

Cheney District Fisheries

Volume 1, Issue 2 Kansas Department of Wildlife & Parks Fisheries Division Summer 2010

Cheney District Update

With the dog days of summer ahead, the fishing should be hot!

Jeff Koch, District Fisheries Biologist
Kansas Department of Wildlife & Parks

The spawning season for most fish species is winding down and fish are redistributing themselves to their summer habitats. The walleyes are now holding on points, drop-offs, and flats, crappies have headed to deeper water, and white bass and wipers are schooled up in open water anxiously waiting for young-of-the-year gizzard shad to grow to lengths where they can efficiently utilize them as forage. Although the fishing can be great in the early spring, we are in the midst of the best part of the angling year.

During May, fishing at Cheney was hit and miss, mostly due to inconsistent weather patterns and high winds. With some recently stable weather, the walleye fishing has been as good as it has been in years. Most walleyes caught at Cheney are in the 15 to 18 inch range, but with a good year-class of gizzard shad this year, some of those walleyes might be keepers late this year or next year. Wiper fishing has also been excellent at Cheney. Anglers have been catching wipers while trolling for walleyes or wading out onto windblown shores. Some really nice white bass (up to 17 inches) are mixed in with the wipers, so be sure of your fish ID before harvesting white bass or wipers. The crappie fishing was also unexpectedly good at Cheney this spring and some really nice crappie have surprised trolling walleye and wiper anglers by showing themselves on the end of their crankbaits!

Continued on page 2

Cheney Lake Walleye Stocking

A little science and a little luck go into making the next year class of walleyes at Cheney Lake.

If you have been walleye fishing at Cheney Lake this spring, you have probably noticed the incredible abundance of 15 to 20 inch walleyes. All of these walleyes are not the result of "crowding below the minimum length limit" that many anglers hear about. The reality is on the contrary; the growth of Cheney Lake walleyes is among the fastest in the nation due to productive water, a high amount of forage, and a long growing season. All of these sublegal walleyes are from an exceptional year class of fingerling walleyes stocked in 2008.

Unlike some Kansas reservoirs that have some degree of a naturally recruiting walleye population, Cheney Lake has little to no natural walleye recruitment. As such, stocking is the only option to maintain walleye populations at the lake. Historically, Cheney Lake has produced relatively small walleye year classes from a variety of different stocking strategies including main lake and river fry stockings. Due to increasing densities of invasive white perch in 2002, KDWP biologists switched to mainly stocking larger fingerlings opposed to small fry which are highly susceptible to predation by white perch.



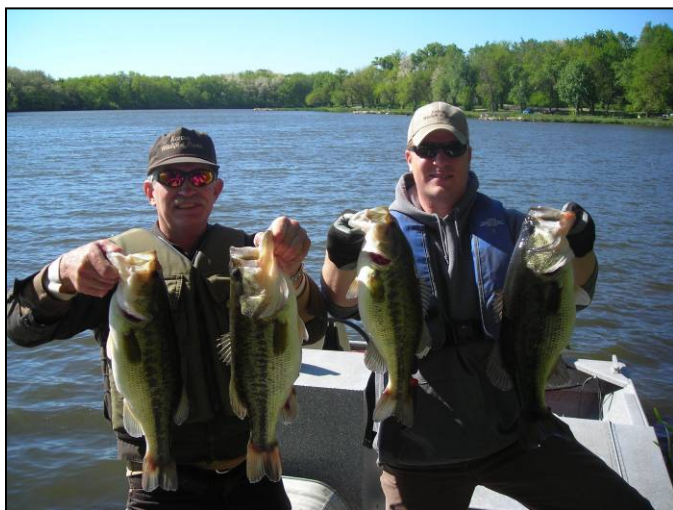
Just a handful of the 237,000 walleye fingerlings stocked into Cheney Lake in 2010.



Cheney District Update – continued from page 1

If you are looking to catch some catfish in the Cheney District, the channel catfish bite has been hot at area lakes. Good numbers of channel cats are currently being caught around the fish feeders at Kingman and McPherson State Fishing Lakes. A couple of community lakes with good channel catfish populations that shouldn't be overlooked are Anthony City Lake, as well as Carey Park Pond and Dillon Nature Center Pond in Hutchinson, which are all being stocked monthly with adult channel catfish.

For all you bass fisherman, there are two excellent options for largemouth fishing in the Cheney District. This spring, there have been several reports of largemouth bass approaching five pounds being caught at Kingman State Fishing Lake. Bass anglers at Kingman SFL should be prepared to fish around lots of vegetation, as bass hold in dense mats of curly-leaf pondweed in early summer and the lotus beds that form later in the summer. Don't forget to be ready for a surprise northern pike while bass fishing at Kingman. For the die-hard bass angler, there might not be a better option in Central Kansas than McPherson SFL. Bass anglers have been hitting the dam and beds of vegetation adjacent to cattails for big bass. The main forage source for bass at McPherson is gizzard shad, so try large shad imitation swim baits for those bass that approach six and seven pounds at McPherson.



