

Fall River/Toronto Fisheries District Newsletter

Extreme Weather 2019

Extreme weather in 2019 had significant impacts on fishing. October in Kansas was the seventh coldest since 1895, and May was the wettest on record according to NOAA. The Fall River Fisheries District received 300-percent of its normal rainfall in May. Apparently, this was only the case in the US. World wide, it was reported that 2019 was the second warmest on record. Cold wet weather was not conducive to fishing.

I conduct creel census (count the anglers) at select lakes beginning March 1 and ending October 31 each year. In Kansas, this is considered the fishing season. In most years, there are many warm spring days to entice anglers to start fishing. However, this year on the third of March, it was -6°. There was snow on the ground, and the ponds and lakes were ice covered.



Olpe Jones Park Pond 03/03/19

I wasn't even thinking about fishing with weather like this. In fact, the next morning at Fall River State Park Kid's Pond it was even colder. These were the coldest actual temperatures (not wind chills) I ever recorded on creel surveys. I've been counting anglers on

creel surveys for 34 years. This was not a good start to the fishing season. It was not very pleasant to work in either.



Fall River State Park Kid's Pond 03/04/19

In addition to counting anglers this time of year, I also spawn walleye at Hillsdale Reservoir beginning the middle of March through the first weeks of April. Although I dressed in warm layers under my rain gear and waders, my rubber coated knit gloves were wet and frozen. Many days the boat deck would be a solid sheet of ice from the wet nets. We had to take our water pumps, zebra mussel filters, and hoses to a garage at night so they wouldn't freeze. The walleye spawn was a great success again this year despite the cold. We met our goal of collecting 78.2 million eggs.

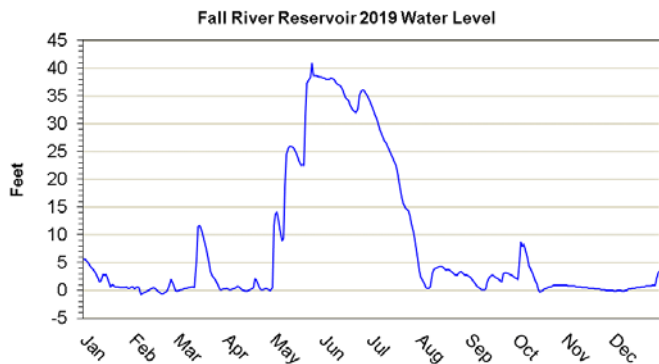
The warm weather went south early this Fall, too. On the second Friday in October, the temperature dropped 39°. That was a powerful cold front. From then on, the lows were below freezing. October is when I do fall test netting. As any good angler can tell you, when a cold front comes through, fish feeding activity stops for two to three days. I only caught 30 crappie the entire third week of netting at Toronto Reservoir. I usually catch that many fish in one net. The water temperature had fallen to 52°

and it was in the 40's the final week of October. This is unheard of for October and ruined the fall fishing.



Olpe Jones Park Pond snow on Halloween

It wasn't just cold weather in spring and fall that upset the fishing. Most district lakes and reservoirs were flooded throughout the spring and well into summer. Fall River Reservoir was in flood stage from May through October. It reached a maximum elevation on May 25th of 40.84 feet. All boat ramps were closed, and all roads were flooded and barricaded blocking access. The spillway was closed to the public and the east side remains closed for repairs.



Fishing access was nearly impossible from flooding. At its highest level, the reservoir nearly topped the Fall River State Park Kid's Pond dam. This would be a problem if fish escaped from the pond or carp got into the pond's balanced fish population. I electrofished the pond in September and found no carp, but gizzard shad found their way through the overflow tube into the pond.

I continued to feed the fish at the Kid's Pond throughout the flooding. I had to use a boat to access the pond. I launched the boat in the road ditch near the State Park entrance,

then drove it through the flooded tree tops to the pond. When the pond got to its highest level, it inundated the fish feeder, turning the remaining fish food pellets into a smelly peanut butter consistency goop that had to be scooped out. After drying it out, it still worked.



Fall River Reservoir clear water

In many Kansas ponds, lakes and reservoirs, floodwaters result in muddy water. However, that was not the case at Fall River Reservoir. Instead of the reservoir's usual 12-18 inches of transparency, decomposing flooded terrestrial vegetation lowered the water's pH which resulted in the clay particles that make the water muddy release from the water molecules and settle to the bottom.

The reservoir had five-foot transparencies while high. This allowed for unprecedented spawning. The reservoir was full of shad, minnows, crappie, sunfish, and largemouth bass. Anglers reported catching large numbers of small bass all fall. Unfortunately, I was unable to document these massive year-classes because bad weather prevented fall test netting. Nevertheless, millions of small minnows could be seen swimming along the shoreline in clear water.



Fall River State Park Kid's Pond nearly flooded by reservoir



Launching boat in ditch at State Park entrance



View of Kid's Pond most of the summer with reservoir on back side of dam



Kid's Pond outhouse after water level receded



Feeding fish at Kid's Pond during flood



Fredonia Bay upside-down boat dock and solar panel



South Rock Ridge dock after water receded

The light in the picture above is the same one pictured below when the lake level was up.



South Rock Ridge dock. How are we going to get that dock down?



Fredonia Bay dock and solar panel after water receded

This damage caused by the flooding is easy to see. However, the economic impact of lost fishing license sales due to bad weather this fishing season was even more. Fishing license sales for 2019 were 192,644, down 18-percent from the 2016-2018 three-year average of 236,759. FEMA doesn't cover lost license sales.

Kansas Fishing License Numbers	2019	2018	2017	2016
resident	111,451	124,108	133,045	145,593
res combo hunt/fish	26,911	31,557	33,066	36,076
nonres 1 day	11,273	12,694	14,637	17,737
res 1 day	10,636	12,238	17,094	19,709
non resident	10,586	11,500	11,127	11,272
5 day	5,987	7,114	8,030	8,415
65-74 Sr lifetime combo	4,676	4,778	5,023	4,632
65-74 res fish	4,474	5,016	5,447	4,904
nr combo hunt/fish	2,827	2,546	2,129	1,573
5 yr combo hunt/fish	1,415	1,766	1,595	2,385
5 yr res fish	1,271	1,282	1,365	1,666
16-20 res fish	793	823	1,105	1,322
16-20 res combo hunt/fish	511	709	910	1,075
65-74 res combo hunt/fish	479	578	501	466
lifetime combo hunt/fish	418	451	493	300
lifetime fish	120	140	178	106
TOTAL=>	193,828	217,300	235,745	257,231
3 yr avg 16-18	236,759			
2019 % decrease from 3 yr avg.	-18			

License sales are the only source of income for the Fisheries Division of KDWPT. We receive no tax dollars from Kansas. We do receive federal tax dollars from the Sport Fish Restoration Act (Dingle-Johnson) based on the number of fishing licenses sold. This federal tax is collected from the sale of fishing tackle and boating equipment. The Fisheries Division has few employees. There are 17 fisheries

biologists, 13 hatchery staff, five fishery researchers, three regional supervisors, four Pratt administrators and four secretaries for a total of 46. The Fisheries Division comprised 11-percent of the Agency budget last year. We do a lot with very little.

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Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism

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