

LAWRENCE DISTRICT FISHING NEWSLETTER

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Special Points of Interest:

- Production of intermediate largemouth bass a success at Melvern Rearing Pond
- Crappie population hits a new low at Melvern
- Some District lakes ranked highly in 2015 fishing forecasts



Biologist Notes

We ended up on a dry note in 2014, as several lakes in the District went back down below normal after summer rains temporarily filled them. Fall sampling went well as far as weather, but some fisheries are feeling the effects of 3 years of below normal runoff.

Melvern Rearing Pond Production

Six hundred pounds of adult fathead minnows were stocked into the rearing pond March 13 of last year to provide food for the 6,000 fingerling largemouth bass stocked about a month later. One hundred eleven bluegill and 13 redear sunfish were stocked, so that their offspring would supply additional forage. Fathead minnows, sunfish, and abundant crayfish present in the pond provided high quality forage for young bass. The pond was harvested by a collaborative effort including KDWPT, COE, and BASS Nation members September 27; yielding 3,536 largemouth bass that averaged 8.8 inches in length! These bass were stocked at 5 locations around Melvern Reservoir. The goal of this project is to increase the number of largemouth bass in the lake for anglers. Largemouth bass stocked into the rearing pond in 2013 and 2014 were genetically mapped, so that they could be distinguished from naturally produced bass.



In the spring 2014 electrofishing sample, about 19.5% of largemouth bass sampled at Melvern less than 12 inches in length had been stocked in the fall of 2013. Bass stocked in fall 2014 were substantially larger than those stocked in 2013, and should exhibit higher survival. Also, the bluegill spawn was tremendous at Melvern in 2014 and should provide some excellent food for these newly stocked largemouth bass.

Melvern Crappie

Crappie have been in free-fall at Melvern since 2011, the year zebra mussels were discovered there. Although there may be other factors, appearance of zebra mussels and presence of the drought likely negatively impacted the food chain at Melvern. Zebra mussels filter the water effectively removing plankton that could be utilized by juvenile sportfish and gizzard shad for food. Lack of runoff creates a more sterile environment at a reservoir, limiting production. The crappie sample catch at Melvern in 2014 is the lowest that I am aware of, at this lake. The graph puts it in perspective. If the data is real, crappie fishing will be really tough at Melvern in 2015.

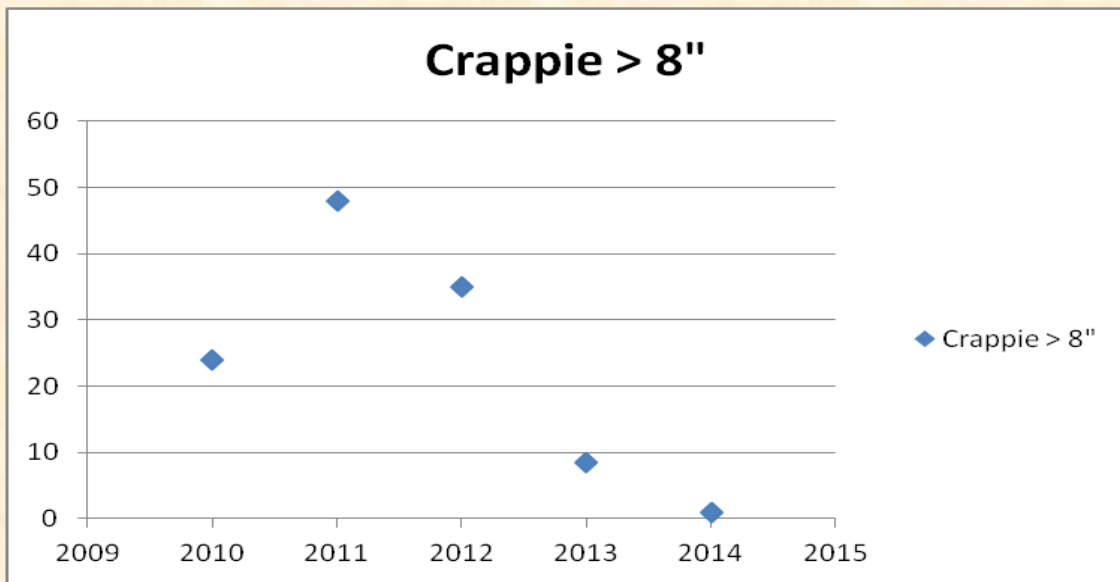


Figure 1. Number of white crappies per net night at Melvern Reservoir, 2010-2014.

