

# Pittsburg District Fisheries Newsletter

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Written By:

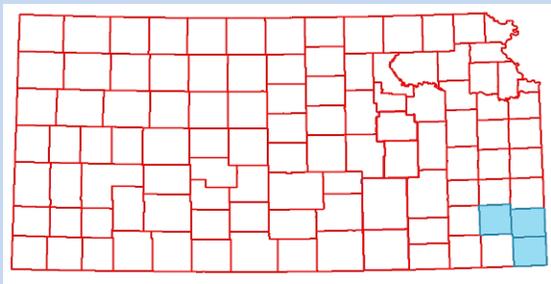
**Rob Friggeri**, District Fisheries Biologist  
Kansas Dept. of Wildlife, Parks & Tourism  
507 E. 560<sup>th</sup> Ave.  
Pittsburg, KS 66762  
(620) 231-3173  
rob.friggeri@ksoutdoors.com

## ***Mined Land Wildlife Area Unit No. 11 Reopens to Fishing on April 9***

The Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) will reopen Unit No. 11 of the Mined Land Wildlife Area (MLWA) to fishing on Saturday, April 9, 2016 at 6 a.m.

Unit No.11 has been closed to fishing for several years due to a mining reclamation project that has recently been completed. The \$184,233 reclamation project was funded through Kansas Department of Health and Environment's (KDHE) Surface Mining Section. David Jenkins, KDWPT's MLWA manager, stated, "Benefits of the project include safer interior roadways, a new improved parking area, native grass plantings for wildlife, improved angler access, and improved fish habitat created by placing brush that was removed along roadways during the project.

"KDWPT staff also stocked channel catfish heavily in this area for the past three years and have also implemented a fish feeding program for the same



*Anglers will enjoy improved shoreline access following KDHE's reclamation project in Mined Land Wildlife Area Unit #11. Boating access has been improved, as well.*

amount of time, which has added size to the channel cats in this strip-mined lake. Other fish species that have benefited from the closure include largemouth bass, spotted bass, black and white crappie, redear sunfish, bluegill, green sunfish and channel catfish," Jenkins added.

The creel limit on bass and channel catfish is five fish per day on the MLWA. In addition, channel catfish must be 15 inches or larger, and largemouth bass 13 to 18 inches in length must be immediately released. Unit No. 11 is located a ¼ mile west of the intersection of NW Coalfield Rd. and 7 Hwy. The entrance to the area is located on the south side of the road.



*This is a view of the new Unit No. 11 access road looking south toward the entrance off NW Coalfield Rd.*



*Many lakes on the MLWA lack habitat for fish. Pushing in nearby timber with a dozer, as seen here in Unit No. 11, is an easy way to improve fish habitat.*

## **2016 Pittsburg District Fishing Prospects**

It has been a mild winter and warm spring. Area waters are warming quickly. KDWP's walleye egg collection schedule at Cedar Bluff was moved up one week because of the warmer-than-normal temperatures. Egg collection efforts are also taking place at Hillsdale and Milford reservoirs, with our statewide goal increasing to 141 million eggs in 2016. Hopefully, more walleye and saugeye will be stocked around the state than ever before. I hope you have your fishing gear ready to go and are prepared to get out and enjoy the many opportunities we have here in southeast Kansas. The following fishing forecast is a species-by-species summary of the information obtained in our spring electrofishing and fall test netting efforts, and my best guess on where you can find the best fishing in and around my three-county Pittsburg District.

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 are one of the first species to become active, running up Spring and Neosho rivers on their spawning run. The low-water dam at Baxter Springs should provide an early opportunity. Paddlefish may run up the Neosho River at any time following heavy runoff and congregate at the Chetopa low-water dam. Crappie fishing will peak in April, followed by bass in early May and catfish in June and July. Also, Mined Land Area trout fishing will continue to be good as bi-weekly stockings will continue through mid-May.

**Rainbow Trout** - The October 2015 trout stocking in MLWA Unit No. 30 marked the 30th season rainbows have been stocked in this 28-acre strip-mined lake. This lake's unique characteristics permit trout to survive year-round, allowing some fish to reach trophy size. More than 381,000 catchable trout have been stocked over the past 30 years, providing anglers some great cold-water angling.

Bi-weekly stockings provide fairly consistent success (we can't guarantee they will be hungry). Each stocking consists of approximately 935 rainbows. Most fish are about 10-inches in length, or one-half-pound each. In addition, 5 percent of each stocking, or 47 fish, are 14 inches or larger. The Crystal Lakes Hatchery has been spicing up many of the stockings with a few surplus brood-fish. As a result, catching a 3- to 5-pound rainbow has not been that uncommon lately.



*Bi-weekly trout stockings in MLWA Unit #30 will continue through mid-May. More than 16,000 rainbows will have been stocked in 15 stockings from mid-October 2015 through mid-May 2016. Why not take advantage of some good trout fishing before the crappie and bass fishing gets into high gear?*

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



## Fishing Prospects (cont.)

**Crappie** – When surface water temperatures reach the low-60s, crappie move into shallow water to spawn. In murky water they may spawn as shallow as 2 or 3 feet. In clear water they will be deeper. This is a great time to catch good numbers of fish. Even shore fishermen can be successful at places like Neosho State Fishing Lake or the small pond near the handicapped access pier at Bone Creek Lake.

