

# Ellsworth District Fisheries



Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks & Tourism Fisheries Division

Spring 2017

## District Information

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### Counties and Reservoirs

CN Clayton	RA Rawlins	DC Decatur	NT Norton	PL Phillips	SM Smith	JW Jewell	RP Republic	WS Washington	MS Marshall	NM Newman	BR Brown	DP Dodge
SH Shawnee	TH Thomas	SD Sheridan	GH Graham	RO Rooks	OB Osborne	MC McDonald	CD Cloud	CY Clyde	FT Ft. Stanton	JA Jackson	AT Atchison	LV Leavenworth
WA Wallace	LG Logan	GO Gove	TR Trego	EL Ellis	RS Russell	LC Lincoln	OT Ottawa	CE Cearley	WB Webb	SN Shawnee	DC Dodge	JO Johnson
GL Greeley	WH Wichita	SC Scott	LE Lane	NS Ness	RH Rush	BT Barton	RC Rice	MP McPherson	DK Dickinson	MR Morris	OS Osage	FR Franklin
MI Miami	LN Linn	CF Coffey	AN Anderson	LY Lyon	CS Chase	WO Woodson	AL Allen	BB Bourbon	EA Earl	RE Reno	SG Sedgewick	BU Buckner
ST Stanton	GT Grant	HS Haskell	GY Gray	FO Ford	KW Kiowa	PR Pratt	KM Kingman	SC Sedgewick	BU Buckner	EK Elk	MG McGee	NO Nowata
CR Crawford	WO Woodson	AL Allen	BB Bourbon	EA Earl	RE Reno	SG Sedgewick	BU Buckner	EK Elk	MG McGee	NO Nowata	CR Crawford	WO Woodson
MT Morton	SV Stevens	SW Seward	ME Meade	CA Clark	CM Comanche	BA Barber	HP Harper	SU Sumner	CL Calloway	CH Chautauque	MO Montgomery	LB Labette
CK Cherokee	CR Crawford	WO Woodson	AL Allen	BB Bourbon	EA Earl	RE Reno	SG Sedgewick	BU Buckner	EK Elk	MG McGee	NO Nowata	CR Crawford

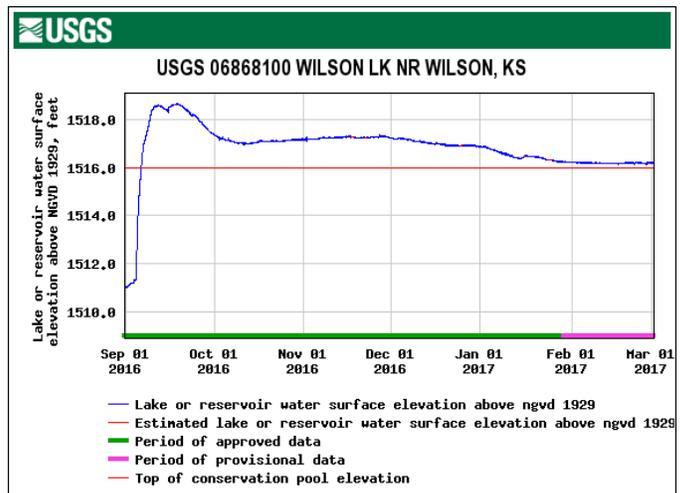
Russell	Wilson Reservoir - 9000 acres
Lincoln	Only leased F.I.S.H. properties
Saline	Saline State Lake (DRY) Lakewood Lake - Salina - 6 acres Indian Rock Lake - Salina (DRY)
Barton	Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area Stone Lake – Great Bend - 40 acres Veteran’s Lake – Great Bend - 13 acres
Ellsworth	Kanopolis Reservoir - 3550 acres Holyrod City Lake – 13 acres
Rice	Sterling City Lake - 10 acres
McPherson	McPherson State Lake - 47 acres Black Kettle State Lake – 8 acres Windom City Pond – 1 acre

*Note: Keep in mind that there are various Arkansas River access points throughout the region and F.I.S.H. Program properties. The F.I.S.H. Program leases the angling rights from private landowners to allow you to fish their ponds. Get the latest Kansas Fishing Atlas for details.*

