

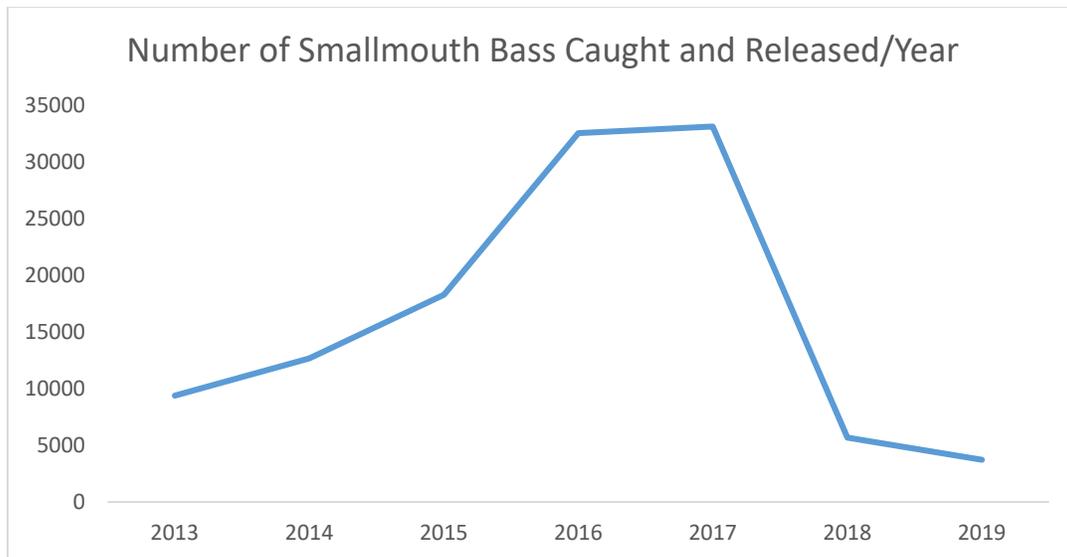


Woodson District Fisheries News

Spring 2020

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Coffey County Lake: Smallmouth Bass Update



Coffey County Lake’s smallmouth bass population has had a reputation of producing some excellent fishing opportunities. Just a few short years ago many anglers were able to catch nearly 100 fish per day. However, in the span of one year, those days have gone by the wayside. At the end of 2017, the total number of smallmouth bass caught and released at Coffey County Lake was 33,105. By the end of 2018, that value dropped to 5,661 fish, and the data from 2019 showed that 3,720 smallmouth bass were caught and released. In addition, we also noticed a decline in the largemouth bass population from previous years’ data. So what in the world happened to these populations? The data seems to show a large die off has occurred, but there hasn’t been any reported of either largemouth or smallmouth.



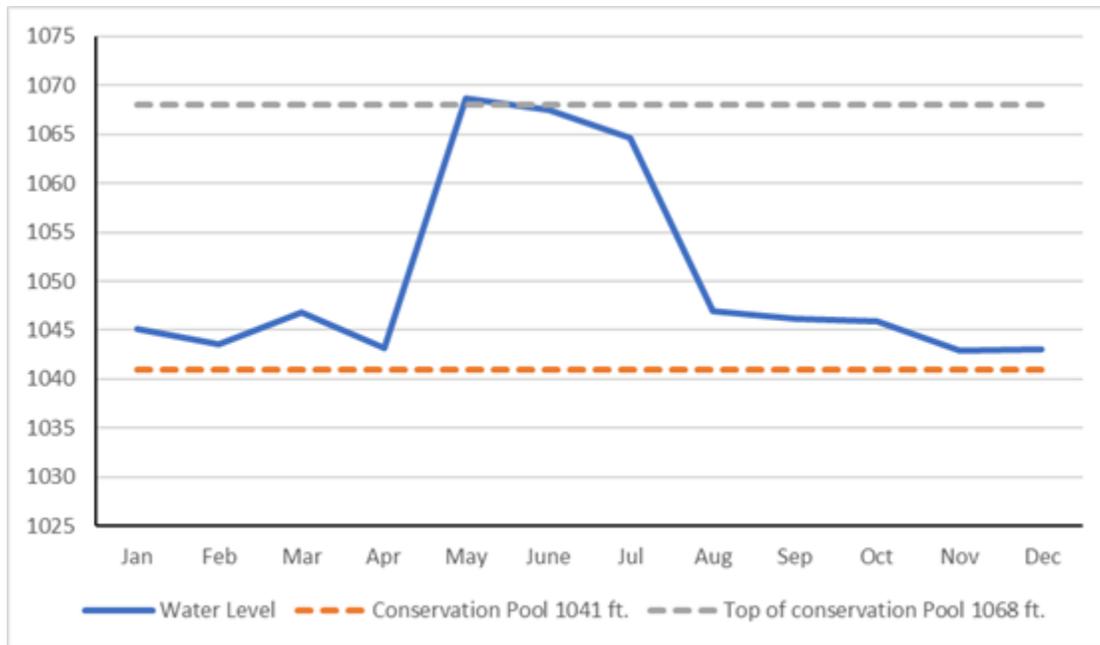
However, this trend of sharp population declines, and no signs of fish kills has been seen before in many Kansas lakes, and the culprit is usually a virus known as Largemouth Bass Virus. With previous knowledge of how LMBV affects populations we decided it was a good idea to test the population. Last spring during our spring electrofishing survey we

