

Ellsworth District Fisheries Newsletter

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District Newsletter Aims to Keep Anglers More Informed

Hopefully a number of you are already familiar with the Ellsworth District Newsletter, having read the Fall 2010 issue as well as the Spring 2011 issue. The plan is to start out with two newsletters per year, one in the spring and one in the fall. More may be added if time allows and other important information surfaces at other times of the year.

The Ellsworth district includes five counties in northcentral Kansas: Russell, Lincoln, Ellsworth, Ottawa, and Saline. Included in those counties are two reservoirs: Wilson and Kanopolis; two state fishing lakes: Ottawa (Bennington) and Saline; three community (CFAP) lakes: Lakewood and Indian Rock in Salina and Holyrood City Lake; and 14 FISH properties - one in Russell County, one in Ellsworth County, two in Saline County, two in Ottawa County, and eight in Lincoln County.

As this newsletter is generated we find both Wilson and Kanopolis reservoirs in pretty good shape water-wise despite the hot dry conditions we have experienced so far this summer. The lakes are right at or slightly above conservation level, and the water is extremely clear at Wilson and reasonably clear with a distinct green tint at Kanopolis. The seep stream below Kanopolis where we stock the trout is at minimal flow and has a lot of algae and duckweed choking the surface.

Ottawa State Fishing Lake is full and reasonably clear with a brown tint to the water. Saline State Fishing Lake is very low and in danger of going dry this fall or winter. Lakewood in Salina is receding slowly but still in pretty good shape. Indian Rock in Salina is dry as is Holyrood City Lake. The FISH properties are in good shape as most are filled to capacity with the big early summer rains we had in our counties.

Fish and Wildlife Management Who Pays?



Have you ever wondered just who pays for fish and wildlife management in Kansas, or in any other state for that matter. We hear all kinds of stories or rumors about that, the most notable one that it comes out of our taxes that we pay every year. Many people think that Kansas Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) gets lots of money from the State General Fund – your state income tax dollars. That is not the case!

Here are the facts about who actually pays for management of our fish and wildlife species and another proposal for getting more money for non-game species.

Actually, nationwide, almost 50 percent of the money that is used to manage critters comes from the sale of fishing and hunting licenses, which includes things like deer and turkey permits, furharvesting licenses, etc. Interest on some of that money is also included here.

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Who Pays?

The next largest contribution to state management programs are taxes on hunting and fishing equipment, accounting for another almost 25 percent of the management monies. Sixty years ago, America's hunters and ammunition manufacturers made an unusual plea: "Tax us!" Congress obliged with the Pittman-Robertson program – an 11 percent tax on ammo and firearms, automatically appropriated to state Fish and Wildlife agencies. Revenues from that tax helped bring back our deer, turkey, elk and antelope populations and continue to provide funds for their management.

In the 1950s, anglers jumped on the bandwagon through a similar Dingell-Johnson program – an excise tax on tackle to fund state fisheries programs. In the 1980s anglers supported the Wallop-Breaux expansion, which currently adds another \$250 million a year to the state fisheries management efforts. Kansas receives money from all of these federal tax funds, and we call those Federal Aid Funds.

Unfortunately, these federal funds have some pretty stringent guidelines attached to them. They must be used for management of game fish and wildlife species – those that we allow anglers or hunters to harvest. They cannot be used for state parks, other forms of recreation, or for nongame critter management. Certainly, some nongame critters benefit when we do habitat enhancement for game fish and wildlife but the funds cannot be spent directly for nongame.

Getting back to the current funding base for state fish and wildlife management, the next big contributors are the special programs that each state runs. Income from the state magazines; sales of related materials like T-shirts, caps, mugs, license plates, etc; and other special programs brings in another 18 percent of the total. Generally, each state gets less than 10 percent of their funding from General Fund sources.

So, the next time you purchase a license, buy a KDWPT T-shirt, or even buy a fishing rod or shotgun, you are helping foot the bill for fish and wildlife management in Kansas. It is what most call a "user pay" system – if you use the resource, you should be helping to pay for its management.