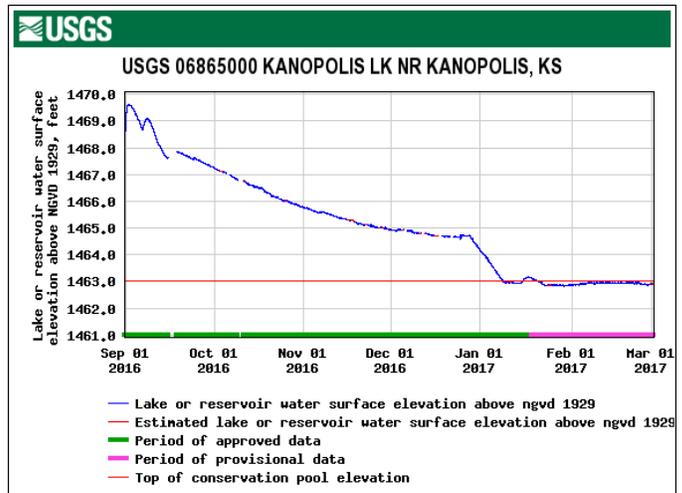


## Winter Weather Conditions

**Wilson Reservoir**) The reservoir filled in September, 2016 and got as high as 2.5’ above conservation pool! Although water was released to maintain flood storage, the elevation remains above conservation pool and will likely increase in preparation for the spawning season.



**Kanopolis Reservoir**) The reservoir experienced drastic increases in water level throughout much of the summer. It is likely that we lost a lot of fish down the Smoky Hill River (see forecast section below). The winter saw water level declines back to conservation pool and remains there to begin the spring.



## Fall Fish Sampling Guide

*Wilson Reservoir*

<b>Blue Catfish</b>	2015 sample	2016 sample
Total fish in nets	11	15
% of 12" fish	9	0
% of 20" fish	91	100
% of 30" fish	0	0

*Still low catches and no fish greater than the 35" length limit; there won't be many keepers for another 1-3 years.*



*The largest Blue Catfish we collected using supplemental techniques in 2016 was 31" and 13 lbs., shy of the 35" minimum length limit.*

<b>Channel Catfish</b>	2015 sample	2016 sample
Total fish in nets	81	72
% of 11" fish	31	28
% of 16" fish	64	65
% of 24" fish	5	7

*Similar Channel Catfish numbers and plenty of good fish.*

<b>Largemouth Bass</b>	2015 sample	2016 sample
Total fish electrofished	8	7
% of 8" fish	3	17
% of 12" fish	59	17
% of 15" fish	38	66

*Bass are aging with limited reproduction. Many 15" fish to be caught. High water conductivity made it difficult to get a good electrofishing sample. This population will improve in 2017.*



<b>Smallmouth Bass</b>	2015 sample	2016 sample
Total fish in nets	18	29
% of 7" fish	5	4
% of 11" fish	17	31

% of 14" fish	72	55
% of 17" fish	6	10

*Many 14" fish to be caught. Body condition is great. This remains one of the top 3 Smallmouth Bass destinations in Kansas.*

<b>Stripers</b>	2015 sample	2016 sample
Total fish in nets	86	83
% of 12" fish	23	60
% of 20" fish	77	40
% of 30" fish	0	0

*The creel limit has changed from 2/day to 5/day. This is an attempt to keep fish from competing with one another to improve growth rates and overall body condition in the future. The 2015 (age 2) year class accounted for nearly 60% of our sample. Look for plenty of 15 - 18" fish this summer. Stripers no longer are skinny as body condition has improved dramatically.*

<b>Walleye</b>	2015 sample	2016 sample
Total fish in nets	145	159
% of 10" fish	29	16
% of 15" fish	68	77
% of 20" fish	3	6
% of 25" fish	0	1

*Walleye catches improved and many fish above the length limit should provide good fishing this year. Fish up to 25.5" were collected this year!*

<b>White Bass</b>	2015 sample	2016 sample
Total fish in nets	74	70
% of 6" fish	5.5	30
% of 9" fish	0	26
% of 12" fish	5.5	6
% of 15" fish	88	37
% of 18" fish	1	1

