

WALLEYE

Another popular Kansas sportfish is the walleye. Walleye spawn in Kansas in March and April when water temperatures reach 45 to 50 degrees. Because fewer than 20 percent of the eggs normally hatch in the wild, artificial spawning and hatching are widely practiced to increase the egg survival rates. Artificial spawning in Kansas is timed to coincide with this natural spawn.

In the state's larger reservoirs, field biologists collect walleye eggs from female fish and milt from the males, then ship carefully-mixed bags of fertilized eggs to the hatchery, where water is added to each bag. This allows the eggs to gradually warm up to the temperature of the hatchery water, normally about 60 degrees. The eggs are then placed into specially designed hatching jars.

Water is piped down the center of these jars then flows up from the bottom. This action, combined with a clay treatment applied in the field, keeps the eggs in suspension and prevents clumping.

Hatchery biologists monitor the eggs closely as incubation advances. Water flows are checked to ensure constant but controlled movement. Water temperatures and oxygen content are also routinely checked. Dead eggs rise to the top of the jars and are siphoned off each day.

At 60 degrees, hatching generally occurs on the eighth or ninth day of incubation. As the fry break out of their egg cases, they swim and are carried upward by the water into large circular holding tanks where they are held for two to four days. Then, they are ready for stocking. Some fry are stocked in hatchery ponds to be raised to fingerling size and stocked later in the summer.



OTHER FISH

In addition to channel catfish and walleye, the Pratt Hatchery also propagates other fish. Sauger and saug-eye fry are usually obtained from the Milford Hatchery and raised to fingerling size in the Pratt ponds. Wiper fry obtained from other state agencies are raised and stocked in much the same manner. Largemouth bass fry from the Meade Hatchery are also brought to Pratt and reared to fingerling size.

A popular panfish, the bluegill is also raised at the Pratt Hatchery. Bluegill naturally reproduce in brood ponds, and when fry are hatched — as many as 1 million in a single pond — they are moved to rearing ponds where they can grow to larger size.

Upon special request from field biologists, the Pratt Hatchery is also capable of rearing black crappie, white crappie, and northern pike.

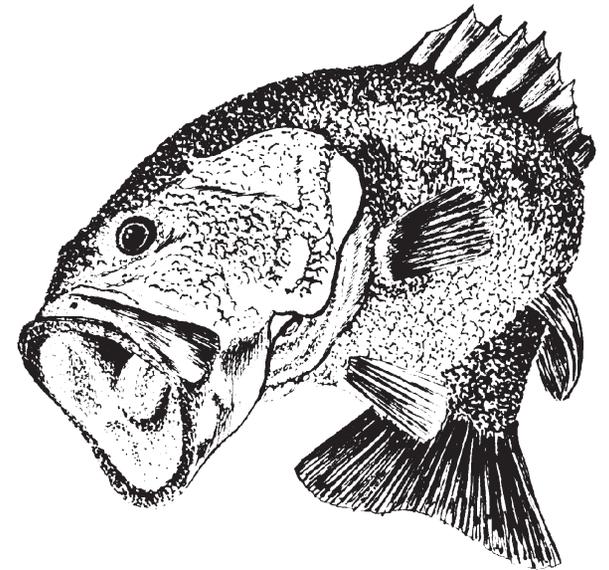
Sportfish are not the only species raised at the Pratt Hatchery. Goldfish, Koi and fathead minnows are maintained as forage species for use throughout Wildlife and Parks' hatchery system. The fry of white amur, commonly called grass carp, are obtained from other states and raised in the Pratt ponds, where they are also used to control vegetation. Each year, the hatchery fills white amur requests from state and city lakes as an alternative to chemical control of aquatic weeds.

COME VISIT US

The Pratt Hatchery is open to the public, and tours are conducted by prior arrangement. The peak of Fish House activity occurs in April, during walleye production, and June, when channel catfish propagation is in full swing. For more information, phone (316) 672-5911, Ext. 149, or write the Pratt Hatchery or Operations Office of the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism, 512 SE 25th Ave., Pratt, KS 67124.

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PRATT FISH HATCHERY



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HATCHERY HISTORY

The Kansas fish culture system began in earnest on March 13, 1903, when the Kansas Legislature approved establishment of a state fish hatchery. Authority was given to the governor and the state fish warden, D.W. Travis, to “Locate and establish a fish hatchery at some place that is well adapted to the propagation of fish.”

On June 30, 1903, Pratt County donated 12 acres of land for a fish hatchery two miles east and one mile south of Pratt. In 1905, three additional acres were donated, and the legislature appropriated \$8,400 for the hatchery. At that time, the hatchery building was constructed, and the hatchery consisted of seven ponds.

The hatchery was expanded almost to its present configuration in 1912 and 1913 with the construction of a new headquarters office, numerous operational buildings, and 83 additional one-acre fish production ponds. At that time, it was the largest fish hatchery in the United States.



THE HATCHERY TODAY

Today, the Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism Operations Office and Wildlife Museum share the grounds with the hatchery, and many visitors tour the facilities each year.

If the body of the hatchery consists of the ponds where fish are raised, the Hatchery Building is its heart. Nicknamed the “Fish House,” this is where fry are artificially hatched, treated for disease, and readied for stocking or rearing ponds.



Presently, the hatchery grounds consist of 87 culture ponds and two concrete raceways. The primary water supply for the hatchery is a shallow five-acre reservoir on the Ninnescah River at the east edge of Pratt’s Lemon Park. With the supplemental help of two wells, the hatchery is capable of running 3,000 gallons of water per minute through the gravity-flow system. Water flows continuously through the hatchery and back into the Ninnescah, giving the facility high-quality water.

Fish species raised at the Pratt Hatchery include wall-eye, wiper (white bass/striped bass hybrid), sauger, saugeye (walleye/sauger hybrid), large-mouth bass, channel catfish, and bluegill. Brood fish and forage fish are maintained in the ponds.

CHANNEL CATFISH

The most popular fish in Kansas is the channel catfish, and channel cats from the Pratt hatchery are stocked all over the state. Hatching methods used today were developed here more than 60 years ago by Seth Way, a long-time hatchery superintendent.

As water temperatures approach 70 degrees, culture biologists place spawning cans in the brood ponds. The male catfish cleans and readies the nest with its tail and fins; then the female lays her eggs, and the male fertilizes and guards them. During the spawning season, biologists check the nests twice a week. When eggs are found, they are removed and taken to the Fish House and placed in hatching troughs where they remain for the next six to seven days.

After the eggs have hatched, the fry are removed from the hatching troughs and placed in rearing troughs for 8 days. Between 75,000 and 100,000 fry per acre are then placed in rearing ponds.

In the fall, ponds are drained, and the fingerlings are used to fill stocking requests throughout Kansas. Some will also be kept and fed through winter and stocked the next summer as intermediate-sized fish.