The highest density population of 8-inch and larger crappie in the Pittsburg District is found at Neosho State Fishing Lake. The October frame-net catch was 28 fish/net. Although numbers are good, you'll have to sort through a lot of smaller fish for a good meal. Only 2 percent of the catch was over 10 inches. Chanute City Lake had by far the highest frame net catch rate where 710 white crappie were caught in two frame nets. Most of these fish were 5 to 7 inches in length with less than 1 percent over 10-inches. Crawford State Lake also has high numbers of smaller fish, with some larger fish mixed in.

Bone Creek Lake and some of the larger lakes on the Mined Land Wildlife Area offer more quality-sized fish. Bone Creek frame-net catch rates are low due to the very clear water, but last year anglers commonly reported catching crappie 12 inches and larger. Nearby Elk City and Big Hill reservoirs have crappie populations rated excellent in 2016, and would be good places to go for a chance for some larger fish. And if you are willing to drive a couple hours, the best crappie fishing in the state can be found at John Redmond Reservoir, located just north of Burlington.



*White (top) and black crappie are the best eating fish around, and are abundant in many local lakes.*



*Largemouth bass are the most popular sportfish in Kansas and they can be found in every public fishing water in southeast Kansas. Maybe you will be lucky enough to top the 11.8-pound state record caught at a private Cherokee County strip-mined lake in 2008.*

**Largemouth Bass** – 2015 electrofishing results showed that the best bass lakes in the Pittsburg district are Neosho State Fishing Lake, Chanute City Lake and Bone Creek Lake. The Mined Land Wildlife Area (MLWA) would also rate highly, but the hundreds of small lakes on the area are not routinely sampled. Neosho State Fishing Lake had the highest density of 12-inch and larger bass with 77 percent. Neosho SL also had a high electrofishing catch rate (107 fish/hour), with 22 percent of the sample exceeding 15 inches.

Crawford State Fishing Lake (CRSL) had the highest percentage of fish 15 inches or larger with 41 percent. Nine percent of the CRSL sample was over 18 inches. The largest fish weighed in at 6.3 pounds. But even though the quality is very good, overall numbers are still down. The electrofishing catch rate was a disappointing 29 fish per hour.

The Chanute City Lake sampling showed both good quality and high density. The electrofishing catch rate was 89 fish per hour. Twenty-seven percent of the catch was over 15 inches in length.

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. Other nearby lakes with good bass ratings are Big Hill Reservoir and Bourbon State Fishing Lake. Bourbon has very high numbers (122 fish/hour) with mostly 12- to 15-inch fish. La Cygne Reservoir is within an hour's drive, and is rated the second best bass reservoir in the state.

**Channel Catfish** – Catfish are plentiful in all our public waters. Channel catfish don't reproduce and maintain their numbers in small lakes on their own, but KDWPT hatcheries do a great job of producing 8- to 12-inch fish for stocking. Approximately 33,500 intermediates are stocked in the Pittsburg District every year. Neosho SFL, Crawford SFL, and Bone Creek Lake ranked the highest based on samplings last October. Neosho SFL had the highest catch rate at 8.8 fish per net (our objective is 5 to 10 fish per net). Forty-three percent of the catch was 16 inches or larger, and a pair of memorable-size fish weighing in at 17.1 and 17.2 pounds was collected.

Crawford SFL ranked second for channel catfish in the Pittsburg District at 4.8 fish per net with 56 percent of the catch 16-inches or larger. Bone Creek ranked third recording a 4.0 fish per net catch rate along with an impressive 28 percent of the sample 24 inches or larger. You too can admire the biggest channel catfish catch of the year from Bone Creek in the photo below.

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. There is public access on two miles of the Neosho River east of Chanute through the FISH program. Other good catfish lakes nearby in the Fishing Forecast include Big Hill Reservoir and Elk City Lake. Big Hill is ranked the No. 1 channel catfish reservoir in the state, and Elk City is ranked No. 4.



One of the great things about working for KDWPT is having a dedicated group of co-workers willing step up and assist when needed. Wildlife biologist Logan Martin is shown here holding the trophy 19.1-pound channel catfish collected at Bone Creek during the October gill net sampling. This is the largest channel catfish caught throughout our 2015 sampling season.



Bone Creek Lake is the top redear lake in the Pittsburg District, producing some 10-inch beauties like this pair. Redear are generally found in a little deeper water than bluegill, and are sometimes called "shellcrackers" because of their love for mussels, clams, snails and other crustaceans.

**Bluegill/Redear** – Bluegill and redear are common in most all of our lakes. Put a worm on a small hook below a bobber and fish along weed lines, and you will probably be successful. 2015 nettings showed Bone Creek Lake and Neosho State Fishing Lake have the best quality sunfish fishing. The MLWA is also offers great opportunities. As for redear, Bone Creek rates the best, with both Thayer City Lakes and Neosho State Fishing Lake also rating highly.



