

# Dodge City District Fisheries

Kansas Department of Wildlife & Parks Fisheries Division

Spring 2016

## Walleye 2016 Egg Collection Operation

One of Kansas' most popular angling opportunities is just beginning as walleye move into shallow, rocky areas -- usually rip-rap along reservoir dams -- to spawn. As waters warm and days grow longer, walleye abandon deep water and migrate to these spawning areas. The walleye is a highly-sought game fish for Kansas anglers and has been stocked in most federal reservoirs and some larger state and community lakes. The state record weighed in at 13 pounds, 3 ounces! To help maintain these fisheries, millions of young walleye are collected and stocked each spring by department biologists and culturists. As the walleye move into the shallow, rocky areas along the face of dams to spawn, KDWPT biologists will be waiting for them to collect their eggs. Below are the lakes and the schedule for the operation in the spring of 2016. Perry and Banner Creek are on the list as those are our locations for obtaining sauger to make saugeye.

Operation sites and beginning net set dates:

Banner-Set on March 13<sup>th</sup>

Perry-Set on March 15<sup>th</sup>

Cedar Bluff -Set on March 14<sup>th</sup>

Hillsdale -Set on March 20<sup>th</sup>

Milford -Set on March 27<sup>th</sup>

There are several parameters that trigger when we set nets and when we shut down the operation on each lake. Fortunately, this process has been tweaked over the years and even though the dates seem scattered haphazardly, the whole process tends to work relatively smooth.

This entire project is one of the largest operations for the fisheries division each year and much preparation goes into making sure all goes according to plan. Most of the fisheries guys from western Kansas gathered the first week of March, as seen in the first photo below, to begin preparing for this operation. In addition to net repairs (we HATE mice!), boats are checked, and trailers are loaded with generators, pans for holding eggs, holding tanks, and coolers for transporting eggs. Water pumps and filters and hoses are all checked, as are waders and cold weather survival gear.



Western Region fisheries biologists work on trap net repair up at Cedar Bluff in preparation for the annual walleye egg-taking project.



A typical female walleye aboard the "Spawntoon" boat, which could be described as a floating Frankenstein Laboratory!

The reason we undertake this operation is because fewer than 5 percent of eggs normally hatch in the wild. Artificial spawning and hatching is used to increase egg survival rates as much as 40-50 percent. When hatchery-bound eggs reach their destination, biologists monitor incubation closely. 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 water temperatures of 60 degrees, hatching generally occurs on the eighth or ninth day of incubation. As the fry break out of their egg cases, they are carried upward by the water into 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. Others are stocked directly into lakes as fry.

## Education Throughout the Year

During a typical year, fisheries biologists spend a lot of time making educational presentations at a variety of locations. In addition to fishing clinics and derbies, another popular educational tool is the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism (KDWPT) mobile aquarium (MA). The MA is set up near the southeast gate of the Kansas state Fair every year and is a great place to hear A LOT of fish stories!



The mobile aquarium, which holds 3,200 gallons of water is one popular education tool used by fisheries staff to increase public awareness and appreciation of Kansas' fisheries resources, increase interest and participation in recreational fishing, and aid KDWPT in staying connected with the citizens of Kansas.

The MA stays at the Milford Fish Hatchery. In addition to the State Fair, the MA will be set up at other events across Kansas, displaying many of the sportfish and non-game fish that can be found in Kansas. Species typically on display include; largemouth and smallmouth bass, white bass, striped bass, hybrid striped bass (wiper), bluegill, green sunfish, channel catfish, blue catfish, flathead catfish, buffalo, common carp, walleye, sauger, saugeye, redear sunfish, black crappie, white crappie, longnose gar, spotted gar, freshwater drum and more. All of the display fish except for the stripers are collected from Kansas waters using standard fisheries science collection techniques. Most MA events have fisheries biologists available to educate and visit with the public about the state's fish resources.

Additional education venues vary greatly across the state. Most fish biologists have probably spoken to all of the service organizations in their management district! Nearly all of us have a good supply of

coffee cups from the Kiwanis, ink pens from AMBUCS, lapel pins from the Optimists, and lion statues from the Lions.

Recently, The Kansas Recreation and Park Association (KRPA), a non-profit, public interest professional organization representing the parks, recreation, and leisure industry in Kansas, held their annual meeting in Dodge City.