tested both largemouth and smallmouth bass for the virus and found that it was present in both populations. What is Largemouth Bass Virus? It is a naturally occurring virus that affects fish and is closely related to viruses found in frogs and other amphibians. The origin of the virus isn't known but it was first isolated in Florida in 1991. Since then the virus has been connected to multiple fish kills throughout the South and Midwest. It is thought to be transported by anglers using infected baitfish or not decontaminating boats, livewells, or other fishing gear. Just another reason to practice **Clean, Drain, and Dry**. In Kansas the virus has been found in several lakes. Many species can be carriers of the Virus, but it has been found to usually only affect largemouth bass, and usually only causes fish kills when fish are most stressed. In fact, the virus can be present in the population for many years and go unnoticed until the fish encounter a stressful event that results in a fish kill. The same event would not result in a fish kill in an otherwise healthy population. Stressors such as, low oxygen, hot water temperatures, parasites, or extreme amounts of angling pressure could result in fish kills. The Coffey County Lake smallmouth bass population was exposed to unseasonably hot spring weather during spawning time in 2018 and it was later found that these fish also had a heavy infestation of parasitic worms (pictured on the right). These two stressors combined with the LMBV is the likely cause of the population decline. Where do we go from here? In the other Kansas lakes that have been diagnosed with LMBV, it has been found that the populations start coming back after a few years once the fish that are left in the population build some immunity against the virus. We are hoping this will be the case at Coffey County Lake, however, it is a real possibility that a restocking program may be needed in order to restore the population. Efforts will be taken to closely monitor this situation and see how the population is responding to the virus. If you are someone that likes to look for the silver lining in bad situations, consider this



after an exposure to LMBV both largemouth and smallmouth bass populations are less likely to have a substantial die off in the future. Another thing to consider, the population density has been substantially decreased, with that said, the competition for food resources has also been substantially decreased which may result in healthier and better-quality fish in the long run. A few anglers have reported catching some 4 lb. smallmouth bass in February.

John Redmond Reservoir 2020 Forecast

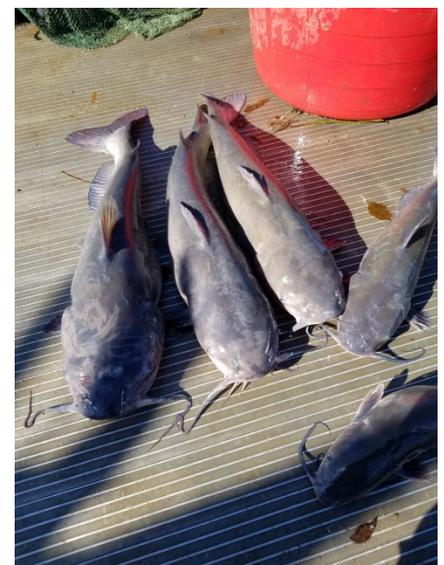
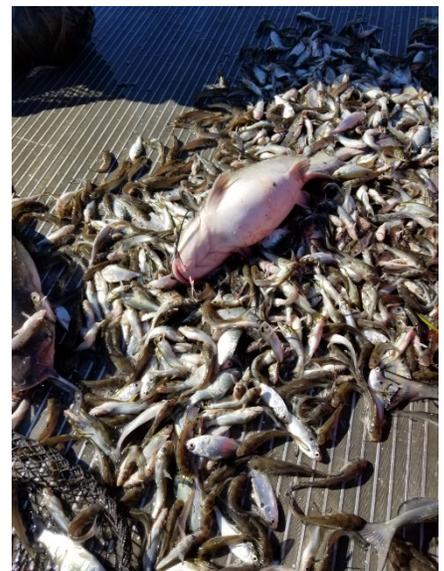


