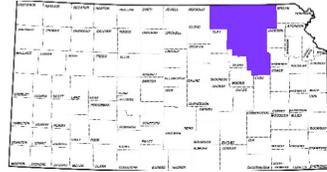


Tuttle Creek Fisheries Newsletter

Spring 2018



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Crappie Forecast for the Manhattan District

Spring is a great time of year for catching crappie. This is when these tasty fish are close to the bank for spawning and both shore and boat anglers can catch them. Crappie numbers can change rather quickly, and it is this time of year that I commonly get the question “what’s the hot crappie lake this year?” The best answer I can give is showing the data from the fish sampling I do each fall.

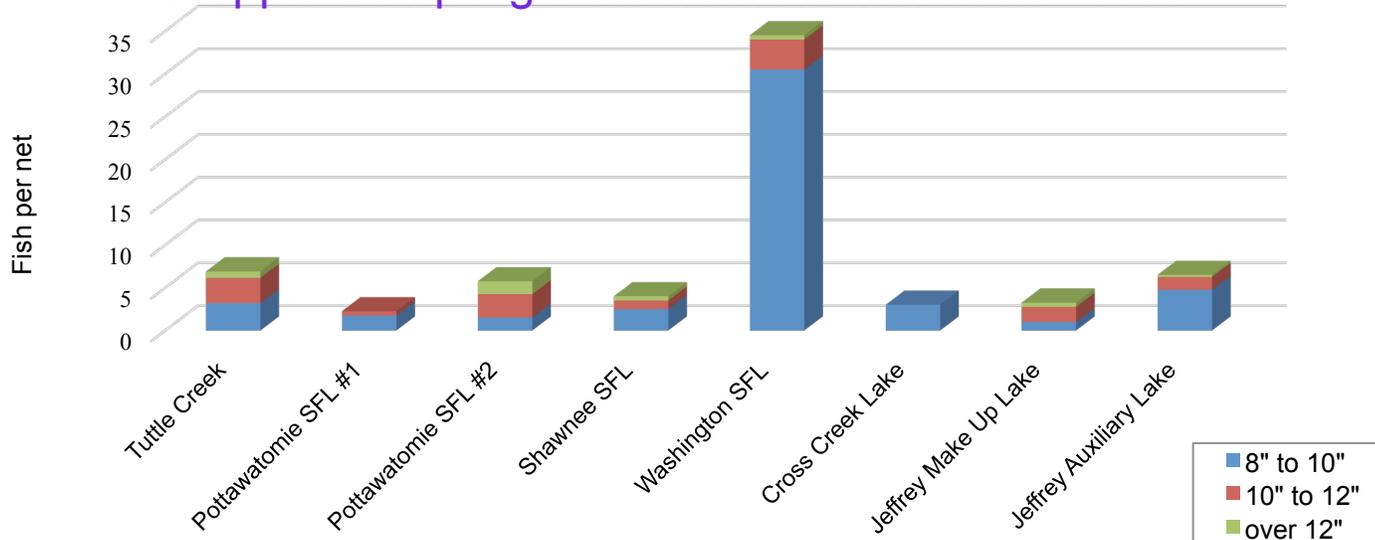
On the next page is a graph with all the lakes that were sampled last fall in the Manhattan District, except for Centralia City Lake that I will explain on the following page. This graph is meant for easy comparison of crappie populations found at local lakes. Each bar represents how many crappie were collected

per net for each length group. Lakes are in no particular order. Fish less than 8 inches were not included in the graph because crappie that size are not normally of interest to most anglers.

The numbers on this graph will be slightly different from the 2018 Fishing Forecast pamphlet because white crappie and black crappie numbers have been put together for easier use. The forecast data for other fish species or for any of the other lakes sampled by KDWPT throughout Kansas can be found at <http://ksoutdoors.com/Fishing/Fishing-Forecast>



Crappie Sampling Data from the Manhattan area



This graph is meant to give you an idea of what the crappie population looks like at each lake and be a helpful guide when looking for fishing locations around the Manhattan area. The number of fish collected per net does not always tell the whole story, so I have included a short narrative below for each lake.

Sample abundance of crappie at Tuttle Creek Reservoir from this fall was near the long-term average for the lake. The crappie population has a nice size structure with a higher than normal percentage of the population over 10 inches. The future looks promising, as the spawn last year was the largest recorded in over 20 years.

