

El Dorado District Update

Mid-April is here and fishing activity is steadily increasing. If you have been waiting for 'it' to happen, the time is drawing near!

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This is the first "Newsflash!" version of the El Dorado District Fisheries Newsletter. These short but timely editions of the newsletter are intended to put time sensitive information in to the hands of anglers. Current information will be provided on fish activity, productive baits, and techniques for various lakes in the district.

Thanks to all of you who participated in the Newsletter Survey that was sent out mid-February 2011. The Emporia Research and Survey Office gained some good data from your responses, and we hope to use the information to improve the content and delivery of newsletters.

Since ice-out, there has been some good fishing for numerous species in the district. El Dorado and Council Grove reservoirs produced some good crappie action. The walleye spawn fishing at El Dorado and Winfield City Lake was less than stellar this year with a few fish caught by determined anglers. Netting at El Dorado on April 6 and 13 showed actively spawning walleye near the dam with good numbers of fish. Saugeye at Council Grove were being caught by crappie anglers in the cold water, and saugeye continue to be caught up the creeks with limits being reported. The state fishing lakes (SFLs) are warming up nicely, and fishing action is improving. Largemouth bass are being caught at all three SFLs and some nice channel catfish have been caught at Butler and Chase.

Depending what Mother Nature has in store for us the next couple of weeks, crappie fishing should continue to improve, the white bass spawn should take off, and walleye should begin to move to the flats.

Reservoir Crappie

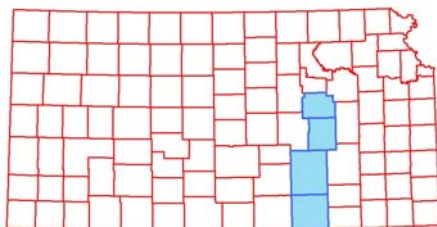
Crappie fishing has been improving nearly every day at El Dorado and Council Grove reservoirs. Crappie are moving from the wintering areas in deeper water to shallower, warmer waters where they are preparing for the spawn. Anglers have been catching crappie in very shallow water at both reservoirs over the last week. The creeks above the reservoirs are producing crappie as they do each spring, and anglers also have a good chance of hooking white bass or walleye/saugeye in addition to crappie while fishing the creeks.

This time of the year you don't need a boat to get in on the good crappie bite. With most action coming in shallow water, fishing from shore can be productive as baits can be presented more precisely. Wading with long rods allows anglers to put the sneak on crappie in shallow water. This technique, known as doodlesocking, is deadly when crappie are utilizing shallow cover. Both live bait and artificials can be used with the long rod. Slowly lower your bait alongside stickups, stumps, or weeds and hold it at varying depths. Crappie often like protection of overhead cover while they are shallow, so fish as closely as you can to the cover. Move slowly and quietly as the fish spook easily.

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Another great springtime method is the jig and bobber combo. This simple rig consists of a small crappie jig with a bobber fastened a foot or two above. This rig allows the angler to fish the jig in an area for a longer period of time to tempt finicky crappie into hitting. This rig can also be used to “swim” the jig at the productive depth to cover more water and find the location of the fish. A slight variation to this method is to replace the jig with a fresh, lively minnow. Few spring crappie can refuse a minnow meal! Fish an area thoroughly. Be sure to fish a variety of depths as fish will move in and out of shallow water during the day due to temperature, light intensity, wave action, or forage availability. Also don't be afraid to move to other areas of the lake to look for active fish if your current spot is slow or unproductive. A spot that was hot yesterday may not be hot again today but during this time of the year the fish will be active somewhere.

Good places to start are similar for both El Dorado and Council Grove. Small coves will warm more quickly and will attract crappie earlier than the larger coves. Look for submerged brush, weeds, stickups or any other kind of cover. Areas that are gravelly or rocky are good, but at times even mud bottoms can be hotspots. Coves in the upper ends of these larger lakes will warm more quickly than coves off of the lower main lake. The spawn normally progresses from the upper end of the lakes down toward the dam, following the warmer water. If last weekend's hotspot isn't hot this week, move down lake and check areas with similar habitat.



Quality crappie, such as this El Dorado slab, can be caught in the creeks above the reservoirs in early to mid-March and on in to the summer months.

If the shallows aren't producing fish during this time of the year, it is likely that the crappie have moved off the bank into deeper water. Utilizing slip bobbers to fish the deeper depths is a productive technique. Fan casting lures such as eighth-ounce or sixteenth-ounce Road Runners is a great way to find active fish that have moved off of the spawning banks. Once your lure hits the water, count to six or eight while letting the lure drop. This will let your lure reach the deeper fish. Once you get a strike, note the countdown number and replicate this on upcoming casts. If the deep bite slows, be sure to check the shallow spawning banks again as fish may have moved up.



A couple of prespawn crappie from El Dorado caught on jigs on April 8, 2011.

Taking a moment to examine your catch can tell you a lot. It is easy to determine sex of the fish during the crappie spawn. Males will be “colored up” as the spawn approaches and during the spawn. This coloration is a darkening of the male's body, making white crappie males turn nearly black. If the spawn is still a ways off, few if any males will show spawn coloration. Take note of the sex ratio of the fish you are catching. Male crappie are generally smaller than the female crappie. If you are catching mostly males out of shallow water and you want some larger fish, look for the first break to deeper water from the spawning area. Usually the females will be holding in this slightly deeper water waiting for the right time to head in to the shallower spawning grounds. If you are catching a mix of males and females then you are likely in a very good location!

