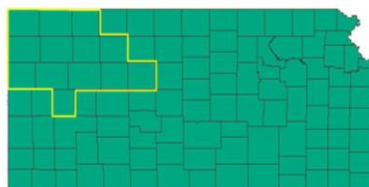


# Cedar Bluff District Fisheries

Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism Fisheries Division



## 2016 District Fishing Forecast Issue



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The Cedar Bluff District encompasses northwest Kansas, and despite the often arid environment, it contains a surprising number of public fishing opportunities. In addition to a Cedar Bluff Reservoir, The district features two state fishing lakes, four community lakes, four wildlife area pits, and five private ponds leased for public fishing. Part of fish management activities include fish population

sampling, which is routinely conducted to direct management and provide anglers information of fishing opportunities at various lakes. Information gathered during KDWPT electrofishing and netting efforts can help anglers decide where to fish and what to fish for. During 2015, Cedar Bluff, Scott State Fishing Lake (SFL), Sheridan SFL, Antelope Lake, and Atwood Township Lake were sampled and will be treated in the forecast for the 2016 fishing season below.

### Cedar Bluff Reservoir

**Largemouth Bass – Fair** – This population has been negatively affected by declining reservoir conditions, on-going since pool elevation was full in the early 2000s. Largemouth bass numbers have steadily declined since the highs of the late 1990s. However, numbers stabilized at moderate abundance during the mid-2000s due to relative reservoir level stability. With the onset of extreme drought conditions, largemouth recruitment was minimal in 2012 and 2013. Existing year classes persisted and individuals grew to larger sizes, but few young fish were recruited to the population

during this period. The reservoir realized increased inflow and rising water level during the early part of the 2014 growing season, and that improved habitat conditions for young bass resulting in establishment of a moderate year class of fish. Anglers can expect fair bass fishing in 2016 as fair numbers of bass primarily 15 to 18 inches dominate the population.

**Channel catfish – Fair** - Opportunities should be similar to those experienced in the recent past. Overall, abundance is low

*Cedar Bluff continued...*

due to consistently poor recruitment of young fish each year. Catfish are better adapted to life in rivers and streams, therefore their reproductive biology and survival of young individuals is better suited to flowing waters. Over the recent past, especially dry conditions have resulted in very intermittent flow in the Smoky Hill River that drains into Cedar Bluff, resulting in poor habitat conditions for young catfish. Even so, catfish recruitment in the reservoir is consistent at a low level, thus low numbers of young fish do survive and recruit to larger sizes resulting in a wide size range of individuals. Low abundance may seem like a negative for this population, but it does reduce competition for food among catfish, which leads to good growth. Taken together, when a catfish does survive, that individual tends to grow well and reach a large size in a relatively short period of time. Catfish anglers will not catch high numbers of catfish at Cedar Bluff but will have a good opportunity to catch fish 5 pounds and larger.



**Crappie – Fair** - Ongoing drought conditions that gripped the district since the latter half of 2010 were most severe in 2011 and 2012. Although the drought could still be considered ongoing, several rainfall events or

short-lived periods of increased rainfall have punctuated the generally dry conditions from 2013 to 2015. Prevailing weather conditions over the past year have influenced habitat and food web conditions in the reservoir that have effectively structured the current outlook for crappie angling opportunities in 2016. Both black and white crappie populations realized extremely limited production and recruitment of young fish to age 1 and older during 2011 and 2012, and white crappie failed to realize establishment of a 2013 year class, as well. Lack of recruitment translated into poor year class formation, which ultimately means no fish to catch. Drought-reduced recruitment resulted in almost no influx of young fish from 2011 to 2013, so the larger segment of especially the white crappie population consisted of fish from 2010 and prior. At this point those older individuals are large, with most running from 12 to 14 inches in length, but they are also few in number as they have, by virtue of their relatively old age, been subjected to a significant amount of natural mortality and angler harvest. With easing of drought conditions, crappie production and recruitment has improved with the establishment of 2013, 2014, and possibly 2015 year classes of black crappie and establishment of 2014 and possibly 2015 year classes of white crappie. None of these year classes were extremely abundant in number, but the most numerous for both species was the 2014 yearclass. Both populations will be somewhat polarized in terms of the lengths of fish available, especially white crappie. Anglers can expect to catch a few nice, large fish or better numbers of fish in the 6- to 8-inch range, with few fish in between. Both populations are currently rebuilding so the number of harvestable sized fish will be limited.