FARM POND STOCKING RECOMMENDATIONS

KDWPT recommends stocking a pond with only four species of fish – fathead minnows, channel catfish, largemouth bass, and bluegill. The minnows are to start out a new pond with a good forage base and channel catfish will do well in any pond, muddy or clear. Bass and bluegill are for clear ponds only. The recommended rates are several pounds of minnows, 100 bass, 100 catfish and 500 bluegill per acre. Hybrid sunfish will do well in a pond but they will not provide adequate forage for a good bass population. Crappie, bullheads, and other species are not recommended!

The channel catfish, bluegill and minnows can be stocked at the same time. Largemouth bass need to be stocked later – either in the fall if the others are stocked in the spring or in the following spring if the others are stocked in the summer or fall. You can get by stocking all species at once if they are all fingerlings.

Let me start out by discussing the most common problems with management of the fish population in a pond. Most farm ponds are stocked with channel catfish, largemouth bass, and some type of food fish for the bass. Some pond owners do not want to stock bluegill as that food fish because they have seen ponds full of overstocked and stunted bluegill. The bluegills are not usually the problem, usually over-harvest of the bass is the problem although too many weeds in a pond can also give the bluegill too many places to hide and avoid predation from the bass.

Largemouth bass are very easy to catch and are perhaps more glamorous than bluegill. They can be caught on most any artificial lure or live bait. The problem is, a 1-acre farm pond will only support about 35 to 50 pounds of bass and often several hundred pounds of bluegill. Several anglers on a good day can harvest half the bass in that pond. If too many predators are removed, then there is nothing to control the bluegill and they become over-populated. Here is what most anglers not understand – **FOR EVERY POUND OF BASS REMOVED FROM A POND, AN ANGLER SHOULD TAKE 10 POUNDS OF BLUEGILL.** How many of you do that?

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FARM POND STOCKING

Another mistake made with farm ponds is the assumption that channel catfish will reproduce and maintain a constant population. If the pond is clear and stocked with bass or crappie or some other predator, most if not all the baby catfish that are spawned in the pond will get eaten before they are one year old. Yes, catfish will spawn in some ponds if they have some type of hole or dark cavity to spawn in. But, baby catfish tend to swim around in a school when they leave the nest and cruise the shallow shoreline. They are easy picking for bass and other predators.

Therefore, in order to keep a constant population of catfish in a pond, pond owners must restock periodically. And, stocking of fingerlings will not work because they will end up getting eaten too. Catfish for restocking need to be 6 to 10 inches long to prevent immediate predation. The ideal situation would be for pond owners to keep track of the catfish removed from a pond each year and restock in the spring or fall when the population falls below 50 percent of the number originally stocked.

Sometimes, in muddier ponds that don't have predators, catfish will reproduce and overpopulate the pond. I have seen some ponds that all you can catch is 6- to 10-inch catfish. Of course, bullheads are not recommended for ponds for just that reason. If there is not enough predation, bullheads will take over. And the old tale that bullheads and other fish get transferred from pond to pond by ducks and herons is just that – a tale!

Pond management often starts with control of access to the pond and an understanding between the owner and those who fish. If everyone knows the rules and understands that the balance in the pond is critical, then the longer the good fishing will last. If everyone will keep track of their harvest each year and report that to the pond owner, then he can make those critical management decisions on a yearly basis.

A farm pond can provide many years of quality fishing pleasure if some attention is paid to its management. Yes, a pond can produce nice bass, big bluegill and good catfish if the correct management occurs. The keys are to give the bass plenty of harvest protection (catch and release), keep every bluegill that you catch (remember the 10 pound rule), control the amount of aquatic vegetation, restock the catfish every couple of years or so, and don't stock crappie or bullheads.

Fall-Winter Days on the Lake Hypothermia!



Beware; there is a killer out there that is silent and quite deadly. Cold water can be dangerous if you are not well prepared for the situation. Knowing what hypothermia is and what to do about it could save your life or that of your hunting or fishing buddy.

As the weather changes from the hot days of summer to the shorter and cooler days of fall, the water in our area lakes and ponds will start to cool down. With that cool down, the fishing should get better and better as the fish fill up on groceries for the long winter ahead. Also, as we get into the fall hunting seasons, there will likely be some waterfowlers hunting on or around the water. As winter comes and hard water (ice) forms, there will be those who drill small holes and try to stay warm while coaxing a few fish up through those holes.

One thing that all lake users need to bear in mind during this time of the year is the situation called hypothermia. Cold water can lower your body temperature very rapidly and the result of that is generally drowning. We need to be very careful when on the water or out on the ice that we don't end up **IN** the water at this time of the year.

