Tuttle Creek Fisheries Newsletter Spring 2014

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

A 39.2 lb Longnose Gar collected last fall. That's 7.7 lbs bigger than the state record!

Saugeye from Tuttle Creek

Tuttle Creek Reservoir Fishing Forecast

Most of the lakes in Kansas that are open to public fishing are sampled annually by local KDWPT fisheries biologist. Biologist use gill nets, trap nets, and an electrofishing boat to collect a representative sample of the fish population in a lake. Fish are weighed and measured before being released. Analyzing this data allows fisheries biologist to make some determinations about these fish populations. Abundance is determined by number of fish caught per net, and this gives an indication of how many fish are in the lake. Length and weight data is used to determine the size structure of a population and the body condition of each fish species. Of course, abundance and fish size is important for fisherman figuring out which lakes will be good for their favorite species each year.

The annual sampling efforts at Tuttle Creek Reservoir in 2011 and 2012 revealed that abundance was above average for most of the sportfish species inhabiting the lake. Unfortunately, sampling conducted in 2013 indicates that fish numbers have fallen off from the previous year's highs. There is a combination of factors affecting this, including: water level 12 feet low during the winter, a large water release in the spring and a poor gizzard shad spawn.

Walleye were a part of the original fishery at Tuttle Creek, but the population never flourished. Saugeye were a better candidate for producing a productive fishery in this system and have been stocked almost every year since 1995. Over the years, they have been quite successful, and during the last five years, the population has been providing good numbers to anglers. However, sample numbers did fall from 9 per net in 2012 down to 1.5 per net in 2013. The reduction in the population is partly due to a loss of fish downstream during a large release and partly due to the lake not receiving a stocking in 2012. The current saugeye population is not as high as the previous few years, but the numbers are still fair. However, the size structure should be appealing to most anglers; all of the fish collected in the gill nets last fall were above the 15 inch minimum length limit. In addition, 30 percent of those saugeye were over 18 inches and 7 percent were over

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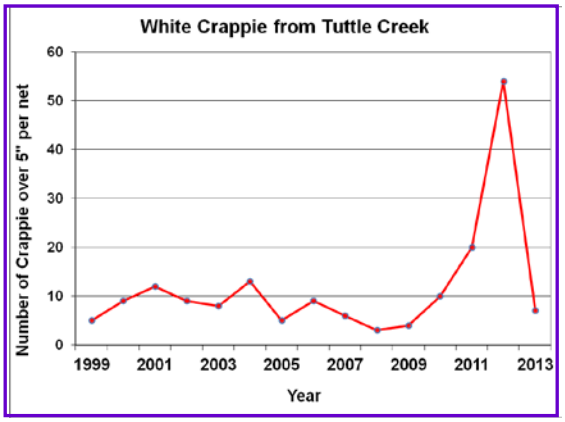
Some crappie caught by ice fishermen this winter at Tuttle. 10 to 13 inches long



14 inch white bass

This 32 inch blue catfish was collected with a gar tail sticking out of its mouth!

Tuttle Creek Reservoir Fishing Forecast

22 inches. The electrofishing sample for saugeye documented that the 2013 stocking was successful in producing a year-class, but the number of young fish was below average for the lake. Overall, the saugeye population should provide some fair to good fishing in the reservoir and in the fishing areas below the dam.

The white crappie population has been fairly consistent over the years. From 1995 to 2010, sample numbers ranged from 3 to 13 per net with an average of 8 per net. The next two years, the population did very well, with 20 per net in 2011 and 54 per net in 2012. However, crappie abundance fell back to more traditional values in 2013 with sampling efforts producing an average of 7 per net. The population lost many of the fish from the good young of the year production in 2011. Those fish were the majority of the population in the 2012 high numbers. On a positive note, the data did document an even more successful spawn in 2013. Hopefully, these young fish will survive and grow well. Crappie will continue to be a popular fish at Tuttle Creek, since there are still decent numbers of fish over 10 inches in the lake.