Crappie lures come in a wide array of styles, shapes, sizes, and colors. Although an angler doesn't need to have a tackle box as big as a semi-trailer, it doesn't hurt to have a couple of different styles and colors on hand during your trip to El Dorado or Council Grove. Jig bodies that have been productive this year are the 3-inch white curly-tailed grub, 3-inch Gulp! Minnow, eighth-ounce turbo-tail RoadRunner, and 3.5-inch Wasshoppah Bug. Each of these baits

works extremely well, depending on fishing conditions. The 3-inch white curly-tailed grub and the Road Runner are good for finding active fish. Deep water can be fished using the countdown method described above. Slow and steady retrieves work well during prespawn and spawning periods. The Wasshoppah Bug and Gulp! Minnow work well vertical jigging and fishing brush piles. A very slow, or deadsticking, presentation with these baits has produced good catches of crappie from ice-out to present. The bigger size of the Wasshoppah Bug makes it easier for the fish to find it in dingy or muddy water. Crappie as small as 6 inches have inhaled the bait despite its larger size. If crappie are being extra finicky and not very active, the Gulp! Minnow is a good option. It is about the same size as a live minnow, it has very little action when deadsticked, and it has scent attractors built in to the bait. Slowly working these baits on the edge of channel, break, or through a brushpile are good ways to catch those reservoir crappie.



Clockwise from top left. 3-inch curly tailed grub, 3-inch Gulp! Minnow, 3.5-inch Wasshoppah Bug, 1/8oz turbo tail Road Runner

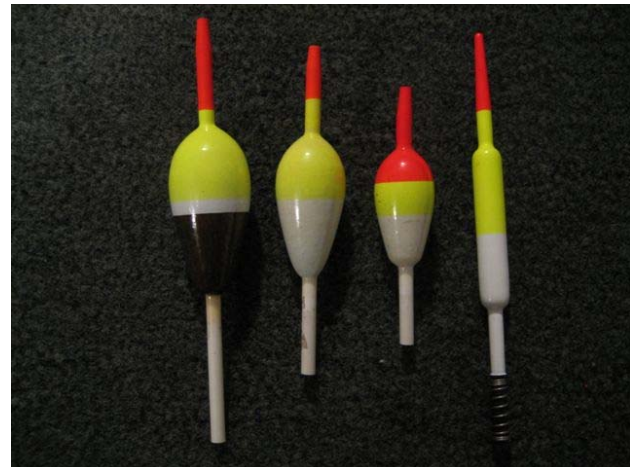
Kansas is known for its crazy weather and this week has been no exception. Crappie had begun to come shallow on the spawning banks at both Council Grove and El Dorado earlier this week as water temperatures increased with the daytime highs in mid- to upper 70s. As luck would have it, a big front blew in last night which brought storms and a big weather change. Instead of the warm weather we've had all week, a northwest wind is blowing 31 mph with higher gusts with an afternoon temperature of 42! A front like this will definitely move those shallow fish back out to deeper water, but they will return quickly when more suitable weather returns. Conditions change quickly, and so does the crappie bite.

The magic crappie bite can happen at any time over the next several weeks. Don't wait for that hot report before you head out to the lake. If you are interested in catching crappie, get out and go when you can!

Hot bites can start and stop in a matter of minutes, and you'll want to be there when it starts. Throughout the period from April 15 to the end of May, good crappie spawn fishing could be had at any given moment. Make sure that you are there!



A variety of colors of crappie tube jigs will give the angler some flexibility. Crappie tube jigs are inexpensive and a wide assortment can be had with minimal investment.



Use the smallest float/bobber that you can. Floats come in many sizes and shapes to fit the situation. Smaller floats can be pulled under without alerting the crappie which increases hook ups.



Other species, such as this chunky white bass, will also hit baits intended for crappie.



A 23-inch El Dorado walleye inhaled a bait intended for crappie on April 2, 2011



A couple of El Dorado walleye sampled April 7, 2011



Two walleye sampled at El Dorado April 13, 2011

Last Cast!

As I finish writing this newsletter, the gale force winds continue churning El Dorado Reservoir outside my office in to a muddy mess. That is Kansas weather for ya, and in a couple of days it will be beautiful again, and the crappie will return to their spawning rituals. On the next warm day, grab a couple of rods and reels and a dozen or so minnows and take a kid fishing. Whether the fish cooperate or not, it won't be a wasted trip.

I set out a couple of nets on April 7 and again on April 13 at El Dorado to check on the walleye spawn. Anglers fishing for spawning walleye this year did not have much success, and many thought that the fish just weren't there. My sampling last fall showed good numbers of walleye, but I wanted to see how the spawn was progressing. We found the spawn still going strong on April 7 with some nice big females caught. The April 13 sample showed a few less fish but ripe females were still cruising the shallow spawning banks. See the pictures at the left for a couple of the nicer females from both of the sampling days. After the spawn, the walleye will slowly move to the flats to put on the feedbag. Usually by the first of May catches of walleye on the flats have increased. Anglers historically have done well with a jig and nightcrawler combo. The increase in white perch in the reservoir may cause fits for anglers as the white perch is notorious for stripping nightcrawlers off of jigs before the walleye have a chance to take the hook.

As always, if you know someone who might like to subscribe to the newsletter, they can do so [HERE](#). If you would like to unsubscribe, please send your info to [Contact Us](#) with "unsubscribe El Dorado District Fisheries newsletter" and we'll get you taken off of the list. If you have any questions or comments or story ideas feel free to [send them in!](#)

Fish On!

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... and FISH KANSAS!



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