Like all other reservoirs around the state John Redmond experienced high-water levels much of the 2019 fishing season. What does that mean for 2020? The graph on the right illustrates the water level of the reservoir throughout 2019, and if you look at it closely you will notice that the reservoir was at least 2 feet above conservation pool all year. This means that more habitat was available for sportfish to spawn in and the young of the year fish to hide in during the year. Did that habitat translate to fish production we could document in the fall netting sample? There were two species that seemed to really benefit from the high water in 2019.

Channel Catfish - We documented an incredible amount of YOY channel catfish in the trap net sample. We captured nearly 500 young of the year channel catfish, compared to previous years 10-20 fish on average. Because there aren't many predators of young catfish in the system, most of these fish should recruit to the population and provide a noticeable boost to the population. As far as big fish are concerned, we saw our share of them as we loaded a trap net so full of big catfish, we almost couldn't pull it in the boat.

White bass - White bass was the other species that really showed up in the fall netting sample. We captured a total of 476 white bass which was an increase of 346 from the previous year. We averaged almost 24 white bass in every gill net. We captured good percentages of larger fish, but the sample was dominated by smaller fish ranging in size from 6-9" which were more than likely young of the year fish that were able to grow exceptionally fast because of all of the available forage from the high water. White bass fishing opportunities should be great this year with good numbers of large and small fish available.

Crappie - The fall sample did not indicate that crappie had the same success as the other species. However, I remain optimistic and believe that the opportunity for some good crappie fishing still exists. Especially during the spawn, when the



fish are vulnerable near the bank. Large crappie are always a possibility at John Redmond with all of the available forage these fish grow fast and are exceptionally healthy.

Blue Catfish – Like the crappie sample we did not see a big jump in numbers of blue cats sampled either with the gill nets or with the electrofishing survey that was conducted in late August. Blue catfish are highly mobile and very well could have migrated either up the river or down the river through the dam. Our fall sample continues to show fair numbers of fish in the 15-20” range and a fair number of young 1-year old fish. Our sampling methods have failed to sample many large adult fish; therefore, I have implemented a **35” minimum length limit and 5 fish/day creel** on the blue catfish. This reservoir has everything needed to produce a trophy blue cat fishery; it should just be a matter of time before these large fish start showing up more regularly. For now, the blue cat fishing opportunities are only fair with very few fish over the 35” length limit.

For the complete 2020 fishing forecast please visit the following website. <https://ksoutdoors.com/Fishing/Fishing-Forecast>



Woodson State Fishing Lake Back Open to Fishing



It's hard to believe but it has been two long years since anglers have been able to enjoy a day on the water at Woodson State Fishing Lake. Well, the wait is over as the lake was reopened to fishing on January 1, 2020. If you haven't been to this lake in two years it is worth the trip to see the vast improvements of habitat we made within the lake. The lake now has vegetation that hasn't been around because common carp activity prevented such growth. I have talked about the habitat additions in previous newsletters but as a reminder we added 120 brush piles and over 200 Georgia Cubes. All habitat locations can be found online, and if you are technically savvy you can get a bathymetric map of the lake with the habitat coordinates on your phone or smart device. Information for all GPS files and instructions to download to devices can be found at the following website. <https://ksoutdoors.com/KDWPT-Info/Locations/Hunting-Fishing-Atlas/Fishing-Atlas/GPS-KML-Information-Files>

As the three pictures at the top of the page illustrate, the current fish populations in Woodson State Fishing Lake are all young fish and the majority of which are not legal to harvest. These fish were sampled in late August. The bluegill was about 3", the walleye was 5.5", and the largemouth bass was also 5.5". The only species that will provide some harvestable sized fish in any sort of numbers is the channel catfish. This population should have a fair percentage of fish over the 15" minimum length limit, but the largest individuals are only going to be around 4 or 5 lbs. Other species present will provide some opportunities to catch fish but the chance of catching a fish of legal length is not very good. I expect the fishing to become good to excellent in three or four years as these young fish move into adult size classes. Until then anglers can come out and enjoy some catch and release fishing, explore the new habitat, and enjoy the scenic beauty of Woodson State Lake.

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