KDWP biologists with just a few of the nice bass sampled from McPherson SFL during spring electrofishing surveys.

Cheney Lake Walleye Stocking – continued from page 1

Cheney Lake continued to produce small year-classes of walleyes until 2007 when biologists slightly changed stocking strategies again by sampling the plankton community at the time of stocking and placing fingerling walleyes in areas of high densities of zooplankton and larval fish. The results have been excellent so far, especially in 2008, when the “year class of the decade” was produced.

Of course, KDWP biologists cannot take all the credit for the recent walleye boom at Cheney Lake. There are many environmental factors that drive recruitment of walleyes including weather, water chemistry, reservoir inflow and outflow, and water temperature. In addition, a host of biotic factors play important roles in walleye recruitment such as density of predators, the timing of the gizzard shad spawn, and plankton abundance.

Each year, biologists learn a few new tricks to help make fishing better for Kansans, but Mother Nature generally has a large say in what anglers will have in their creels in years to come. Let's hope Mother Nature has a good year in store for us in the Cheney District so our 2008 year class can quickly grow to be keepers and our 2010 year class will be following right behind them.



Here's what biologists look for when stocking walleye fingerlings. Larval fish, also called ichthyoplankton, are sampled with a fine mesh net pulled behind the boat. The bottom half of the jar is full of larval gizzard shad, a favorite food item for recently stocked fingerling walleyes. These tiny fish play a large role in walleye recruitment.

Wellington City Lake

In the mid 1990's, a new dam was completed at Wellington City Lake, creating a lake within a lake and breathing new life into the fishery.

At first glance on a windy day, the “new lake” portion of Wellington Lake looks totally different from the “old lake”. The breached dam of the old lake separates the deeper and clearer new lake from the shallow, turbid, windswept old lake. Only a small opening in the center of the old dam connects the two lakes. It is this habitat heterogeneity; however, that helps Wellington Lake sustain a thriving and diverse fishery.

Wellington City Lake is currently one of the best saugeye lakes in the state and is home to some monster flatheads. In addition, decent crappie and wiper fisheries should keep anglers busy this summer. Saugeye anglers generally have some good luck with jig and crawler combinations around the old dam and near the deep area that connects the two lakes. Although the minimum length limit for saugeye at Wellington Lake is 18 inches, reports of five-fish limits have been common at the lake this spring. Fish sampling indicates that good year classes of smaller saugeye are present that should sustain the fishery for years to come. If the saugeye aren't biting, look for schooling wipers chasing baitfish this summer, especially in windblown coves in the evenings. Wellington Lake also has a good crappie population, and in last year's netting samples, half of the crappie sampled were above 10 inches. One habitat that should satisfy summer crappie anglers is the abundance of deep water structure. Try fishing jigs and minnows deep on submerged trees in the new lake for some dog-day crappie action.



Wellington Lake is home to one of the best saugeye populations in the state.

Although most of the angler pressure occurs in the new lake, channel and flathead catfishing can be excellent in the shallows of the old lake. An abundance of submerged stumps and trees in the old lake are perfect habitat for big channels and flatheads. With some big tackle and lively bait during night, dawn, and dusk, there is a good chance at landing some of the trophy flatheads that might push 50 pounds.

Please Be Safe on the Water This Summer

In light of the tragic events at Cheney Lake over Memorial Day Weekend, anglers and boaters are reminded to be safe on the water and always wear a life jacket. The U.S. Coast Guard estimates that over 70% of boating fatalities could have been prevented if the victim were wearing a life jacket. Remember that there must be one life jacket for each occupant on board and all children 12 years and younger are required to wear life jackets when on board or being towed by any vessel.

I hope you found the summer edition of the Cheney District Fisheries Newsletter informative and you are able to get out and get in on some good fishing. This summer, biologists will be out filling fish feeders, stocking fish, and hoop netting for channel catfish. If you see us out and about, feel free to us ask any questions about fishing in the Cheney District.

If you know someone who would like to subscribe to the newsletter, they can do so [HERE](#). If you would like to unsubscribe, please send your info to [Contact Us](#) with “unsubscribe to Cheney District Fisheries newsletter” and we'll get you taken off of the list. If you have any questions or comments feel free to send them in.

Jeff Koch
District Fisheries Biologist
Kansas Department of Wildlife & Parks
21514 South Yoder Road
Pretty Prairie, KS 67570
620-459-6922

All articles are copyright of Kansas Department of Wildlife & Parks and cannot be copied or distributed without permission from KDWP.