

June 2, 2020

KDWPT Official Statement  
*El Dorado Reservoir Blue Catfish Die Off*

KDWPT Fisheries Division staff learned of a blue catfish die off occurring at El Dorado Reservoir on April 19, 2020. Initially, low numbers of smaller fish were found deceased. By April 22, increased numbers of fish – ranging 10 to 30 inches long – were discovered. Staff collected and submitted eight blue catfish to the Bozeman Fish Health Center in Bozeman, Mont. to determine the cause of death.

While overall test results were inconclusive, the preliminary bacteria screening in two of the submitted fish indicated the presence of *Yersinia ruckeri* – a common water-borne pathogen. This bacteria can cause health issues in fish that are under stress from environmental conditions, such as rapid changes in water temperature or population density. Testing conclusively ruled out viruses.

While fish die offs due to pathogens are fairly common, they generally do not cause population-level impacts. Therefore, staff are confident the recent die off is likely attributed to a natural resetting of the blue catfish population density that is sometimes seen in other sportfish populations in Kansas reservoirs.

*History*

Blue catfish were introduced to El Dorado Reservoir in October 2004 and were stocked annually through 2009. When the population matured in the early 2010s, natural recruitment rates of El Dorado blue catfish were much higher than rates seen in other Kansas reservoirs. A protective slot limit was imposed in 2016 to provide increased harvest of fish under 25 inches long to better meet the reservoir's fisheries management objectives. While blue catfish have been in El Dorado Reservoir for nearly 16 years, they are the most recent sportfish to be introduced to the 39-year-old reservoir.

*Tagging Study*

A tagging study is currently underway at El Dorado Reservoir to evaluate population dynamics of area blue catfish. Data collected from the study will provide staff with insight into population abundance, vulnerability of blue catfish to angling, and the overall status of the population. Anglers who successfully catch a tagged blue catfish should call (620) 342-0658 with the following information: length of the fish, date, tag number, and whether the fish was kept or released.