Hypothermia occurs when the body loses heat faster than it produces it. It can occur anytime an individual is exposed to cold, wet, or windy weather. However, it poses the greatest danger when boaters are immersed in water during an emergency. Cold water robs the body of heat 25 times faster than cold air.

Symptoms of hypothermia are (listed in order of severity); shivering, bluish lips or fingernails, loss of feeling in extremities, cold bluish skin, decreased mental skills, slurred speech and blurred vision, rigidity in extremities, unconsciousness, coma and death.

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Hypothermia

Fall and winter hunters and anglers should wear a life jacket anytime you are in a boat or on the ice. I know some fall days are warm and comfortable but when that water gets below 60 degrees it does not take long in the water to get into real trouble. Ice fishermen often mumble and grumble about wearing a life jacket, but they make some float coats today that not only will keep you afloat, but they will keep you warm, as well. They look just like a jacket or winter coat so you don't have to worry about looking dumb wearing a regular life jacket. But still, I would rather look dumb than be dead!

Here are some other tips to avoid hypothermia. If you fall out of a boat, try to re-board your vessel even if it is swamped or capsized. Get as much of your body out of the water as you can. Don't remove coats or clothing unless absolutely necessary, they will trap heat and help you float. Try not to thrash around or move any more than necessary – excess motion consumes energy and increases loss of body heat.

Always wear your PFD – personal floatation device. It allows you to float without much movement, it insulates your body, and it allows you to pull your knees to your chest in a heat-escape-lessening posture. If there are other people in the water with you, huddle together with your arms about their shoulders

Treating hypothermia has some points that many are unaware of. Obviously, get the victim out of the wind, rain, or water. Treat the hypothermia victim gently and do not allow him to walk unless absolutely necessary. Avoid warming the victim too rapidly. Gently replace wet clothing with dry. Focus on preventing further heat loss by wrapping the victim in a sleeping bag or blankets. Any material, even trash bags wrapped around a person will retain heat. Try to keep the victim awake and it is alright to give them warm liquid as long as it is not alcohol or caffeine. In mild cases, a warm bath may be in order but in all other situations, seek medical attention as soon as possible.

Have fun out there but always be safe and be prepared for the worst!



Looking Ahead to Fall Fishing on Wilson and Kanopolis Lakes

So far the 2011 fishing year at Wilson and Kanopolis has been a pretty good one for many anglers. Sure, there are some who mumble and grumble about "Where are all the big walleye?" "Why can't we catch any white perch?" and "Where have all the white bass gone?" The biggest question this year just might be "Have the fish boiled in the lake yet?" Most reports that I have gotten have been favorable; the fish cleaning stations have been busy, the tournaments have had excellent results, and a lot of fish have gone into the frying pan. So, what is there to look forward to for the remainder of the year?

Often fall fishing is the best fishing of the year. As the water starts cooling down, the fish go on a feeding spree, getting ready for the winter ahead. Most fish species become very active in the fall and most move up shallow to feed. Because of all the other activities going on in the fall, fishing pressure drops off considerably and that generally means that the fish are not as spooky.

Another thing that makes fishing often good in the fall is the presence of lots of small gizzard shad upon which most fish feed. If you fish with shad or some type of bait that imitates a shad in the fall, you stand a good chance of catching a fish. So, get out your white jigs, roadrunners, shad imitation crank baits, and slab spoons and get ready!

Many anglers like to fish for walleye, white bass, and crappie in the fall. Wilson has a very good population of walleye that went deep for the summer. Soon after the water starts cooling down, they will move up onto the points and the underwater road beds. Slab spoons will be the ticket then. Remember, Wilson has one of the best, if not the best, walleye population in the state of Kansas right now. Kanopolis has one of the best saugeye populations in the state. There were a lot of short fish over there in the spring but many of those fish are now legal size. Saugeye tend to move shallower than walleye so look for them up on the flats or along the dam.

White bass numbers are down in Wilson but the ones that are caught will be nice in size. Kanopolis has one of the best white bass populations in the state but anglers had some trouble finding whites during the summer.