*White Bass reproduction has suffered but the 2016 sample shows a vast improvement as 30% of the sample were < 9". The population still contains a fair amount of very large adults near 3 lbs.*

<b>White Perch</b>	2015 sample	2016 sample
Total fish in nets	229	367
% of 5" fish	10	51
% of 8" fish	21	17
% of 10" fish	51	25
% of 12" fish	18	7

*Similar to White Bass, perch have experienced a good year of reproduction as the majority of the sampled consisted of fish < 8". Remember: it is illegal to possess live white perch.*

## Kanopolis Reservoir

Channel Catfish	2015 sample	2016 sample
Total fish in nets	103	49
% of 11" fish	19	37
% of 16" fish	81	61
% of 24" fish	0	2

*While numbers are down there are plenty of quality fish.*



*A small Blue Catfish collected at Kanopolis for the first time since stockings began nearly 8 years ago. These are likely hard to find. Nonetheless, they'll be protected with a 5/day creel limit as opposed to a 10/day limit for Channel Catfish.*

White Crappie	2015 sample	2016 sample
Total fish in nets	63	42
% of 5" fish	22	6
% of 8" fish	57	56
% of 10" fish	21	34
% of 12" fish	0	4

*Fewer crappie were collected in our sample in 2016 but the proportion of larger fish is encouraging.*

Saugeye	2015 sample	2016 sample
Total fish in nets	164	63
% of 9" fish	23	0
% of 14" fish	68	81
% of 18" fish	7	17
% of 22" fish	2	2

*Saugeye numbers have dropped dramatically. We did not stock in 2016, but the loss of larger fish was even more dramatic. Biennial (every other year) stockings are helpful to improve growth rates by reducing competition between 2 year classes. High water levels and high harvest are likely responsible. Remember: the new min. length limit is 18". Nearly 20% of our sample constituted legal-sized fish. This proportion will only improve in future years.*

Wipers	2015 sample	2016 sample
Total fish in nets	86	100
% of 8" fish	53	74
% of 12" fish	19	17
% of 15" fish	28	9
% of 20" fish	0	0

*A great year class is present; bodes well for the future.*

White Bass	2015 sample	2016 sample
Total fish in nets	470	145
% of 6" fish	46	1
% of 9" fish	6	17
% of 12" fish	36	50
% of 15" fish	12	32

*White bass reproduction was nearly non-existent in 2016. There's plenty of large fish to be caught as 82% of the population is > 12".*



*The crew sampling fish in gill nets at Kanopolis Reservoir.*



*A juvenile Flathead Catfish collected near the Kanopolis dam.*

## McPherson State Lake

Bluegill	2015 sample	2016 sample
Total fish in nets	67	52
% of 3" fish	48	38
% of 6" fish	52	62
% of 8" fish	0	0

*Six-inch fish are common.*

Channel Catfish	2015 sample	2016 sample
Total fish in nets	38	40
% of 11" fish	76	50
% of 16" fish	24	42
% of 24" fish	0	8

*I have a feeling catfish are being harvested rapidly but provide some quality summer fun.*

Largemouth Bass	2015 sample	2016 sample
Total fish electrofished	112	94
% of 8" fish	21	20
% of 12" fish	37	31
% of 15" fish	40	48
% of 20" fish	2	1

*Great bass fishing at McPherson. Numbers have dropped but it's likely due to different sampling gear that was used this year.*

White Crappie	2015 sample	2016 sample
Total fish in nets	217	209
% of 5" fish	49	35
% of 8" fish	49	60
% of 10" fish	2	4
% of 12" fish	0	1

*Fish are mostly small but 10" fish are present. Catch and eat all the small crappie you can manage!!!*

Saugeye	2015 sample	2016 sample
Total fish in nets	21	17
% of 9" fish	5	0
% of 14" fish	48	18
% of 18" fish	28	59
% of 22" fish	19	23

*The Saugeye minimum length limit is now 21" and only 2 can be kept per day. These fish are being used to help control the crappies.*



*Jason Black holding a 22" Saugeye at McPherson State Lake.*

## Trout Program

### Kanopolis Seep Stream

We conducted a tag study on rainbow and brown trout at the Seep Stream last year. The objective was to tag trout in the winter and sample them prior to the 2016 trout season. We collected 7 Brown Trout and 0 Rainbow Trout in September, 2016. Unfortunately, no trout retained their tags. Although the Brown Trout seem capable of surviving summer conditions in the stream, their poor body condition indicated significant stress. Furthermore, high water flushed through the stream last June which likely took a lot of our trout with it.