Bluegill, redear, black bass, and crappie are members of the family Centrarchidae, or nest builders. When spawning, they move into shallow water where the male builds a plate-sized nest he tends until the eggs hatch. The clearer the water, the deeper the nest. In strip mined lakes, where shallow water is often restricted to the ends of larger lakes, spawning fish are not hard to find. It is a great time to cash in on concentrations of colourful male bluegill like those seen here.

## New Bone Creek Feeders Ready for Installation

Public Wholesale Water Supply District No. 11 (PWWSD No. 11) recently received five new fish feeders that are scheduled to be in place on Bone Creek Lake by the first of May. Purchase of the feeders was made possible when a \$10,545 grant was awarded last August through KDWPT's Community Fisheries Assistance Program (CFAP). The five 600-pound capacity feeders will replace the four smaller feeders purchased through a CFAP grant in 1998.

The additional new feeder will be placed near the spillway area at the south end of the dam. This is a very good shoreline access site.

Approximately \$225,000 is available annually to fund CFAP fisheries enhancement projects statewide. PWWSD No. 11 is providing 26 percent of the project's \$14,850 total cost. About 5 1/2 tons of feed is fed annually at Bone Creek, or 20 pounds per acre.



*Five new commercial grade 600-pound capacity feeders arrived at Bone Creek in early March. There is very little shoreline access at Bone Creek, and the feeders are placed near the best shoreline access areas in order to attract and hold channel catfish and bluegill in the vicinity to increase fishing success.*



*Brown trout were first stocked in the MLWA in 1999 when a few surplus browns were available from KDWPT's contract hatchery, Crystal Springs Trout Farm in Cassville, Missouri. Since then, there have been three brown trout stockings totaling 6,236 fish. The last stocking occurred in October 2011.*

## Mined Land Wildlife Area Brown Trout Stocking Postponed – Again

Unfortunately, the trout lake in Unit No. 30 of the Mined Land Wildlife Area did not receive another stocking of brown trout. The scheduled stocking of 2,000 browns in October 2015 through a fish trade with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission went unfulfilled.

On October 26, 2015, Brett Houdyshell, KDWPT's fish trade coordinator, contacted me with the bad news. "I just wanted to let you know that our trade with Nebraska for brown trout didn't go through this year. They said they were hit with budget cuts and the fish were not produced. I will try to locate some again next year."

The hatchery folks tell me that browns are much more difficult to spawn and rear than rainbows, and that they are a valued commodity with few surplus fish available for trades. Browns have been previously stocked in 2008, 2010, and 2011, so I know they are sometimes available. I just hope next year there will be another brown trout stocking that will result in some quality-size fish in the future.

The goals of the brown trout stockings are to improve the quality of the existing trout fishery, provide another unique fishing opportunity, and hopefully, create a few trophies.

## Free Fishing Weekend June 4-5, 2016. Why not go fishing with friends



Kids love to fish, so please consider getting young family members and friends involved in this life-long activity. Free fishing weekend, or fishing derbies like the O.K. Kids Derby at Lakeside Park in Pittsburg pictured here, are good opportunities to do just that.

### Upcoming Fishing Derbies

- May 7, 2016 O.K. Kids Fishing Derby  
Lakeside Park, Pittsburg  
8:00 - 10:00 am  
620-231-8310
- May 14, 2016 Eagles Kids Fishing Derby  
West Mineral Eagles Club  
Sign-up Fri. 6-9 pm & Sat 6-9 am  
Weigh-in Sat 4:00  
620-827-6171
- July 4, 2016 Pittsburg Annual 4th of July Derby  
Lincoln Park Ponds, Pittsburg  
8:00 - 10:00 Youth & adult categories  
620-231-8310
- Aug 14, 2016 Arma Homecoming Derby  
Hookie Park, Arma  
10:00 - 12:00  
620-249-4144

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



The O.K. Kids Fishing Derby is usually the first I assist with every year, and it's always the first Saturday in May. Kids can fish for a couple hours with a chance for some nice prizes, then participate in archery, canoeing, biking and a host of outdoor games and activities throughout the day. My granddaughter Mia Onelio is shown here with one of the bluegill she caught at the derby.

If you or someone you know is interested in taking a group of kids fishing, I have two dozen rods and reels and a tackle box available to loan out. I can also provide you with some good handouts including fish identification, fishing basics, regulations, and more. I'm just a phone call away. (620) 231-3173



The Pittsburg Parks and Recreation Department will be purchasing channel catfish to be stocked just prior to the July Fourth fishing derby at Lincoln Park. I will be traveling to Harbin Fish Farm at Anthony to pick up the fish, which average about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a pound each. Mark Harbin has the statewide contract that supplies catchable-sized channel catfish for KDWPT's urban fishing program. The hatchery will sell fish at contract price to cities and municipalities that participate in the CFAP program.