

Pittsburg District Fisheries Newsletter

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Spring is Finally Here It's Time to Go Fishing

It has been a long, cold winter, but area waters are warming up fast, and I've already received reports of some good crappie fishing at Bone Creek Reservoir. If you haven't already, I hope you are ready to get out and enjoy the many fishing opportunities we have here in southeast Kansas.

Since the fall newsletter, I have been busy with annual gill net and frame net samplings, weighing and measuring hundreds of fish; completing fisheries habitat projects; attending training sessions and professional meetings; lots of maintenance work on boats, trailers, sampling equipment, and fish feeders; completing management reports and stocking requests; and working on angler access grants at Thayer and Chanute. This spring we just started the walleye egg collection project, with a goal of collecting 90 million eggs from Hillsdale, Cedar Bluff, and Milford reservoirs. We will be stocking Bone Creek, Crawford State Lake, Chanute City Lake, and the Mined Land Wildlife Area as a result of these efforts. Kids fishing events are being scheduled, and we will be sampling bass populations in May. I hope your winter has been busy and productive, as well.



This winter's prolonged snow and ice cover made cardinals flock to the feeder just outside my picture window. A record 19 colorful male cardinals were counted at one time. Although beautiful, scenes like this are hopefully a thing of the past. Spring is finally here, and it's time to boot that bad case of cabin fever. Let's get outside and catch some fish!

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Kansas
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2014 Pittsburg District Fishing Prospects

In general, the smaller, shallower ponds and pits will warm up first. Fish will be active and spawning in these impoundments a week or two before the fish in larger, deep lakes and reservoirs. White bass will soon be making a run up Spring River, so this is an early opportunity you should be prepared for. Also, Mined Land Area trout fishing will continue to be good as bi-weekly stockings will continue through May.

Crappie – The water temperature is already in the low to mid-50s, and crappie will soon be moving in shallow to spawn. Fish are much easier to locate and catch at this time. Crappie spawning occurs when the water temperature is 58 to 60 degrees. Many times, a jig placed a few feet below a bobber is all that's needed to get in the action. The highest density population of 8-inch and larger crappie in the Pittsburg district was found at Neosho State Lake. The October frame net catch was 73 fish per net. Although numbers are high, you'll have to sort through a lot of smaller fish for a good mess to eat. Only 3 percent of the catch was over 10-inches. Crawford State Lake and Chanute City Lake also have high numbers of smaller fish, with some larger fish mixed in. Bone Creek and some of the larger lakes on the Mined Land Wildlife Area have more quality-size fish to offer. Bone Creek frame net catch rates are low due to the very clear water, but crappie are abundant, and anglers this year have already reported catching crappie 14-inches in length. Nearby Parsons City Lake, Bourbon County Lake and Big Hill Reservoir (biologist rating excellent) have good crappie populations too, and would be good places to wet a line and catch some larger fish.



Richard Jameson proudly displays a pair of 4-pound black crappie caught in a Crawford county strip-mined lake. Although giants like these are rare, there are many area lakes that provide good crappie fishing.



The Mined Land Wildlife Area produces some big largemouth bass like these two beauties caught in the trout lake. These fish were no doubt enjoying a supplemental diet of rainbow trout.

Largemouth Bass - When water temperatures reach about 63 degrees, bass will move into shallower water to spawn. The best bass lakes in the Pittsburg district are Bone Creek Lake, the Mined Land Wildlife Area (MLWA), Chanute City Lake, and Neosho State Lake. Electrofishing in 2013 showed Bone Creek had the highest quality fishery as 37 percent of the catch were 15-inches or larger. The catch rate for 8-inch and larger bass at Bone Creek was 96 fish per hour, the highest catch ever recorded. All MLWA lakes have bass, but the best for big fish are often the ones that don't receive heavy fishing pressure. It could be worth the extra effort to walk into or portage into an overlooked or hard to get to lake. The Chanute City Lake sampling showed both good quality and high density. The electrofishing catch rate was 121 fish per hour with 22 percent of the catch over 15-inches in length. Neosho State Lake had a catch rate of 117 fish per hour with 14 percent over 15-inches. Other nearby lakes with good bass ratings are Big Hill Reservoir and Wilson State Lake.

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



Fishing Prospects (cont.)