*Type of fish tag used for trout.*



*The KDWPT Stream Crew helping sample trout in the Kanopolis Seep Stream.*



*A Brown Trout collected inhabiting the Seep Stream in September, 2016.*

## New Electrofishing Boat

You might have noticed where I continually make mention about the difficulties of Largemouth Bass sampling at Wilson Reservoir. I mention that the water conductivity is too high to collect adequate samples and, consequently, our results are sometimes erroneous. Water conductivity is related to salinity or the saltiness of the water. In Wilson Reservoir, a lot of the saltiness comes from sulfates leached from rocks in the watershed. These salts affect the flow of electricity.

An electrofishing boat works by putting electricity in the water to temporarily stun fish. The conductivity of the water determines the specific amperage and voltage that should be used to most effectively capture your target species. In typical freshwater habitats in the Great Plains Region, with values in the 150 – 300 range for water conductivity (microsiemens) your target amperage is approximately 8 – 14. Stay with me. In Wilson Reservoir, the water conductivity ranges from 3,000 – 5,000 microseimens (very salty!) and requires a target amperage nearly 10 times greater (or more) than typical freshwater systems. Most electrofishing boats only have enough power to handle 40 amps or water conductivities up to 1,200 microseimens. This creates a problem when trying to sample bass at higher conductivities. Much greater amperage and overall power is needed than can be generated and the bass swim away from our nets with ease.

We've recently updated our electrofishing boat from an older control box only capable of generating 40 amps to a newer model capable of generating 80 amps. The new box also has a lot of functionalities that should prove beneficial to the process.



*Example of the older style of electrofishing control box capable of generating 40 amps. While great in typical systems, this unit struggles in high conductivity systems.*



*Our new control box capable of generating 80 amps. Although not perfect for conductivities great than 2,500 microsiemens, it should definitely be an improvement.*



*The new electrofishing boat in action (KDWPT Stream Crew).*

I'm happy to say we've made a step in the right direction towards acquiring more accurate and precise samples of Largemouth and Smallmouth Bass in the Ellsworth District. This information is important in order to understand the population dynamics from year to year and what we need to do in order to achieve the best population possible. Without good sampling data, we have less of an idea on how to approach scientifically sound management of their populations.

## Blue Catfish: Respect the Potential

Milford Reservoir is a great example of what happens when Blue Catfish populations fulfill their potential in Kansas waters. This reservoir is a world-class fishery for blues and anglers flock from all over the country for the opportunity to catch a giant over 40 pounds. The largest fish taken from Milford was over 80 pounds! Most reservoirs in Kansas were stocked with Blues one or two decades after Milford (e.g. El Dorado, Tuttle Creek, Perry, Wilson, Lovewell, Clinton, Elk City, etc.). While not all populations will grow like the one at Milford, it's reasonable to assume there will be exciting trophy opportunities for this long-lived species throughout the state in the next five to 15 years.



*Ernesto Flores holding a gravid (spawning) Blue Catfish collected in Wilson Reservoir, 2016 (Scott Waters, fisheries biologist at Glen Elder, in the background).*

Remember, with these great opportunities comes great responsibility. Blue Catfish are managed differently than Channel Catfish in Kansas. Long-lived species are typically more susceptible to overharvest than other species because of slow maturation rates. Blues take five to seven years before they'll spawn. Populations of some species have been wiped out in much shorter periods of time. Likewise, if they're sustainably managed, these populations can flourish. You'll notice as these populations age and anglers catch on that we're likely to regulate these populations with slot limits. This allows the harvest of smaller individuals and larger trophy fish

but maintains/protects the intermediate breeding stock. Other reservoirs might have a 35-inch minimum length limit to allow these populations to grow and have time to reproduce. A 35-inch blue weighs approximately 20 pounds. The remaining reservoirs with blues might have a 5/day creel limit as opposed to channels that have a 10/day limit. There is a reason for it, so know what you catch and know what you have to release.

