

Independence District Fisheries

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Independence District Introduction

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Well friends, welcome to the first issue of the Independence District Fisheries Newsletter. The goal of the newsletter is to keep anglers up-to-date on fishing opportunities and projects in the district. The district covers Montgomery, Labette and Wilson Counties.

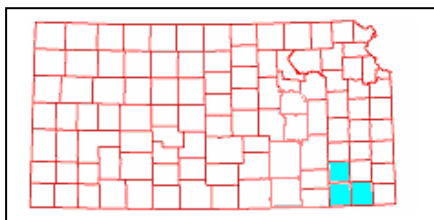
My name is Sean Lynott, I was born and raised in northeast Pennsylvania. I earned a B.S. in field biology from Black Hills State University and a M.S. in Fisheries Management from South Dakota State University (Go Jackrabbits!!).

I had planned on coming to Kansas getting some work experience and then returning back north. Plans have a way of changing as this marks my sixteenth year with Wildlife & Parks.

I am an avid angler and regularly fish in my district waters. Hope to see you on the water.



Work or play, for me it's fish everyday!



Chetopa Paddlefish

These primitive planktivores provide anglers a different fishing experience.

Paddlefish, also known as spoonbills, have a long, paddle-shaped rostrum that accounts for about one-third of their body length. Paddlefish are primarily cartilaginous, which means that they have very few bones. They have small eyes and no scales.



One of the largest fish in America, Paddlefish are a springtime tradition for many anglers in Southeast in Kansas.

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Chetopa Paddlefish —cont from Page 1

Paddlefish are filter feeders, and they spend most of their lives in open water eating microscopic animals called zooplankton.

Because they are filter feeders, the most popular and dependable way to catch paddlefish is by snagging. Anglers in Kansas harvest paddlefish by snagging during a 60-day snagging season that runs March 15th through May 15th.

One of the most popular places to snag Paddlefish is at Chetopa within the City Park. Snagging is allowed on the East bank of the Neosho River from the City dam downstream to the Cherokee County Line. There is just a little piece of city property on the west side, no trespassing is allowed downstream of this point.

PADDLEFISH REGULATION CHANGES

On the Neosho River at Chetopa, lola and Burlington catch and release is allowed.

Paddlefish must be 34 inches or greater to keep on the Marais des Cygnes River. Paddlefish are measured eye to fork of the tail.

Once a fish is placed on a stringer it can not be released, culling is not allowed.

Hooks must be barbless at Chetopa. Barbs can be pinched down or filed off.

Paddlefish Regulations

A Paddlefish permit (**\$12.50, \$7.50 youth**) is required in addition to a fishing license. The Paddlefish Permit includes **six** carcass tags. For locations to buy Paddlefish Snagging permits go [HERE](#) or buy [ONLINE](#).

- Paddlefish may be snagged using pole and line with not more than two single or treble hooks.
- **Daily Creel limit: 2**
- **Possession limit: 6**
- [Browning Oxbow](#), there is a **24-inch length limit**, measured from the eye to the fork of the tail.
- Immediately upon harvest, anglers must sign a carcass tag, record the county/date/time of harvest, and attach the carcass tag to the lower jaw of the paddlefish taken. (NOTE: Tagging harvested paddlefish at designated check-in stations is no longer required.)

- Anglers must stop snagging once the daily limit of legal-sized paddlefish is reached.
- Nonsport fish (carp, drum, grass carp, threadfin and gizzard shad, goldfish, gar, suckers including carpsucker and buffalo, goldeye, and bowfin) may also be snagged in waters posted open to snagging during the paddlefish season. There are no limits on nonsport fish.

Paddlefish require specific flows, temperatures and substrate to reproduce. Spawning is triggered by a combination of daylight, water temperature, and water flow. When water temperatures climb between 50-55 degrees and spring rains cause the rivers to rise, paddlefish migrate upstream to spawn. Male paddlefish reach sexual maturity at 4-5 years and make spawning runs annually. Females reach sexual maturity at 8-10 years and spawn once every 2-3 years.

A very common question this time of year is: when is snagging best at Chetopa? Below is a little information to help you determine the best time to hit the river.

The Neosho River needs to be running around 8,000 cubic feet per second (cfs.) to get fish moving up from Miami, Oklahoma. The best fishing at Chetopa occurs at 10,000-15,000 cfs. Once the river gets up past 20,000 cfs, it becomes difficult to snag and the park starts to flood. The snagging is also best when the river is rising. Once it starts to drop, paddlefish will head down stream to deeper holes.



Although water temperature and photoperiod play a part, flow rate determines angling success.

Chetopa Paddlefish —cont from Page 2

Here is a link to gauging stations in Kansas, I use the flow at Parsons when I plan my trips.

<http://waterwatch.usgs.gov/?m=real&r=ks&w=map>

For paddlefish in the Neosho River the releases from John Redmond Reservoir have the greatest importance. Here is a link for the reservoirs in the Tulsa District.

http://www.swt-wc.usace.army.mil/old_resv rept.htm

A release from John Redmond takes approximately 24-36 hours to reach Chetopa.