Of the four state fishing lakes that I sample, Pott. No. 1 had the lowest number of crappie per net, but the population has been slowly improving. Pott. No. 2 data shows the lake has a good population of bigger fish right now. Shawnee SFL has struggled to grow fish into the larger length groups for the last decade, but the 2017 sample had improvements in both size structure and body condition. The high numbers of small fish at Washington SFL tend to make this lake stand out in the graph, but the 2017 sample finally documented some bigger fish, which was the most seen in a decade.

The crappie fishery at Cross Creek Lake is currently well below what the lake is capable of

producing as the number of fish collected last fall was the fewest recorded in 25 years.

There are two lakes on the Jeffrey Energy Center property that are open to public access. Make Up Lake has produced some very good crappie fishing over the years, but the population is hindered by extremely inconsistent spawning success due to the fluctuating water levels seen at this water supply lake. However, the 2017 data recorded the third highest spawn in lake history so with good growth and survival the fishing should be good there again soon.

At Jeffrey Auxiliary Lake, crappie have not been a substantial part of the fishery for the history of the lake. However, crappie numbers have been more than double the long-term average for two years. This is due to greater spawning success and improved body condition during this time. Harvest data collected at the guardhouse recorded the number of crappie caught in 2017 was nearly double the ten year average. Hopefully, the population continues to perform well and becomes a viable component to the fishery.

I hope this helps you find some nice crappie!

Highlight Lake: Centralia City Lake is the place for 2018

It is always nice to have a lake with a really good fish population to tell anglers about. Well for 2018 that is Centralia City Lake.

The lake was a popular fishing destination in 2017 as the lake had fantastic numbers of nice sized crappie along with a robust saugeye population. Despite all that fishing pressure, my sampling results from the fall of 2017 indicates that the fish populations are still improving!

There are several factors that have contributed to these good fish populations; such as increased habitat from the expanding water willow planted along the bank, reduced turbidity from the reduction in carp numbers, and most importantly: reshaping the fish populations through predator/prey interactions.

For most of the last decade, the lake was dominated by a stunted crappie population. There were so many crappie that there was simply not enough forage available for the fish to grow. Anglers don't typically harvest sufficient numbers of these small fish. What was needed was an increase in the predator base to reduce the numbers of small crappie so there would be less competition and more food per crappie.

Saugeye have filled this role in the past, but their numbers had been low for a while. However, this improved dramatically in recent years due to some excellent survival from stocking efforts. These saugeye were successful in reducing the number of crappie, which resulted in an increase in the average size of crappie in the lake.

Below is the same graph from the previous page, but with the Centralia City Lake data added. I left it off previously because the other lakes look

quite low when compared to the Centralia data. From all the lakes in Kansas sampled by KDWP in 2017, Centralia City Lake had the highest number of crappie per net over 8 inches, 10 inches and 12 inches.

The saugeye population is also doing well from the good stocking success and abundant forage. The 2017 fall sampling collected the most saugeye on record. In addition, 48 percent of these fish were over the 18-inch minimum length limit. When compared to the other lakes in Kansas, Centralia had the most saugeye over 18 inches collected per net in the state in 2017.

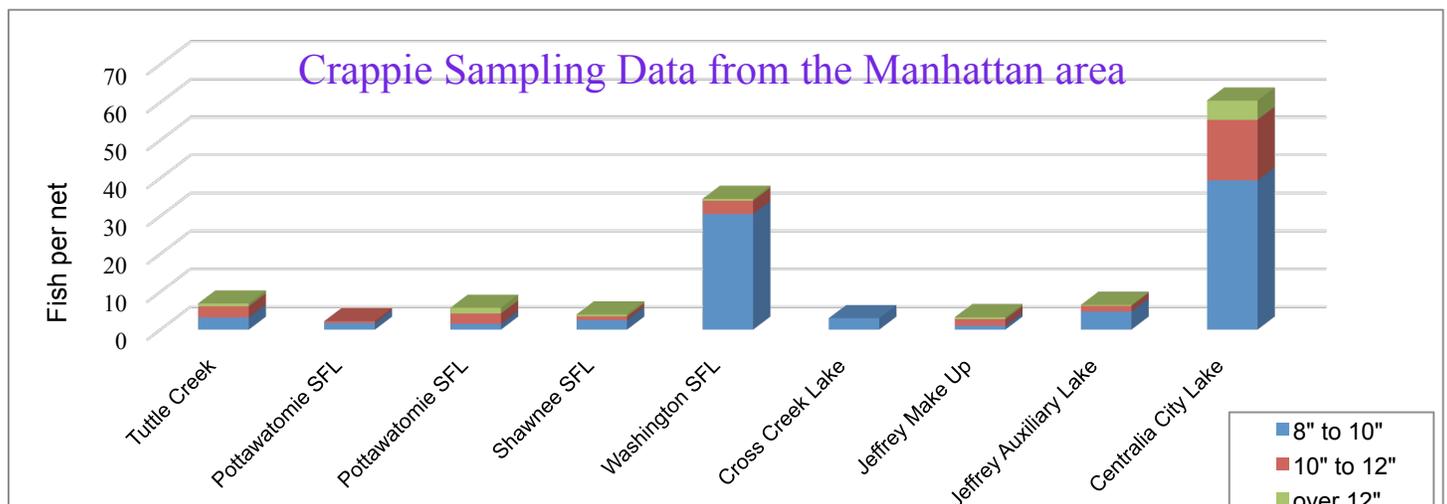
The lake also has an excellent channel catfish population. It ranks No.1 in the state for numbers of channel catfish over 24 inches.