Some reservoirs also allow floatlines (a.k.a. jug lines). This method is allowed at only a select number of reservoirs but is now (as of 2017) allowed 365 days/year and 24 hours/day. This angling technique is very effective at catching Blue Catfish. This makes it even more important for our anglers to appreciate and respect the resource. Please follow regulations and release fish outside the legal limit.



*Blue Catfish collected with a floatline at Wilson Reservoir.*

I ask that you recognize the uniqueness of the Blue Catfish and understand the opportunity they provide. To do this, we must fully know how to identify a Blue Catfish from other species. This seems easy, but that's not always the case. As Channel Catfish age they lose their spots. Furthermore, spawning Channels take on a blueish, almost purple, appearance. Folks often mistake these for Blue Catfish and they go home to the frying pan. You can use whatever identification technique you're comfortable with, but I caution that only 1 technique is fool proof: A Blue Catfish has at least 30 anal fin rays, whereas a Channel Catfish has less, typically 24 - 29. Know where to look and how to count these. Don't be afraid to let other anglers know how to tell the difference whenever the opportunity presents itself. Let's all be responsible stewards of our fisheries resources!

# Identification of Blue, Channel, and Flathead Catfish

In the past, blue catfish have been stocked in Kansas reservoirs to provide trophy opportunities to anglers. Recently, the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks stocked blue catfish in El Dorado Reservoir in an attempt to control zebra mussel populations. Channel catfish are commonly stocked in small impoundments, such as community and urban lakes. Flathead catfish, while not stocked by the department, are found statewide especially in streams and rivers. All three of the catfish species listed below are native to at least part of the state.

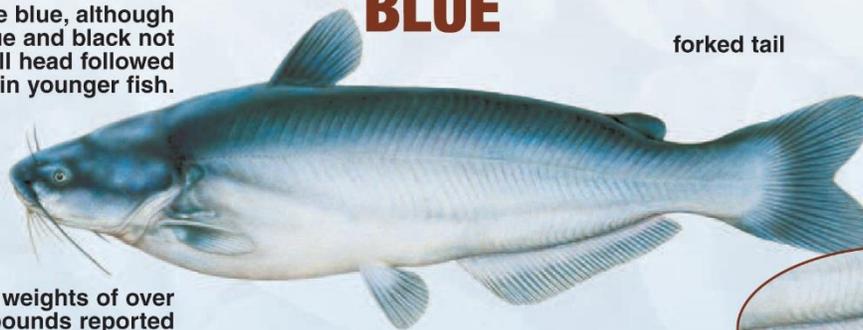
It is important that anglers be able to identify what type of catfish they catch because length limits on blue, channel and flathead catfish can differ in a given body of water. During spawning, male channel catfish adopt a blue color and can be mistaken for blue catfish by anglers. Juvenile (fish 12 inches or under) channel catfish are the only catfish that have black or brown spots. The information below identifies additional key characteristics needed to identify these three fish.

color often pale blue, although white or dark blue and black not uncommon. small head followed by distinct hump in younger fish.

## BLUE

Lower jaw even with upper jaw

weights of over 100 pounds reported



forked tail

anal fin longer with 30-35 supporting rays with flat edge



color often brownish-yellow with white belly, juveniles have black or brown spots, spawning males may be dark blue in color

## CHANNEL

Lower jaw even with upper jaw

weights rarely over 30 pounds recorded



forked tail

anal fin shorter with less than 30 supporting rays with round edge



color often mottled brown/black and pale yellow

## FLATHEAD

Lower jaw extends beyond upper jaw

weights of over 100 pounds reported



no forked tail (square)