Channel Catfish – Channel catfish anglers are fortunate. Even though channel catfish don't reproduce and maintain their numbers in small lakes on their own, KDWPT hatcheries produce plenty. In 2014 over 33,500 intermediates (8-12 inches) were stocked in the Pittsburg district. Catfish are plentiful in all our public waters. Neosho State Lake, Chanute City Lake, and Crawford State Lake ranked the highest based on samplings last October. The MLWA also has a lot to offer, as each fall 14,000 fish are stocked throughout hundreds of pits. One tip to improve your catfishing success is don't fish too deep throughout the summer months. Most large, deep lakes stratify, and there is no oxygen in deeper water. You'll have better luck fishing at the shallower ends or along shoreline vegetation in water 15 feet deep or less.

If you like river fishing and the opportunity to set limb-lines or trotlines, the Neosho River and Spring River-Empire Lake complex offers some good fishing. Other good catfish lakes nearby ranking excellent in the Fishing Forecast include Big Hill Reservoir, Parsons City Lake, and Bourbon County Lake.



Eric Craft shows off a 19-lb.7-oz. channel catfish caught incidentally while bass fishing at Bone Creek. Most public waters receive annual stockings that maintain good catfish populations.



Bluegill are found in every public fishing water in southeast Kansas. They are the bread-and-butter for kids, and are hard to beat in the skillet.

Bluegill/Redear – Bluegill and redear sunfish are common in most all of our lakes. Put a worm on a small hook a few feet below a bobber, fish the rig along weed lines, and you will probably be successful. Bluegill, redear, bass, and crappie are members of the family Centrarchidae, or nest builders. They move into shallow water where the male builds a plate-size nest and tends it until the eggs hatch. The clearer the water, the deeper they nest. In strip mined lakes, where shallow water is often restricted to the ends of larger lakes, spawning fish are not hard to find. Spawning areas are at a premium, and all the sunfish are forced to use the few suitable areas. The result is that hybridization is common, and you will often see hybrids of bluegill, redear, green sunfish, and longear sunfish. 2013 nettings showed Neosho State Lake and Bone Creek Lake have the best quality sunfish fishing. The MLWA is also offers great opportunities.

MLWA Trout Lake Continues to Provide Unique Opportunities

The Oct. 13, 2013 trout stocking marked the 28th season rainbows have been stocked in the 28-acre trout lake in Unit No. 30 of the Mined Land Wildlife Area (MLWA). More than 349,000 catchable trout have been stocked. This lake's unique characteristics permit trout to survive year-round, allowing some fish to reach trophy size.

The trout lake was one of the first lakes created by Big Brutus, the giant 16-story-tall electric coal shovel that operated from 1962–1974. Shortly after KDWPT acquired this property from P & M Coal Company in 1981, oxygen-temperature profiles revealed that this lake did not typically stratify. During summer months, depths from 20 to 40 feet have temperatures below 70 degrees, and oxygen levels exceeding 4.0 parts per million – conditions sufficient to maintain year-round trout survival. Bi-weekly stockings of 935 fish are made from Oct.15 through the end of May. Multiple stockings are more costly, but ensure much more consistent success for anglers. Approximately 16,000 trout are stocked annually. Most trout are 10 inches (about 1/2 pound) when stocked, but 5 percent of each stocking are comprised of fish 14 inches or larger.

In addition to the rainbows, brown trout stockings have been made in 2008, 2010 and 2011. The browns were stocked in an attempt to improve the quality of the trout fishery and provide another unique angling opportunity on the MLWA. A 20-inch minimum length limit with a one per day creel limit has been implemented to protect the browns until they can reach trophy size.



The trout lake is stocked with 935 rainbows every two weeks from mid-October through May. The frequent stockings insure anglers more consistent success. Two cabins are available to rent at the trout lake. One of the cabins can be seen here in the background.



The trout lake offers excellent fishing, good shoreline access, and a beautiful setting. So beautiful in fact, that a wedding recently took place there. Trout fishing success will continue to be good through May.

Trout can be caught at any depth during the winter months. In summer, fishing is slower, and fish will remain in 20 to 45 feet of water. The limit on rainbows is 5 fish per day with no size limit. There is a 20-inch minimum size limit on browns with a one fish per day creel limit.

A \$12.50 trout permit and a fishing license are required for all anglers 16 and older fishing in the trout lake. Youth 15 and younger are not required to possess a trout permit, but their daily creel limit is two, unless they purchase a trout permit, which allows a full daily trout creel limit of five. Trout permits are available online (www.ksoutdoor.com), from local license vendors, at KDWPT Park and regional offices, and most county clerk offices.



Five percent of each MLWA rainbow stocking are comprised of fish 14-inches or larger.