Fall Fishing on Wilson and Kanopolis Lakes

The fish are there and hopefully this fall they will break loose and bite well. If you fish for white bass, just use the same techniques for white perch and you might just fill the boat. Both these fish species will hit smaller slab spoons as well as plain jigs sometimes fished two at a time. Find underwater humps or the edges of the creek or river channels and the 'white' something's should be there. If the gulls come in, follow the birds and they will tell you where the fish are.

Crappie are another fish not too numerous in Wilson right now but as with the white bass, if you catch some they will likely be nice! Kanopolis crappie numbers are not real high either but there are certainly more crappie here than in Wilson. Kanopolis has a variety of sizes and this fall might just be when they decide to bite well. Crappie will move into the deeper brushpiles as the water gets cold and small slab spoons or just plain old jigs will work. If you find the crappie, chances are you'll catch good numbers of good ones – it's the finding that seems to be tough in the fall.

Often while fishing for these three main species of 'eating' fish, you might hook into an occasional striper at Wilson or wiper at Kanopolis, maybe a big ole channel catfish, or even a pesky drum. These are three species of fish that often keep a fall fishing day going when some of the other fishing might be slow. All four of these will stretch your line good if you hook into a big one – might even be that BIG ONE THAT GOT AWAY!

If you want some just plain ole fun catch and release fishing, then tie on a crawdad crank bait and throw it at the rocks in the fall at Wilson. The smallmouth bass are not real big but they have big hearts! Fall fishing for these fighters and jumpers can really make for a fun fishing trip when you don't feel like cleaning fish. Indian summer October days on the lake fishing for smallmouth are just about the closest thing to 'heaven on earth' that there is!

Let's talk about one fall fishing technique that seems to work well this time of the year when the water temperatures are cooling down through the 50 degree range. That technique is crankbaiting rocks. We fisheries biologists have found lots of species of fish like rocky type habitat at this time of year.

And, on reservoirs, where does one usually find rocks and lots of them? Well, here at Wilson you can find rocks just about anywhere in the lake but on lots of reservoirs the rocks are mainly along the dam and any causeway where a road or a railroad crosses the lake. Milford and Glen Elder both have several of these causeway areas.

These rocky riprap areas tend to hold fish year-round but are particularly good fish producers in the fall. Some of you may ask, "What are crankbaits?" Crankbaits are the short diving plugs with plastic or metal bills or lips that look a lot like baitfish. Some crankbaits like Rattle Traps are lipless but they still sink fast and vibrate when pulled steadily through the water. Crankbaits wiggle-wobble through the water when pulled with a steady retrieve. They dive down to even 20 feet deep, depending on the size of the bill and how fast you retrieve them. They come in a variety of colors and most look like little fish while others are made to imitate crawdads. Shad and crawdad colors are hard to beat in the fall.

Most people who fish rock rip-rap areas cast and retrieve the crankbaits back to the boat at a 90 degree angle to the bank. Or, if fishing from the bank, they cast straight out and in. The key to better fishing success along the rocks is to cast parallel to the shoreline, dragging the crankbait slowly across the rocks all the way in. I know what you are thinking – yea right, we'll get hung up for sure! If you retrieve slowly once you feel the bait ticking the rocks, you will be amazed at how a two treble hook crankbait can bounce off the rocks and not get snagged up. If you do get hung, simply maneuver the boat directly over the snag. If you are bank bound, try getting on the far side of the snag and shaking the bait loose.

Fish that live around the rocks often live in the holes and crevices between the rocks. They then dart out after something that passes their attack point on the same plane. If the lure passes the fish from above or behind, he may not see it soon enough to react. So, try casting parallel to the rocks, cranking the bait just fast enough that you can feel it occasionally touching the rocks.

Sometimes the fish will hit the lure hard and practically pull the pole out of your hand. Other times the lure almost feels snagged up, then when you jerk a bit, it takes off. You'll get hung up in the rocks once in a while, but if you move to the crankbait and jiggle it hard, usually it will come right out. Most crankbaits are designed to float when at rest on the water so they will float up when they come loose. *(Continue Page 6)*

Fall Fishing on Wilson and Kanopolis Lakes

Crankbaiting rocks will catch a variety of fish. Both species of black bass like rocks as do crappie, white bass, drum, and even channel catfish. Sometimes you have no idea what you have on the end of your line until you get the fish into the boat or up to the shore. There have even been some big flatheads caught on crankbaits fishing this way. Shad colored crankbaits are often preferred in the fall but my favorite all-year round crankbait is the Bomber Model-A crawdad.