Paddlefish Equipment

Typical snagging gear includes a stiff, 7- to 9-foot rod equipped with your choice of a saltwater-sized level-wind or spinning reel spooled with 30-50 pound test (or heavier) line. If you choose to use heavier line or one of the super braids, you will need to tie a leader of 14-20 lb. monofilament from the hook to the sinker. This will make it possible to break off if the sinker snags.

Attach a large, teardrop-shaped, 3- to 8-ounce sinker to the end of the line. Use the heavier weights in deep water or where there is fast current. Use lighter weights in slack water or when the river drops.

Tie No. 10/0 or No. 12/0 treble hooks to the line. Anglers usually use two hooks, one about 18-24 inches above the weight, and the other 2 feet farther up. Tie two half-hitches around the shank of the hook to insure that the hook rides upright. This will help you hook more fish.

Have plenty of extra hooks and weights in the tackle box because you will lose a few. Many snaggers pour their own weights. It's cheaper than buying them.

Heavy needle-nose pliers are a must. You will need them to remove hooks from the fish's tough skin and to reshape bent hooks.

Most anglers use a 10- to 14-foot piece of rope to secure their catch to the bank.

Snagging 101 (tips and tricks)

Come down to Chetopa and watch the snaggers for a bit, and it will be very evident that snagging styles vary as much as the anglers themselves. The only common denominator is that it is a workout.

I like to cast out in front of me or slightly downstream, when the line tightens in the current I lift the rod tip to the 11 o'clock position then I reel down to the 7 o'clock and lift again. I repeat this until the rig is ready to cast again.

When I come in contact with a fish a little snap of the wrist is all that is needed to bury the point past the barb.

The river bottom is hard on the hook points. Check your hooks often; I like to keep a small hone handy for quick touch up work.

If you become snagged, wrap the line around the reel seat, point the tip at the snag and walk backwards up the bank. Keep the rod tip low in case the snag gives way. You'll only need to dodge a 6-ounce sinker once to see the value of this technique.

If you are having trouble connecting with a fish or need help landing a fish, ask your fellow snagger. I have found most snaggers very willing to help.

Snagging isn't for everyone but everyone should try it once. Good Luck!

Aquatic Nuisance Species ALERT! Asian Carp



Photo by Craig Johnson

Bighead carp are an Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS) have been snagged in the Neosho River. This large species has the potential to reproduce very rapidly. Bigheads are filter feeders that can compete against our native paddlefish. Remember, it is illegal to possess or release any ANS species ALIVE.

For more information on ANS Click [Here](#).

Big Hill's Best!

The smallest federal reservoir in Kansas should provide very good fishing this year.

Based on 2009 sampling data, my pick for the lake of the year is Big Hill Reservoir. Big Hill Reservoir is located in an area of southeast Kansas referred to as the "Little Ozarks." The dam site is 4.5 miles east of Cherryvale and 11 miles southwest of Parsons.

The 1,240-acre impoundment was constructed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Tulsa District, with primary functions of flood control, municipal and industrial water supply, and recreation. The reservoir is five miles long, with 80 percent of the basin still having standing flooded timber. The 20 miles of irregular shoreline is comprised of oak dominated hardwood with rocky outcrops and numerous coves. The reservoir has a mean depth of 23 feet and a maximum depth of 60 feet. The water clarity is striking, unlike the other federal reservoirs found in southeast Kansas.

Beginning in 1996, American water willow and arrowhead were planted in Big Hill Reservoir. The primary goal of the project was to stabilize shoreline erosion that became more pronounced after the introduction of grass carp in 1986. Approximately 80 percent of the reservoir now has water willow established on the shoreline. The habitats created by these weed beds are great areas for anglers and concentrate most of the sunfish species present, including largemouth bass.

There are two improved boat ramps on the reservoir and a permit is needed to use the ramps, however, anglers can launch a belly boat or kayak at any access point free of charge. There are also gravel access ramps located at the horse trail head just off of old highway 160 and on the west side of Rea Bridge.

Full hook-up camping is available at the parks operated by the Corps of Engineers. For more information on camping and shelter house availability call 620 336-2741 or visit online at:

http://www.swt.usace.army.mil/recreat/OPSField.CFM?tblOPSField_LakeName=Pearson-Skubitz%20Big%20Hill%20Lake

I like to say that the only thing big about Big Hill is its name. It is not a mainstem reservoir and functions more like a state lake on steroids. The fish populations are very diverse. Below is an overview of the primary species.

Crappie: According to the 2008 creel survey, crappie were the most preferred fish by Big Hill's anglers. An estimated 29,634 crappie were harvested with an additional 23,099 caught and released. Average length of crappie harvested was 10 inches.

The crappie sample this past fall shows a healthy population with 54 percent being over ten inches in length. Simply put, the crappie population has never looked this good!

Crappie will start feeding in earnest during March to prepare for the spawn in April. Small jigs and minnows pitched towards the weedbeds will produce many fish during this time.

Largemouth Bass: The largemouth bass population in Big Hill has tested positive for largemouth bass virus (LMBV). The virus has been shown to cause fishkills occasionally, but has no human health implications. It can be spread in water, so clean and dry your gear before using the same gear at another water body.