The white bass population was at an all time low in 2008. Since that time, white bass densities have been steadily increasing up to 12 fish per net in 2012. The population took a big step back in 2013, with only .5 white bass per net in sampling efforts last fall. In general, white bass fishing will be tough at Tuttle Creek Reservoir this year

Traditionally, Tuttle Creek Reservoir and the Big Blue River have been popular spots for catfish anglers. Unfortunately, channel catfish numbers were quite low in the 2013 sample. This is particularly disappointing because there was a large number of young fish in the 2012 sample. It is feared that many of these fish were lost downstream. On a positive note, the last time the channel catfish numbers were this low, the population rebounded within a year from fish immigrating into the reservoir from the river system upstream. Hopefully, this will happen again, and the channel catfish population will be good again soon.

Blue catfish are another species that took a step backwards. The species has been improving well since a new stocking effort was started in 2011. However, sample numbers fell about 50% from the previous year. There were still decent numbers of fish from the 2011 stocking, but there was poor survival from the 2012 stocking. The population is dominated by fish less than 20 inches, however some fish were collected in 2013 that were over 30 inches. Anglers reported catching blue catfish on a fairly regular basis last year in the upper end of the reservoir and in the river. However, the population will need to expand and mature before they become a popular feature for the lake. Two more stockings are planned to bolster existing blue catfish numbers. Hopefully, the blue catfish population will continue to develop and begin reproducing on its own.

Overall, the fish populations are below average at Tuttle Creek, but the lake can quickly produce great fishing with good water level conditions.

Crappie Forecast for the Manhattan District

Crappie are one of the most popular sportfish in Kansas, mostly because they are so good to eat. Crappie populations tend to be cyclical, and it is not uncommon for a lake to have great fishing for a couple of years followed by some really tough fishing years. So I am always getting questions such as "Where are the good crappie lakes this year?"

Below is a table for waters in the Manhattan District that were sampled in fall of 2013. Fish less than 5 inches were not included in these tables. Along with the number of fish caught per net, there are percentages of the fish that were collected in each length category, rounded to the nearest whole number. Lakes are in no particular order. These numbers will be slightly different from the 2014 Fishing Forecast pamphlet because white crappie and black crappie numbers have been put together for easier use.

White and Black Crappie Data from 2013	Fish/net	Percentage in each length group (%)			
		5 - 8"	8 - 10"	10 - 12"	12 - 15"
Tuttle Creek Reservoir	7	29%	52%	15%	4%
Pottawatomie SFL #1	1		100%		
Pottawatomie SFL #2	9	29%	51%	11%	9%
Shawnee SFL	14	93%	5%	2%	
Washington SFL	53	97%	3%		
Jeffrey Make Up Lake	51	14%	80%	5%	1%
Jeffrey Auxiliary Lake	3	4%	30%	58%	8%
Cross Creek Lake	33	20%	78%	2%	
Centralia City Lake	223	74%	23%	3%	
Lake Wabaunsee	54	19%	66%	7%	8%

White crappie on the left
Black crappie on the right

A crappie fisherman is usually looking for a lake with good numbers of crappie (fish per net) and a good size structure. An example of a poor crappie population is Shawnee SFL because there are low numbers of crappie per net and only a few over 8 inches. An example of a good crappie fishery would be Lake Wabaunsee, which has good densities and a good percentage of the population in the larger length groups. This data can be a helpful guide on where to start fishing for crappie, but netting data can at times underestimate the number of big crappie in a lake.

Rainbow Trout at Willow Lake – a cabin fever cure

Trout from Willow Lake

Located in Tuttle Creek State Park, this 10 acre lake is a popular fishing spot during the winter and early spring. Every year Willow Lake is stocked with 12,900 rainbow trout. These stockings are spaced out monthly from November 1st through April 15th. They are stocked even if the lake is ice covered; a chainsaw is used to cut a hole in the ice if needed. Most of the trout are 10 to 15 inches long, but there are always a few bigger trout over 18 inches in each stocking. These hatchery reared trout have been raised their whole lives on pellet fish food. So baits like corn, marshmallows, or commercially produced trout baits work well for these fish. Other baits that do well are worms, minnows, jigs or spinners. Anglers have been catching a lot the last month, and there has been good ice fishing this winter.

The Lake has good numbers of crappie and channel catfish, but no matter what you are fishing for, a trout permit is required to fish at Willow Lake from November 1st through April 15th. Unless you are younger than 16, then you only need a trout permit if you want to harvest more than two trout. A vehicle permit is also required in the State Park. Other local spots for rainbow trout are Moon Lake with 9,000 trout stocked and Cameron Springs with 12,000 trout stocked, both located on Fort Riley Military Base.

Good luck fishing in 2014!