The other popular fall fishing technique is slab spooning. Slab spoons are just big hunks of lead shaped like a small baitfish with a treble hook attached to the end. They cast a country mile but most are vertically jigged up and down over the side of a boat. They come in a variety of sizes so you can use whatever size matches the baitfish or you can tailor size to the fish you want to catch. Most of the spoons I see in the fall are either white or chartreuse in color.

Again, slab spoons are usually fished straight up and down over the side of a boat along the river channel or some type of underwater structure. They are made to imitate a dying baitfish – you pull it if fairly quickly off the bottom, then let it flutter back down. Any fish that will take a gizzard shad will hit a slab spoon – stripers, wiper, white bass, crappie, drum, and even that occasional channel catfish. If you can find the fish, a slab spoon can put a lot of them in a boat in a hurry.

Yes, fall fishing can be extremely productive and the good fishing can last well into the winter as well. Schooling white bass are common and wipers and stripers really like the cool water of November and early December. Walleye, black bass, and catfish are all filling up for the winter. So, keep that fishing pole out, try to find some rocks or rip-rap, and throw crankbaits. If that doesn't work, move to the river and creek channels, tie on a slab spoon, and start jigging. Don't overlook underwater brushpiles either. I'll GUARANTEE there will be fish down there somewhere.

Come and fish the clearest and prettiest lake in the state of Kansas this fall! Now Kanopolis is not known for its clear water but it generally looks pretty good during the fall season. You will find a great variety of fish eager to bite, less crowded fishing conditions, and weather that just makes it a joy to be in the great outdoors and out on the lake

SEASONAL FISHING PATTERNS AT WILSON RESERVOIR

Most of the anglers who fish at Wilson are the fair weather anglers who fish during the warmer parts of the year. However, there are more and more anglers who are retiring or finding more time to fish. Some of the more dedicated anglers like to fish during the colder months because the fish tend to bunch up more tightly and become easier to predict and to catch. Ice fishing is becoming more and more popular because when the new ice comes on the fishing can be pretty darn good.

I get questions all the time about where the better fishing is and what to use during certain times of the year. Years ago I made up a table that I use for my fishing classes that basically goes through the entire year and explains what should be biting at that time, what kinds of baits to use, and where in the lake to go. It has been a popular handout and I think I will expand on that information within this article and gear it specifically for Wilson Reservoir. Perhaps you anglers can use this type of information to try your luck during various times of the year.

January: Generally the water temperatures in January are from 32 to 38 degrees. For those of you who do not know, water has some interesting properties. Everyone knows that 32 degrees is the freezing point for water. Well, if the heaviest water was 32 degrees, water would freeze all the way to the bottom. Really 38 degree water is the heaviest. So, when ice forms on our lakes and ponds the temperature on or near the bottom will always be 38 degrees or maybe even higher in deeper water where heat from the ground underneath can cause the water to be even warmer. So, when ice forms on top, the cold-blooded fish will be most comfortable at or near the bottom where the water is warmer.

During January, most of the fishing is ice fishing if it is cold enough for ice to form thick enough for anglers to get out on it. If it stays warm, anglers with boats will find fish deep around any brush or along any creek or river channel, which are the highways for fish under the lake. Any underwater spring will also be a place that fish will concentrate in winter. If there is no January ice, the steep rocky bluff areas are popular bank fishing locations.

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When ice conditions are good, the upper end seems to be where everyone heads first. Horseshoe Bend, the river channel bluffs below Horseshoe Bend, and the upper end around Lou's Point are the more popular areas. If ice conditions are good other areas like midway back in Hell Creek, the brushpiles around Minooka, and in front of the steep rocky bluffs in Hell Creek, at Minooka, and at Elm Creek or Duval are popular areas. Smaller slab spoons, jigs, ice jigs, and Kastmaster spoons are all successful ice fishing lures. Some tip them with minnows, PowerBait, strips of fish flesh or skin, or fish eyeballs to make them more appealing.