The lake supports moderate populations of largemouth bass, bluegill, white bass and wiper.

Fishing at Centralia City Lake should be really good in 2018 and hopefully we can continue this trend into the future.

Good Luck!

Luke Planting Water Willow



A Rationale for fishing regulations: why the change to the blue catfish regs?

I find that many people think we have fishing regulations to protect fish, but this is not the primary reason for a lot of the regulations put on fishing. Most of the regulations are attempts to make as many anglers as possible happy with their fishing experience. This is why many of these regulations are tailored toward what the majority of our anglers actually want. I know this maybe a tough topic to explain in a short newsletter article, but please let me try with an example using the fishing equipment that is legal in our beautiful state of Kansas.

My job is to provide fish for anglers. If an angler wants to keep a fish, then why would I care what method is used to catch that fish? The fish is being removed from the system, so biologically it does not matter how it was harvested. It is the same if it is taken with an old-fashioned cane pole, a trot line with 25 hooks, or a stick of dynamite tied to a rock.

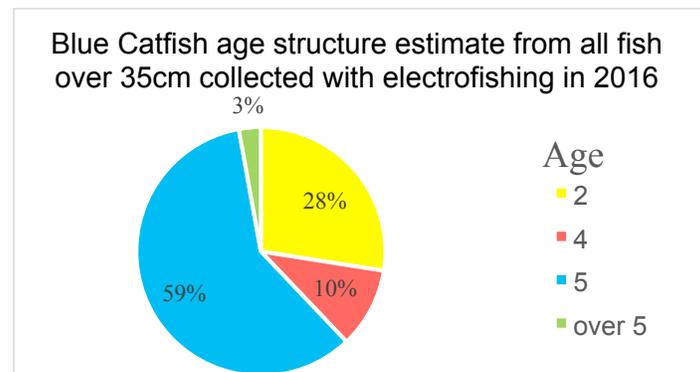
I have heard people say “why won’t the state let me use dynamite to fish with?” However, consider it being asked this way, “is it ok that everyone can use dynamite to fish with?” I imagine that not too many anglers would approve of dynamite being thrown into their favorite fishing hole by all their fellow anglers. Hence, why explosives are not a legal method.

But what about trotlines? In general, anglers are ok with trotlines being a legal method of take. However, in smaller bodies of water that are more frequently visited by families with young anglers, then the approval of competing with trotlines decreases. So in an attempt to satisfy as many anglers as possible, trotlines are legal fishing equipment only in our larger bodies of water in Kansas. This is just an example showing that many of the fishing regulations are in place as an attempt to satisfy the desires of the anglers we are serving.



Now, sometimes KDWPT does actually use a fishing regulation to protect fish. An example of this is the 35-inch minimum length limit on blue catfish. This regulation has been in standard use in this state when establishing a new population. This species matures at an older age than most of the other fish in the state; usually at a minimum of 6 years and 24 inches. That is why biologist want to protect the newly stocked fish until they have a chance to grow, reproduce and hopefully expand the population to a point where it sustains itself. Once the blue catfish population reaches that milestone then the regulations and goals for the species will be reevaluated. Different lakes may be managed in different ways due to variations in habitat, fish growth, and the desires of local anglers.