**Walleye – Good** - Since 2010, conditions have generally been favorable for the further

*Cedar Bluff continued...*

development of this population. Strong year classes of walleye were established in 2010, 2013, 2015, and especially 2014 as fall sampling results revealed that the 2014 year class was the most abundance observed since 1982. In all years when increased walleye recruitment was observed, the reservoir water level was stable to moderately increased during the early portion of the growing season. Additionally, in all years except 2013, young walleyes produced were the result of natural walleye production, with a token stocking being conducted during 2013 to offset any potential mortality of walleye eggs due to a water release from the reservoir conducted during the spawn season. Anglers likely reduced the abundance of larger fish somewhat, but overall the number of fish 18 inches and larger increased due to survival and growth of females from the 2013 year class by the end of the 2015 growing season. A large portion of this population will consist of individuals of the very strong 2014 year class that will approximate 15 inches during 2016, but with growth over the season, it will be likely that many of these individuals will near or exceed 18 inches by late 2016. Given the current scenario, anglers can expect to catch good numbers of fish overall, slightly improved numbers of harvestable sized fish during 2016, but availability of harvestable sized walleye will be most fully realized during 2017.



**White Bass – Excellent** - Good year class establishment in 2010 and 2013 with lesser recruitment that occurred in years in between has resulted in a population that will provide quality angling opportunities during 2016. Adequate annual gizzard shad production since 2010 has fueled good white bass growth among younger individuals such that members of the 2013 yearclass ranged in length from 11 to 12 inches going into 2016. Slower growth of larger, older whites caused individuals of the 2010 and other adjacent year classes to stockpile into a group of fish ranging primarily around 15 inches long. Prevalence of larger white bass will provide ample opportunities for anglers to harvest some quality fish. Harvest should be promoted from a perspective of welfare of the population as reducing abundance of larger individuals will improve growing conditions by reducing competition.

**Wiper – Good** - Since 2009, wiper fry have been stocked on a biannual basis, but prior, stocking had not been conducted since 2005. Lack of stocking from 2006 to 2008 represented year classes that would currently be large fish representing the 10-pound-plus trophy fish. But given lack of stocking, the trophy potential of this population will be minimal during the upcoming fishing season. A return to a regular stocking regime during recent years and corresponding establishment of year classes has resulted in a population made up of a relatively stable, moderate ly abundance population of smaller fish that range from 3 to 6 pounds. Given time, growth of individuals from existing year classes and continued biannual stocking should result in an increased size range of individuals and a return of trophy wiper angling opportunities in the next few years.

## Scott State Fishing Lake

**Bluegill – Good** - Overall abundance of this population was moderate due to good recruitment a couple of years ago. High predator abundance has helped maintain good growing conditions by reducing competition among bluegill, keeping small bluegill numbers in check. Good growth has accounted for a large portion of the population to reach 6.5 to 7.5 inches. Good numbers of respectable sized bluegill will provide good angling opportunities during the upcoming 2016 season.

**Channel Catfish – Good** - consistent annual stocking of fish has yielded good recruitment of individuals to the fishery each year. But high rates of annual harvest tend to limit the availability of larger fish. Consequently, this population includes abundant fish under 15 inches in length and a limited availability of fish up to 24 inches.



**Crappie – Good** - Crappies remain abundant, but lacking establishment of a 2014 year class meant less small fish comprising the fishery. Although growing conditions were not sufficient to promote rapid growth of larger crappies, it was apparent that growth was sufficient to promote a notable portion of the population to around 10 inches in length. With continued high numbers and improved size quality

anglers will harvest better quality fish during 2016.

**Largemouth Bass – Excellent** - This population has maintained relative stability over the past couple of years in that annual recruitment and growth of young fish has been sufficient to replace fish lost to harvest or other sources of mortality. Consequently, bass abundance has remained moderate to high. Fish displayed excellent body condition, indicating good growth. It was no doubt that good bass habitat availability and diversity coupled with an ample supply of small crappie and bluegill for forage has precipitated the quality dynamics of this population. This population will generally provide excellent bass angling opportunities given high numbers and wide size range. Bass anglers will find quality prospects as approximately 10 percent of the population ranged between 4 to 6 pounds.