February: Conditions this month are very similar to January – ice fishing if it is cold and fishing the steep rocky bluffs if it is not. Generally the longer the ice is on; the harder it is to find the fish. Some anglers find that before sunup and after sundown is the best times when ice fishing gets tough. One other February situation I see occasionally is that if the ice goes off, there is generally a winterkill of shad. Late in the month when they float up, I have seen anglers back in Hell Creek and in other creek areas on the lake have pretty good luck on big channel cats. These catfish are eating the dead shad and are usually taken on shad sides or shad gizzards or cut carp. Once in a while I will hear of those guys catching stripers too – apparently the stripers are hungry and will take dead shad off the bottom. This action seems to be best during the warmer parts of the day.

March: Early March is generally a dead period for fishing. The fish are starting to stage for spawning - the walleye on the dam and the rocky points and the white bass and stripers in the upper end getting ready to run up river. If early March is warm, anglers often will have some luck trolling small shad crankbaits in the upper end and the lower river for whites and stripers. For some reason, trolling seems to be the only way to get them to go.

Later in March the walleye show up on the dam to spawn, and a lot of the fishing activity is concentrated there. Walleye spawn when the water temp gets around 45 to 50 degrees. Anglers throwing floating Rapalas and yellow or darker colored jigs catch a few spawning fish casting parallel to the dam rip-rap. Lots of hours are spent for the few walleye taken. Late evening and nighttime are usually the best, but I've also heard of some fish caught early mornings. Cloudy, rainy days will often be good all day long.

Other species of fish are tough now. A few catfish might be caught from the river and a few crappies might show up near brushpiles or the steep rock bluffs on warm sunny days. Sometimes anglers catch a few smallmouth bass along the dam fishing for walleye but they are just now waking up. In March the upper end warms the fastest and the dam area the slowest. Farm pond bass and crappie fishing is often really getting good in March.

April: All heck breaks loose in April from a fishing standpoint. The walleye are still on the rocks spawning till about the 10th or so. Then they DISAPPEAR for about a month or two. The white perch move into the dam and rocky areas to spawn just about time the walleye get done. The white bass start up the river if there is adequate flow and really get going by mid-month. The concentration of anglers shifts from the face of the dam to the river above the lake about this time of the year.

The stripers seem to realize that the river is not going to work for their spawning urges, so they head back down the lake and start feeding on anything they can find. They start to stack up on the windy points and in areas along the dam. The smallmouth and largemouth bass really get up on the structure in April – any rocks, logs, or shoreline brush that draws heat will invite bass in. If there is water in the feeder creeks the largemouth will be there – if not try the beaver feed piles! The larger smallies are thinking about spawning later in the month and often stack up on the steep rock bluff areas. Anglers catch them on suspending jerk baits this time of the year and are likely to harvest their biggest fish of the year.

Crappie start to move shallow for their spawning, and on sunny days you will find them around any shallow brush or rocks with jigs and minnows later in the month. During this fishing time remember to keep your baits small as the water is still cold and the fish are looking for a smaller bite. Also, the shad are just now spawning and any forage fish that is available in the next couple of months will be small. Always try to match your bait with the size of the forage during this spring fishing period.

May: Is probably the very best fishing month of the year for most anglers. The water is warming through the 50s and 60s, many species still have the spawning urge, and the warmer water is shallow so the fish will be too. The white bass spawn in the river generally extends into early May, and if conditions are not good in the river they will head toward the dam to spawn in early May.

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The crappies are still in the spawning mood as are the black basses. The stripers have figured out that they cannot get their spawning urges taken care of so they decide it is time to fatten up. May is schooling time for stripers. They stay on the windblown points feeding on shad or baby white perch or anything they can find. It is generally during May when stripers will hit top-water lures and you'd better hold on if they do. White bass and white perch often move up onto the points with the stripers and will take small white jigs or small crankbaits as long as they match the size of the forage. That seems to be real critical now.

Catfishing is also picking up on the main lake now, too. Late in the month, the smallmouth will really go on a feeding spree and small crawdad crankbaits thrown around any rocky shoreline will provide some fast action. Smallmouth may also start to hit top-water baits now.

June: This month is another good fishing month. Generally the big June attraction is walleye on the flats. This is the time to get out the jig-n-nightcrawler and drift fish for these tasty critters. This is the time of year is often the very best time to catch lots of walleye. Some of the more popular flats are the old Lucas swim beach area, the flat points west of Hell Creek State Park, alfalfa flats (between Minooka and Elm Creek), the roadbeds from Duval to Elm Creek and the one coming down from the A-frame on the north side, and the sandpits area – north and west of Minooka. Some shore-bound anglers without boats can often wade out to fish in some of the shallower flats and points as the walleye often get as shallow as 2 or 3 feet.