KDWPT & KDHE Cooperating to Make Improvements on Mined Land Wildlife Area

The product of past coal mining, the Mined Land Wildlife Area (MLWA) is a 14,500-acre public wildlife area that is like no other in the state. The distinctive topographical features, numerous strip-mined lakes, and abundant wildlife make the MLWA a favorite destination of many anglers, campers, hunters and outdoor enthusiasts.

The Surface Mining Section of the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) has been completing reclamation projects on abandoned mined land areas in Crawford and Cherokee counties for many years. The primary purpose of these reclamation projects is to remove safety hazards to the public. Many of the projects are geared toward eliminating vehicle safety concerns of steep-sided high-walls next to public roads. These projects are paid for by KDHE, with funding coming from a tax placed on newly mined coal. The tax money is distributed back to states to reclaim old mine sites that were abandoned long before reclamation laws were on the books. KDHE prioritizes these safety concerns, with Area No. 35 of the MLWA now their highest priority site. This \$3.5 million project was just recently initiated.



One of the benefits of reclamation work in MLWA No. 8 is improved boat access to the shallow and productive finger pits. The largest lake and finger pits were connected, and now the new boat ramp at the top right of this photo gets boaters to most all the available water.



KDHE's primary concern is safety. Excavation work in MLWA No. 44 focused on providing a safe zone between the lake and the county road at the far right. The gently sloped shorelines following reclamation greatly improve access for shoreline anglers.

KDWPT works closely with KDHE to minimize the impact to wildlife and aquatic habitats during excavation and to build in fish and wildlife friendly improvements. There is no doubt that initially there is temporary loss of wildlife habitat. But in the long-term, the new improvements will greatly reduce future maintenance costs, improve long-term stability of roads, and improve habitat diversity.

Approximately \$6.5 million has been spent by KDHE on improvements on the MLWA to date. Some of the many benefits realized include: making interior roads safer and more assessable; improving productivity of soils by applying crushed limestone to neutralize acidic sites; installation of water control structures to help prevent flooding and erosion; increasing water levels to inundate timber and improve aquatic habitats; improving boat access to large, newly-connected pits; improved shoreline angler access; greatly reduced long-term maintenance costs; and the construction of additional wetlands.

KDHE reclamation work on the MLWA will continue with projects totaling \$5 million either in progress, or to be initiated soon. The areas targeted for these improvements include units 17, 18, 19 and 35.

Free Fishing Weekend June 7-8, 2014. Why not go fishing with friends



Kids love to fish, so please consider getting someone you know involved in this life-long activity. Maybe you'll be lucky enough to have your beginning angler catch a first fish like this. This young lady will likely be hooked on fishing for life, and it was an extremely rewarding experience for me.

Upcoming Fishing Derbies

- April 26, 2014 Eagles Kids Fishing Derby
West Mineral Eagles Club
Sign-up Fri. 6-9 pm & Sat 6-9 am
Weigh-in Sat 4:00
- May 3, 2014 O.K. Kids Fishing Derby
Lakeside Park, Pittsburg
8:00 - 10:00 am
- July 4, 2014 Pittsburg Annual 4th of July Derby
Lincoln Park Ponds, Pittsburg
8:00 - 10:00 Youth & adult categories
- Aug 17, 2014 Arma Homecoming Derby
Hookie Park, Arma
10:00 - 12:00



STOP AQUATIC
HITCHHIKERS!

New F.I.S.H. Water in Cherokee County

Two new fishing impoundments have recently opened a mile south of Columbus on Highway 7. The Fishing Impoundments & Stream Habitats Program (F.I.S.H.) has successfully attained public fishing access to private waters for 15 years. A primary focus for F.I.S.H. is attaining small impoundment access for anglers in strategic locations. All counties are classified into one of three tiers based upon their potential to increase fishing participation. Tier classification is determined by taking into account population, public fishing acreage, and per capita fishing participation. The rate in Cherokee and Neosho counties is \$75 per acre. In Crawford county it is \$100 per acre.

Another focus of the F.I.S.H. program is to increase access to high quality, long stretches of streams for fishing and paddlesports. Base rates for fishing access are based upon a Stream and River Evaluation Map and stream miles are enrolled at an annual rate of \$1,000/mile (high priority fishery resource), or \$500/mile (moderate fishery resource).

If you or your neighbors have a large pond, strip-mined lake, or stream segment that you'd be willing to share with the public, please contact me.



This 12-acre borrow pit pond located a mile south of Columbus now provides anglers with another location to catch bass, bluegill, channel catfish and redear. A 7-acre pond is also available at this new FISH property.