There has not been a kill attributed to LMBV on Big Hill. It is likely that the bass density is low enough not to cause this result. Although at a lower density than I would like to see (I am never satisfied), there are plenty of bass present and size structure is superb. Five percent of the largemouth sample was greater than 20 inches in length with the largest fish weighing in at 6.72 lbs.; this was a post spawn fish that was probably pushing 8 lbs. in the days before I shocked her. There is a 21-inch minimum length limit in place for largemouth bass.

Tip: The shoulders of Rea Bridge are an excellent ambush point for pre-spawn largemouth bass. Females will hang



Darrell Stice has been hired as a creel clerk to survey Big Hill's anglers in 2010. Stop by and say hello.

Big Hill's Best —cont from Page 3

out in 4-6 feet of water while the male prepares the nest in 1.5 feet. Working the deeper water parallel to the shoulder will keep you in the strike zone longer than casting perpendicular to shore.

Smallmouth Bass: There is an 18-inch minimum on smallmouth bass in Big Hill. The biggest fish sampled in 2009 was just a hair over 4 pounds. The rip-rap on the dam, the shoulders of Rea Bridge and the boat ramp areas are a great starting points for smallmouth bass. Crayfish imitations work well April through June, then try switching to shad imitations as the bass tend to suspend in deeper waters.



Quality smallmouth bass like this one are a rarity in Southeast Kansas.

Tip: Great topwater action is available in the morning and evening hours throughout the summer along the dam. Pencil poppers in blue and white have produced very well in the past. The bite is over before the summer crowd shows up.

White Bass: White bass were first collected in 1991 in Big Hill Reservoir. Since that time the population has slowly built in numbers. Anglers are now beginning to target this new member of the fishery. The white bass population density in Big Hill Reservoir has appeared to have leveled off; the size structure of the population is very good.

Approximately 30 percent of the white bass sampled this fall were 12 inches or larger. These scrappy members of the true bass family are readily caught on shad imitations. My favorite way to catch them is locate a school herding shad in to the shallows and get into casting range. The shallow point just south of Timber Hill Boat ramp has been a great spot to catch

Remember these aforementioned species are just the highlights. Channel and flathead catfish and other sunfish can be found in Big Hill. So come on down and see what Big Hill has to offer.



Sport Fish Restoration

The little known program that has big implications on Kansas's fisheries.

While coming out of a local business, I had an individual come over and ask me what I was up to and if it was the best expenditure of his money. This is not an uncommon occurrence, so I asked him my standard questions.

Was he an angler? No he answered.

Did he own a motor boat? Again no was the response.

I then asked what money was his that he was concerned about? He answered, a little brashly, that he was a taxpayer and I was a state employee.

My final question was if he what percentage of his taxes (the general fund) were used to support fisheries programs in Kansas? No was the answer again.

Ah, the stage was set, and he couldn't even see it coming. I grinned a little when I gave him the answer: NONE!

The Kansas Department of Wildlife & Parks Fisheries Division receives no General Fund money for any fisheries programs. The Division is a prime example of a user-pay program. Funds from fishing license sales are used to match federal Sport Fish Restoration (SFR) funds generally in a 75/25 cost share. It is surprising the number of non-anglers and anglers alike who have this misconception about funding and aren't familiar with the Sport Fish Restoration Program.

Originally passed in 1950 and strongly supported by anglers throughout the nation, the Sport Fish Restoration Act (Dingell - Johnson Act) placed a 10 percent excise tax on fishing rods, reels, lures, fishing line, and related fishing equipment. In 1984 Congress passed the Wallop Breaux amendments to the Act, which

Sport Fish Restoration - cont from Page 4

included import duties on yachts and a motorboat fuel tax on gasoline.

As a result of important partnerships formed during the 1984 amendments, each state now spends at least 15 percent of SFR monies on boating access and up to 10 percent on aquatic resource education and fisheries outreach activities.

Monies are distributed depending upon the size of the state and the number of fishing licenses sold with no state receiving more than 5.0 percent or less than 1.0 percent. The program provides a valuable investment in the maintenance and enhancement of our natural resources and the tremendous economic benefits they generate for the future.

Kansas is recognized nationally by anglers and fisheries professionals as providing exceptional sport fishing opportunities. Over 217,000 recreational anglers fished Kansas waters in 2009, contributing an estimated \$ 242 million to the State economy. This high level of angler participation and satisfaction is maintained through the support of the Sport Fish Restoration Program.



In 2010, Kansas will receive over \$3.5 million. Annual funding received from the Sport Fish Restoration Program is utilized by KDWP to support activities that directly benefit anglers and ensure that the tremendous sport fishing opportunities offered in Kansas are available for years to come.

So get out and enjoy the aquatic resources, after all you are paying for them.

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



Parting Shot!

I hope you enjoyed the first district newsletter. I hope to release two issues a year.

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Dean Reed of the Green Country Fishers Club practicing "Catch and Grease" during their club outing at Montgomery State Fishing Lake.

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