With members in nearly every county, KRPA has a vast network of support and active professionals who are dedicated to improving the quality of life in Kansas by providing high quality park and recreation services. Several KDWPT Fisheries biologists attended this event this year to educate these recreation and park professionals about the KDWPT Community Lakes Assistance Program.



Biologist Bryan Sowards speaking at the Kansas Recreation and Park Association annual conference in Dodge City, Kansas February 1 – 4.



Lowell Aberson speaking to 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students at Linn Elementary School in Dodge City on March 9<sup>th</sup>.

And finally, as seen above, many fisheries biologists make visits to schools or to annual field days that schools schedule in many of our state parks and state fishing lakes. Some of these field days may allow us to reach out to four or five hundred kids in a day or two! Teachers often request that we stress the importance of reading, math and science in our daily routine.

## **Finding and Fishing for Crappie When They Spawn**

Many folks are looking forward to fishing for walleye fishing this month; the spawn is when the big ones will be shallow. But if you want to get in on some hot fishing during a spawn, the crappie spawn will be on us soon. The crappie spawn is often more attractive to anglers because the weather is usually nice and the action can be fast and furious.

Understanding how the spawn plays out and finding prominent areas will greatly increase your chances of catching springtime slabs. These tips will help you plan your attack before the spawn arrives. To be successful fishing during the spawn, crappie fishermen need to understand the following:



Here's a couple of nice crappie from Meade State fishing Lake.

Male crappies establish the nests while the females usually stage out away from the nesting areas. Both males and females will feed aggressively right up to the time that the females move into the nesting area and drop their eggs. If you think back to some of your better spring crappie fishing trips, and the majority of the females caught were loaded with eggs, this would indicate that you were catching prespawn fish.

When they are done spawning, females quickly leave the area and can be difficult to pinpoint and catch. Male crappie are really good at guarding nests and fry, that is exactly why the spawn bite is the best "hit" most anglers feel all year. The males are not actively feeding after the females are gone, they are just trying to keep any predator away from the eggs and fry. Male crappie are only trying to kill or wound predators that pose a threat, and will "chomp" once or twice and then spit the bait. Because of this, a quick hook-set is key; otherwise your bait will be outside of the crappie's mouth in less than a second.

Probably the two most common ways of fishing for crappie during the spawn are casting near cover in shallow spawning areas or vertical jigging directly into cover such as brush, standing timber, or vegetation. Areas that have plentiful gravel or riprap banks will convince crappie to come quite shallow with very little cover. In addition to being good prespawn feeding areas, it is a great substrate to deposit eggs.

Casting and steadily retrieving a small lead-head jig with a grub or tube bait can be very effective. If you wish to slow down the presentation, affix a small bobber 16-20 inches above the lure and work it with slow twitches.

A long jig pole is the best tool for vertical jigging. The long pole will allow you to get into, above, or around cover and drop a bait right in the crappie's home. Active fish do not require much action from a lure presented in this manner, just a slow fall and bit of up and down jigging will usually do the trick if the fish are there.

Crappie fishing during the spawn gives anglers a great chance at loading stringer with good numbers of delicious filets from shallow water. If you stay on the move to find actively spawning crappie, remember those areas where you have success, those spots will pay off for you year after year!

## Water levels in southwest Kansas going into 2016

So far the winter of 2015-2016 has not been quite as wet as hoped. We are still seeing the benefits of heavy rains last May that filled Horsethief Reservoir and a few other waters, but several other locations are still dry or nearly so. As of March 1, 2016, water levels in some of our State fishing lakes and larger Community Lakes are as follows.

The numbers in parentheses are the surface acreage when the lakes are at full.

### Southwest Region State Fishing Lakes

Barber State Fishing Lake - Lower – (51) - 3 feet low  
Clark State Fishing Lake – (337) – 1 foot low  
Concannon State Fishing Lake – (50) - 3 feet low  
Ford State Lake – (40) – 2 feet low  
Goodman State Lake – (40) acres – Dry  
Hain State Fishing Lake – (53) – 2 feet low  
Kiowa State Fishing Lake – 21 acres - full  
Meade State Lake – (80) – Full

### Southwest Region Community Lakes

Coldwater City Lake – (250) – 1 foot low  
Jetmore City Lake – (110) – 8 feet low  
Liberal Arkalon Area – (13) – Full  
Pratt County Lake – (51) – Full  
Larned City Pond – (2) – Full  
HorseThief Reservoir – (450) – 4 feet below full pool

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