**Saugeye – Good** - Since initial stocking in 2010 and on the basis of follow up stockings since, this population has continued to establish

*Scott continued...*

itself both in terms of abundance and size availability. Year class establishment has been good most years fish were stocked, but especially in 2013. Fish from the 2010 and 2011 groups have grown to sizes attractive to anglers such that 12 percent of the population was legal for harvest and ranged in length from 18 to 25 inches. The proportion of this population made up by

harvestable-sized individuals was down somewhat, but was downplayed on a percentage basis by the high abundance of individuals from the 2013 yearclass that were about 15 inches in length. Anglers should expect to catch high numbers of fish, especially in late April through May 2016, and should have a reasonable expectation of catching a harvestable-sized individual.

## Sheridan State Fishing Lake

**Bluegill – Poor** - This population has been on an increasing trend over the past two years in terms of abundance. However, predation, angler harvest, or poor growth has limited the availability of larger individuals, leaving the majority of the population below 5 inches in length. Low to moderate general abundance and lack of large fish will render this population of little interest to anglers during 2016.



**Crappie – Good** - The Sheridan crappie population was improved in abundance, comprised almost in equal proportions by black and white crappie, and both populations contained respectable numbers of harvestable-sized individuals. Establishment of a strong 2013 year class for both species coupled with good growth fueled by good annual shad production

resulted in 53 percent of whites 10 inches and larger and 53 percent of blacks 9 inches and larger. Anglers can expect good small lake crappie angling opportunities during 2016.

**Channel Catfish - Poor to Fair** - Both overall abundance and abundance of larger individuals decreased over the past year. Despite annual stocking of catfish that typically averaged 6 to 8 inches in length, Sheridan typically receives a high degree of catfish specific angling pressure, thus harvest may have been partially responsible for the reductions. However, body condition of fish sampled was less than desired and slower growth may have been a factor that partially limited the availability of larger fish. High numbers of common carp are present in Sheridan and have increased competition for food available to catfish. Over the next several years targeted efforts to reduce carp abundance will be undertaken with one objective being improved catfish condition. During 2016 anglers can expect limited opportunities to catch quality catfish as 10 percent of the population was greater than 15 inches in length.

**Largemouth Bass – Fair** - This population continued to be characterized by a moderate to high abundance of individuals that  
*Sheridan continued...*

experience impaired growth as they approach 15 inches in length. Low bluegill abundance and lack of appropriately sized gizzard shad has been responsible. Given the current scenario, only 4 percent of the population exceeded 15 inches in length. Efforts will be made to increase forage availability during upcoming years with the goal of improving growing conditions for bass. Anglers can expect good catch and release angling opportunities with plenty of fish less than 15 inches. Anglers seeking quality-sized bass will be hard pressed to catch many large fish in 2016.

**Saugeye – Fair** - Prior to 2014, this population was intended to be sustained by biannual stockings of fingerling-sized fish. Fingerlings were last stocked in 2010, but from 2012 to 2014 no additional fingerlings were available due to hatchery shortages. Due to lack of fingerling availability, smaller, fry-sized saugeye were requested for stocking starting in 2014 and were stocked that spring. The current state of this population was greatly determined by this recent stocking history. The 2010 year class established and individuals grew in length, but became less numerous once they reached 15 inches and larger sizes because of increased angler harvest. Concomitantly, survival and establishment of the 2014 fry stocking was excellent and resulted in the formation of a very strong year class that will range anywhere from 10 to 14 inches in

length at the start of 2016. Over the next several years, biannual stockings of saugeye fry will be conducted on a trial basis to evaluate whether stocking the small, hatchling fish is a viable method of maintaining the population. Given the high number of fish less than 15 inches, anglers will catch bunches of short fish. Fish of legal harvestable length will be tough to come by during 2016 due to the recent gap in stocking and the attrition of fish from the 2010 and older year classes.



