lake

The trout lake in Unit #30 of the Mined Land Wildlife Area will soon be receiving another stocking of brown trout. A stocking of 2,000 browns is scheduled in October 2015. This stocking is made possible through a fish trade with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

Rainbows have been stocked regularly in the trout lake since 1986. From 1986 to 1993, trout were obtained through trades with other state agencies in Colorado, Wyoming, Utah and Montana. In 1994 KDWPT began the trout stamp program, and since then approximately 16,000 rainbows have been stocked annually through bi-weekly stockings from October through May.

Brown trout were first stocked in 1999, when a few surplus browns were available from KDWPT's contract hatchery, Crystal Springs Trout Farm in Cassville, Missouri. Some of these fish did well, and grew to trophy size. This led to a project to stock more browns, protect them with a restrictive 20-inch length limit and one fish per day bag limit, and try to produce more trophy fish. The goals of the project were to improve the quality of the fishery, provide another unique fishing opportunity, and hopefully, create a trophy fishery.

Even though rainbow trout can live year-around in this unique strip-mined lake, and have the potential to



The trout lake in Unit #30 has the potential to produce some big brown trout, as exemplified by this beauty caught in 2005.

reach trophy size, most are quickly harvested before attaining quality size. Browns are more secretive than rainbows, feeding most actively at night and staying in cover during the day. They are also more piscivorous, preferring a diet comprised of more fish and crayfish. Browns just seem to be less vulnerable to fishing pressure. Browns have been previously stocked in 2008, 2010 and 2011. Hopefully this stocking will result in some bigger fish being caught by area anglers.

2016 License Fee Increase Proposed by KDWPT



The Commission will discuss and vote on a 2016 fee increase proposal at their Oct. 22 meeting in Burlington. The increase is badly needed in order to continue vital fisheries programs like F.I.S.H., the Community Lake Fisheries Program, the winter trout stocking program, continuing operation of four fish hatcheries, and many others.

KDWPT Secretary Robin Jennison informed Commissioners at the August 20 Commission meeting that a fee increase was needed in 2016. The last fee increase occurred in 2002, and current programs are now costing more than annual revenues. In the 14 years since the last fee increase, inflation has increased costs by 32 percent. KDWPT depends solely on license fees to fund its fishing, hunting and wildlife conservation programs. No money is received from the general fund.

Under the proposal, an annual fishing or hunting license would increase from \$18 to \$25; a combo fish/hunt from \$36 to \$45; a non-resident fish from \$40 to \$50; a trout stamp from \$10 to \$12; and a non-resident 5-day fish from \$20 to \$25. License fees in neighboring states are currently equal to, or higher than, KDWPT's proposal. In Oklahoma, a resident annual fishing license is \$25 and a non-resident fish is \$59.50. In Nebraska, an annual resident fish is \$27.50 and a non-resident fish is \$59.50.

Bone Creek Awarded CFAP Grant for Fish Feeders

Davis Breth, KDWPT's new Community Fisheries Assistance Program (CFAP) coordinator, recently awarded Public Wholesale Water Supply District #11 (PWWSD #11) a \$10,545 grant for five new fish feeders at Bone Creek Lake. The feeders will replace the four existing feeders purchased through a CFAP grant in 1998. One additional new feeder will be placed near the spillway area at the south end of the dam.

Approximately \$225,000 is available annually to fund CFAP fisheries enhancement projects statewide. PWWSD #11 will provide 26 percent of the project's \$14,850 total cost. About 5 1/2 tons of feed is fed annually at Bone Creek, or 20 pounds per acre.



Fish feeders are very popular with anglers. They concentrate fish in the general area and make them easier to find and catch. Bone Creek has maintained four fish feeders since the lake first opened in 1999.



Betty Trammel shows off the trophy channel catfish she caught near a Crawford State Lake feeder soon after the feeder dispersed feed. Also pictured is her brother Larry Bennett, who regularly catches big catfish near one of the four feeders at Crawford.

KDWPT Receives Grant to Provide More Public Hunting, Fishing, and Boating Access on Private Lands.

KDWPT recently received a \$2.7 million dollar grant to improve and increase wildlife habitat and public access for recreational opportunities on privately-owned land. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) awarded \$20 million dollars to 15 states, with Kansas receiving the most. USDA's Natural Resource and Conservation Service (NRCS) will administer the funds, which will be available for a three-year period.

This grant is designed for states to expand existing public access programs, create new public access programs, and to provide incentives to improve wildlife habitat on enrolled lands.

The majority of the \$2.7 million will be spent on the hunting side, with KDWPT hoping to enroll 40,000-60,000 new acres of quality access properties to the Walk-in Hunting Access program. The primary focus will be new or recently enrolled Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) properties.

On the fisheries side, the new funding will be used to improve recreational fishing and boating access. A priority will be given to acquiring leases on prime stream reaches, since most of the 10,000 miles of streams and rivers in Kansas are privately owned. Access is only guaranteed on Kansas' three navigatable streams, the Missouri, Kansas, and the Arkansas. Enrollment of quality privately-owned impoundments will also be a priority in some areas.

More than 1 million privately owned acres are currently enrolled in KDWPT's Walk-in Hunting and Fishing Impoundments and Stream Habitats (FISH) programs. Initial enrollment in the new program is expected to begin in late spring 2016.