Gizzard shad are the most important prey source for adult crappies in a reservoir, and number of young of the year shad have been very scarce over the past 3 years at Melvern. About

1000 gizzard shad young might be captured in 20 samples in a good year at Melvern, only 10 to 150 were caught annually from 2012 through 2014. These are some of the lowest numbers I have seen in reservoir collections. Improvement in gizzard shad production could turn crappie fortunes around quickly. Shad usually produce higher numbers of offspring during years in which water levels are about 3 feet over conservation pool during May. We have not seen that scenario in awhile!



Lawrence District Lakes Statewide Fishing Forecast Rankings

Each year fisheries biologists submit sampling data that is used to compile fishing forecasts for lakes across the state. This information is found in a printed leaflet “KANSAS Fishing Forecast 2015” at KDWPT offices and on the KDWPT website. Anglers can review information each year to help determine where to fish for a particular species. Below is a discussion of lakes and their associated species that ranked highly in this year’s forecast.

Clinton Reservoir ranks 3rd statewide for channel catfish. During the past several years Clinton has been one of the best reservoirs to catch channel catfish between 18 and 22 inches in length. This water does have bigger fish, but its bread and butter are the high numbers of “eating size” catfish. Clinton, also has ranked highly the past few years for white bass. This year it ranked 4th. There are good numbers of whites and many range in size from 12-14 inches, with a few exceeding 15 inches long. The past few years white crappie populations at Clinton have been below the long-term average, and 2015 will be another one of these years. However, Clinton still ranked 5th in the state for this species. Back in the early days of Clinton Reservoir (late 1970s and early 1980s), a good smallmouth bass population existed. Over time this species declined significantly to where it was just a remnant population. Smallmouth bass fingerlings were stocked from 2008 through 2011 to try to re-establish this fishery. Stockings were successful. Hopefully this population will be self-sustaining. According to the data, Clinton ranks 6th in terms of smallmouth bass.



Lawrence District Lakes Statewide Fishing Forecast Rankings (Continued)

A tremendous smallmouth bass sample was collected at Melvern Reservoir in 2014, which resulted in this reservoir being ranked 2nd for this species in the 2015 forecast. High numbers of young smallmouth bass were collected, along with high numbers of adults; indicating that this fishery is only going to improve. Channel catfish numbers are fair at Melvern and this year it ranks 10th. White bass have been fairly high at Melvern over the past 3 years, and 2015 should be another decent year, as Melvern ranks 11th for this species.



Douglas SFL ranks 1st for redear sunfish. Most adult redear will measure 7-9 inches, so size is just average, but high numbers are present. Channel catfish rank 3rd statewide here, which they have ranked highly ever since Douglas re-opened for fishing in 2009 after it was renovated. Bluegill rank 9th at Douglas and should supply good angling, most larger adults will be about 7 to 7.5 inches in length.

Lonestar lake ranks 6th for bluegill, and again most larger adults will measure from 7 to 7.5 long. If you are looking for “trophy” redear, Lonestar has fewer, but larger redear than does Douglas. Some redear over 10 inches long are caught every year. Black crappie rank 10th at Lonestar, these fish are going to measure between 8-9.5 inches in length with a few over 10 inches.

Lawrence District Lakes Statewide Fishing Forecast Rankings (Continued)

Lake Shawnee ranks 3rd for smallmouth bass. Shawnee has had smallmouth bass since the 1990s. This population is self-sustaining at a moderate level. Some quality fish are present, as occasionally someone will boat a 4 pounder. White bass numbers have been high at Lake Shawnee over the past 3-4 years, and 2014 data ranked this lake 3rd for this species.

Melvorn River Pond ranks 8th for white crappies and 9th for black crappies for 2015. This water covers about 100 acres, is shallow and highly productive. Although the data did not reflect it, this lake has very good numbers of big bluegill.



As winter starts to wane and warmer temperatures began to be more common, thoughts turn to fishing. Before you know it walleyes will be spawning at your favorite lake; with white bass, crappie, black bass, bluegill, and catfish to follow. Hopefully, the fishing forecasts will give you a hint of where to begin fishing for whatever tickles your fancy. Good luck, and good fishing!