

Horsethief Reservoir Happenings

Horsethief filled to capacity in 2015. While the fishing was getting pretty good when it was only about ¼ capacity, it's a whole different story now! While we do stock fish every year, they are mostly baby fish and these populations of largemouth bass, walleye, channel catfish, bluegill and crappie need time to fill the void. There are several projects that have been started to help the fish populations develop.

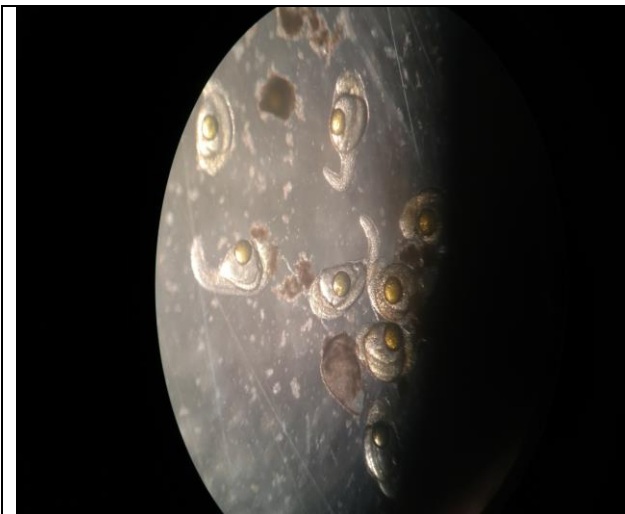
In 2014, American Water-willow (*Justicia americana*) was first planted in Horsethief. The leaves look like those of the willow tree and that is where the name comes from. Water willow is a perennial plant and the primary goal is to provide habitat, which is sorely lacking, for the fish. Secondly, it grows to 3 feet tall and often forms dense colonies that will help stabilize shorelines, which are particularly vulnerable to erosion due to the western Kansas wind. Once established, water willow can spread from seeds or fragments. It will form extensive continuously growing horizontal underground stems that put out lateral shoots and roots at intervals, which is how colonies form and spread rapidly.



Water willow plantings from 2014 at Horsethief Reservoir beginning to form colonies.

The submerged portions of water willow will provide excellent habitat for many micro and macro invertebrates, which are the beginning of the food chain. These invertebrates are food for fish and other wildlife species (amphibians, reptiles, ducks). After aquatic plants die, their decomposition by bacteria and fungi provides food (called “detritus”) for many aquatic invertebrates. Deer have been observed browsing the leaves at Cedar Bluff Reservoir while beaver and muskrat will consume the stems. In a few years, there should be good colonies of water willow scattered around Horsethief and anglers will have more fish to catch because of it.

Crappie are a species of fish that anglers often request, and in fact, many times are stocked by well meaning, yet misinformed anglers. Unfortunately, one of the major obstacles to successful culture and stocking of crappie is that they have an extremely high reproduction rate, which can lead to overcrowding and stunting in small water bodies. Because of this, Horsethief has been stocked with hybrid crappie, which are a cross between the female black crappie and the male white crappie, produced in our Pratt Fish Hatchery. Hybrid crappie should be able to reproduce but less frequently than the pure strain white or black crappie, avoiding overcrowding and stunting. And hybrids should grow faster than the parental species, especially through the first two growing seasons.



In the above photo, taken thru a microscope, the hybrid crappie had just hatched in mid May 2016.

The photo on the right is the same fish being stocked into Horsethief in early August.



Normally to tell the difference between the two species, white crappie have five or six dorsal spines and black vertical bars on the sides of the body, whereas black crappie have seven or eight dorsal spines and mottled black spots on the sides of the body. Hybrid crappies do occur naturally and are often difficult to distinguish from a normal black crappie.

It is hoped that we will be able to continue to improve on and expand this program in the future to ensure a good population of these delicious fish are available to anglers at Horsethief Reservoir.

ZEBRA MUSSELS FOUND IN CEDAR BLUFF RESERVOIR

The Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) has confirmed the presence of invasive zebra mussels in Cedar Bluff Reservoir in Trego County. The lake is owned and operated by the federal Bureau of Reclamation (BOR). In July, the BOR conducted its annual plankton sampling survey to look for zebra mussel veligers (larvae). The results were reported to KDWPT aquatic nuisance species staff on Wednesday, August 24. Department fisheries staff began a search on August 25 and found a population of adult zebra mussels near the Muley Boat Ramp on the south side of the reservoir. Cedar Bluff Reservoir is the western-most reservoir in Kansas confirmed to have zebra mussels. There is no known method to completely rid a lake of this invasive species.

While the reservoir is managed by the BOR, KDWP manages the fishery. The lake consists of about 6,869 surface acres at conservation level and has a maximum depth of 42 feet. Cedar Bluff State Park and the lake are popular destinations and offer a variety of recreational activities such as boating, skiing, swimming, fishing, camping and hiking.

Lake enthusiasts play the primary role in stemming the spread of zebra mussels to uninfested lakes. **“Zebra mussel larvae, or veligers, are microscopic and undetectable to the naked eye, so everyone who visits a Kansas lake needs to be aware that transferring water between lakes can lead to more infestations,”** said Jeff Koch, KDWP Aquatic Research Biologist.

Prevention is the best way to avoid spreading any aquatic nuisance species (ANS). They often travel by “hitchhiking” with unsuspecting lake-goers. “Everyone who recreates on Kansas lakes should clean, drain, and dry their boats and equipment before using another lake. In addition, don’t transfer lake water or live fish into another body of water, as this is a main way that all aquatic nuisance species move between lakes,” Koch said.

Cedar Bluff Reservoir and the Smoky Hill River downstream from the reservoir east to Kanopolis Reservoir will be added to the list of ANS-designated waters in Kansas, and notices will be posted at various locations around the reservoir. Live fish may not be transported from ANS-designated waters. The sharp-shelled zebra mussels attach to solid objects, so lake-goers should be careful when handling mussel-encrusted objects and when grabbing an underwater object when they can’t see what their hands may be grasping. Visitors should protect their feet when walking on underwater or shoreline rocks.



Water levels in southwest Kansas going into the fall of 2016

Spring and summer rains in 2016 have been very good to us in southwest Kansas. We are still seeing the benefits of heavy rains last May that filled HorseThief Reservoir and a few other waters, but several other locations are still dry or nearly so. As of September 1, 2016, water levels in some of our State fishing lakes and larger Community Lakes are as follows.

The numbers in parentheses are the surface acreage when the lakes are at full pool.

State Fishing Lakes	Community Lakes
Barber State Fishing Lake – (51) - Full	Coldwater City Lake – (250) - Full
Clark State Fishing Lake – (337) - Full	Jetmore City Lake – (110) - Full
Concannon State Fishing Lake – (50) - 1 foot low	Pratt County Lake – (51) – Full
Concannon State Fishing Lake – (50) - 1 foot low	Larned City Pond – (2) - Full
Ford State Lake – (40) – 1 foot low	HorseThief Reservoir – (450) – Full
Goodman State Lake – (40) acres – Full	
Hain State Fishing Lake – (53) - 1 foot low	
Kiowa State Fishing Lake - 21 acres - full	
Meade State Lake – (80) - Full	



Providing opportunities, like this young angler enjoyed at Clark State Fishing Lake this summer, is the end goal of all that we do to manage fish in southwest Kansas. All too often anglers get caught up wanting more and bigger fish, and forget the fun of just being out there. Enjoy yourself!

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Questions or comments? Send them as well.

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