**Wiper - Fair to Good** - Good survival and year class establishment over the past couple of years has increased abundance to the highest level observed since 2011. As such, young fish make up a large part of the total population. Fish ranging from 13 to 16 inches are not uncommon and will provide some good small lake wiper opportunities during 2016.

## Graham County-Antelope Lake

**Crappie – Fair** - Crappie abundance has been relatively low over the past three years, yet existing individuals exhibit good growth and attain quality sizes. High predator abundance, primarily saugeye, has exerted sufficient predation to limit the recruitment of young fish to the fishery thus depressing overall abundance. Crappie recruitment has

been consistent at a relatively low level the past four years, and coupled with good growth, a low to moderate abundance of a wide size range of individuals has become available. This condition is expected to continue over the short-term as saugeye abundance remains high.

*Antelope continued...*

Management activities aimed at establishing a balance between saugeye abundance and crappie recruitment will be ongoing over the next several years. Anglers can expect to catch fewer crappies overall, but almost 60 percent of the catch will range from 10 to 13 inches in length during 2016.

**Channel Catfish - Fair to Good -**

Abundance improved some, but remained at a moderate level. Overall size quality of fish has improved with over 70 percent of the population ranging from 16 to 22 inches in length. Anglers can expect pretty good catfish angling opportunities during 2016 with the predominance of nice-sized fish.



**Largemouth Bass –Good -** Recent recruitment of small, young fish to the fishery helped to increase overall abundance and improve the number of small fish in the

population that will be critical to maintaining abundance into the future. At the same time, the 13- to 18-inch slot length limit improved survival of larger fish to the point that abundance of fish ranging from 15 to 18 inches was the highest observed in some time. From a bass angling standpoint, more, bigger fish means good angling opportunities during 2016.

**Saugeye – Good -** Extremely high survival and recruitment led to the establishment of a very strong 2014 year class that effectively increased overall abundance of this population to high levels. The 2015 growing season provided this group of fish another year's growth such that most individuals ranged in length from 13 to 15 inches. Since this year class was by far numerically dominant, many fish caught this upcoming year will fall within this length range. Although only comprising about 7 percent of the population, older year classes made up of larger fish realized fairly good carry-over from the prior year and will constitute fish exceeding 18 inches and thus be legal for harvest. During 2016, anglers will realize excellent catch and release saugeye fishing opportunities with an occasional keeper mixed in. Given normal fish growth, the potential to harvest good numbers of fish should increase dramatically by 2017 as members of the strong 2014 yearclass grow to and beyond 18 inches in length.

## Atwood Township Lake

**Channel Catfish - Poor to Fair –** This population is moderate to low in abundance and consists primarily of small fish ranging from 9 to 14 inches. As a result, catfish angling opportunities will be limited during 2016.

**Largemouth Bass – Fair -** This population has realized marked improvement over the past couple of years. Emigration of highly abundant common carp into the lake disrupted bluegill and bass reproduction. Consequently, an absence of small bluegill translated into starvation and even mortality

*Atwood continued...*

of a significant number of largemouth bass. Bass abundance bottomed out last year, but targeted management efforts aimed at removing carp from the lake resulted in dramatic improvement in bluegill production, improving foraging conditions for surviving bass. Largemouth reproduction also improved with decreased carp abundance increasing bass abundance in 2015. The bass population is in a rebuilding phase and should continue to improve over the course of upcoming years. This population will be moderate in abundance and the majority of individuals are small in size being the product of recent successful reproduction. As a result, 2016 largemouth bass angling opportunities will be somewhat improved, but still limited, as the population is primarily comprised of a moderate number of individuals ranging from 9 to 14 inches in length.



**Saugeye - Good to Excellent** - This population experienced starvation impacts similar to those experienced by the largemouth bass population. It appears that mortality was not as dramatic as numbers have remained stable. Saugeye growth stagnated during the years of no bluegill production, but with dramatically increased bluegill production, saugeye experienced much improved growing conditions. This population is essentially the product of stockings in 2010 and 2011, so individuals have had ample time to grow to decent sizes. Currently the population is dominated by quality fish as approximately 70 percent ranged in length from 18 to 22 inches, with smaller fish lacking due to no recent stocking. Anglers should expect good saugeye angling opportunities in 2016 given good abundance of quality-sized fish.