The blue catfish population at Tuttle Creek is still young. In 2016, spines were collected to get age estimates of blue catfish. This data indicated that the population is dominated by fish from the 2011 stocking with 59 percent being age 5.



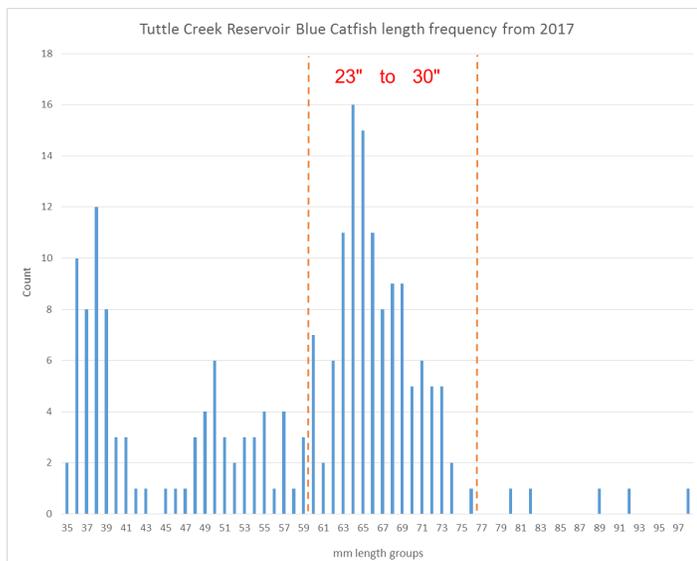
The 2011 year-class is considered very important to the creation of a self-sustaining population. Tuttle Creek has been stocked 10 times since 2002, but only two of those stockings have had good survival.

To protect the 2011 year-class for several years, a 35-inch minimum length limit was implemented starting in 2018. The intent is to give these fish a chance to grow and reproduce to get the blue catfish population on the path to

Continued on page 5

sustaining itself. Natural reproduction has been going on for a few years now in the River Pond, so a minimum length limit on blue catfish is not in effect downstream of the dam.

If adequate natural reproduction occurs as I hope and expect it to, then I anticipate the 35-inch minimum length limit will be removed in the near future. The long-term management plan for blue catfish in Tuttle Creek Reservoir will be focused on harvest opportunities in the lake and in the tail-water fisheries below the dam. The goal is to one day have a thriving population that will provide a robust fishery that will support ample harvest. The plan is finally coming together as you can see from the graph below that the lake is starting to get a sufficient number of fish that are large enough to reproduce.



A baby blue catfish in the palm of my hand

Pictured above is one of the highlights of my career – early indication of success in the blue catfish plan with evidence of a natural spawn in the lake. In late summer of 2016, I collected six of these little guys in Tuttle Creek. Prior to this, only one blue catfish had been seen that had been born in the reservoir and was not from a stocking of hatchery-reared fish. To date, natural reproduction has still been quite limited in the reservoir, but hopefully this will improve in the coming years to the benefit of the fishery and to the future anglers visiting Tuttle Creek.

Tight lines and thanks for reading.

What's New for 2018?

The statewide creel limit for wipers and stripers has been changed from 2 per day to 5 per day. This change was made to allow anglers to harvest more of these fish once they have moved downstream out of the lake into the river system or in areas where they have been maintaining good numbers. For example in the Manhattan area, anglers are now able to harvest 5 wipers per day at the Rocky Ford Dam. In addition, the daily wiper creel is now 5 per day at the nearby Milford Lake. However, some lakes in the state will remain at the 2 per day creel, local examples are: Centralia City Lake and the Jeffery Energy Center Lakes.

Pictures from sampling conducted in fall of 2017

Tuttle Creek Reservoir



Exceptional numbers of little saugeye for the second year in a row. Limited number of bigger saugeye in the lake.



One of the longer blue catfish I have collected in Tuttle Creek at 37 inches, but it was not too fat at 25 pounds



This 2.6-pound, 16-inch black crappie makes this 12-inch, 1.3-pound white crappie look small



More white crappie from Tuttle Creek

Pictures from sampling conducted in fall of 2017

Some fish from Centralia City Lake. Great saugeye numbers this year and always has a good channel catfish population



Some crappie from Shawnee State Fishing Lake on the left and Pottawatomie State Fishing Lake No. 2 below



Cross Creek Lake has some nice channel in it for a small impoundment

A big Thank You to everyone that helped me last fall: Alex, Ben, Bryon, Corey, Luke and Scott. Good Luck!