anal fin shorter with less than 30 supporting rays with round edge

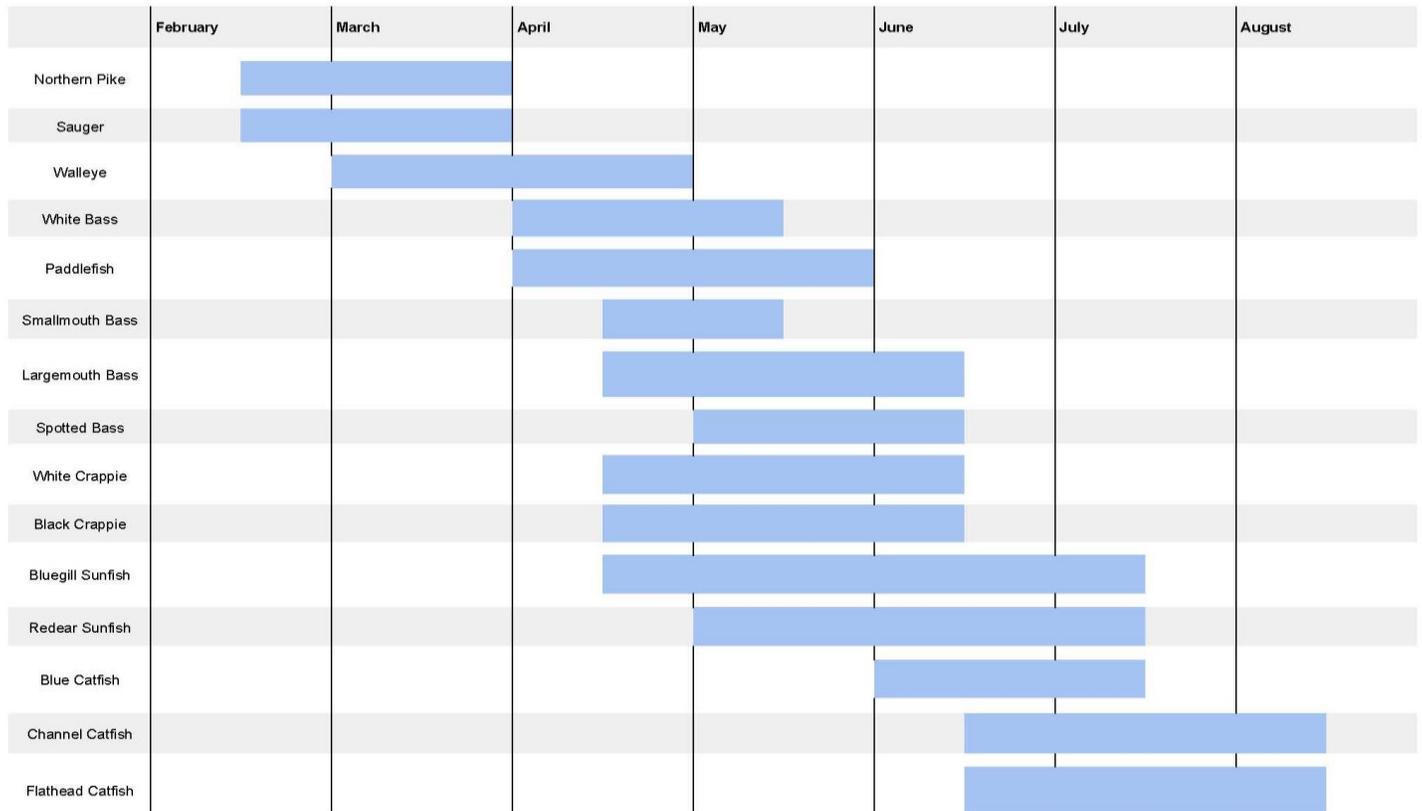
Artwork by Joseph R. Tomelleri



# Spawning Schedules

Fish species spawn at varying times of the year. This is based on a species' physiology, water temperature, and the changing day length. Water levels and other abiotic conditions can also play a role. Cold water species (Northern Pike, Walleye, etc.) typically spawn first, followed by black basses and crappies, and finally catfishes. This rough display (below) illustrates typical spawning times for popular Kansas sport fish. Remember, large females are typically more difficult to catch during the spawn for most fish species. Their energy and focus is on reproducing and not eating your bait. It's likely a better plan of action to target these fish as the spawn draws to a close and they begin feeding again.

**Typical Fish Spawning Months in Kansas\***



*\*Please note that fish spawning is dependent on water temperatures, day length and other factors, which can vary annually and by location. This information is meant to be a general guideline for anglers curious about the approximate spawning seasons, and not an exact representation of specific start and ending dates for fish spawning time in Kansas.*

## Newsletter Subscription

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Go Fish Kansas!



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