Catfishing picks up rapidly in June, and this is their spawning time. This is about the only time of year the catfish are on the rocks and will occasionally take a crankbait fished slowly around those rocks. As the water warms up you need to switch from stinky shad baits to other baits like worms, crawdads, frogs, shrimp, sponge baits and prepared baits. Now is also a good time to start limb lining or trot lining for catfish.

June stripers, white bass, and white perch are often still on the points and chasing bait fish. Small white twister tail jigs are a good bet and action will slow as the water temp heats up later in the month. Smallmouth and largemouth bass will still be active on crankbaits and top water but later in June is will be time to switch to plastic worms and crawdads and fish deeper. Crappie will have disappeared, retreating to the deeper brushpiles and scattering all over.

July: This month brings on the dog days of summer and the fishing tends to slow way down. Many lake goers are more interested in staying cool and playing in the water than fishing. Early morning outings and late evening fishing are more popular and more effective. Fishing deeper will also be more effective. Early in the month the walleye may still be on the flats but by now they have been pounded pretty hard. They too will gradually move deep and disperse as the water heats up!

By July, the stripers have moved to their deep-water haunts – the deep roadbeds and the river channel between Lucas Point and the dam. Downrigger trolling with large crank baits or live bait is a popular method now as is still fishing live bait straight down in 30 to 50 feet of water. These striper anglers also catch a few big catfish and a few walleye with these techniques too.

If you can find them schooled, the white bass should be chasing shad schools all over the main lake and you have to be lucky to find them and stay with them. The white perch tend to go deep in the summer too, around the deeper brushpiles and along the river channel breaks around Minooka and on the north side around Rocktown. Night fishing under lights is often good in July too – some of the favorite spots are right under the Hell Creek Bridge, over around Rocktown, and the hump out in front of the outlet tower near the dam. Small jigs and minnows seem to work the best under lights.

Black bass are in their summer mode – lazy during the day and active early mornings, late evenings. Top water will work good at these times and plastics will take some fish during the heat of the day. Often catfish are the saving grace during these summer months because they like warmer water.

August: A mirror image of July – hot and tough fishing – lots of playing. This is the month when I get a lot of, "Where are the fish – we can't seem to find much of anything." I tell them that most fish take their vacations in the late summer months too!!!

Look for fish in the same locations and under the same patterns as in July. One trend I have noticed over the years here at Wilson is that the stripers will often show up and stack up in the front of Deer Run Cove in August. I have come to the conclusion that there is some type of thermal refuge in that area in the summer – an underwater spring or something that cools the water a bit here. I cannot prove that but it happens too often to be coincidental!!!

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September: September fishing all depends on the weather, how fast the water cools down. Much like July and August, the fish early in the month will be few and far between. The fishing pressure drops off drastically in the fall as the kids are back in school, the vacations are over, hunting seasons kick in and draw a few anglers away from the lakes, and some people simply have had their fill of fishing for another year. From now on, only the diehard anglers will venture to the lake and they like that just fine – not much competition, no more jet skis or water skiers, and a lot of the lake to your self.

As the water starts to cool down in September the fish become more active again. Stripers start to emerge from the deep and start feeding up on the points. The white bass continue to school on shad but the schools tighten up and they become more predictable. The gulls move in and help anglers find the schooling activity. Popular areas at this time of year are the humps and bumps between Lucas Point and Minooka.

Catfishing remains strong and the black bass begin to get more active during the day. The white perch emerge from hiding and start feeding actively on shad – often stacking up just off the steep rocky bluffs in Hell Creek. Crappie starts to show up around the marina docks. All species of fish realize that the water temperature is more comfortable now and that they need to fill up on groceries for the long winter ahead. Forage is at its highest density going into the fall season.

October: To the diehard angler, this month and the next one are probably their best fishing months of the year. Yes, they enjoyed May because everything breaks loose then but for numbers of fish and the most relaxing time on the water, this period is their favorite.

All species of fish are active in October!!! We do our fall test netting now because all species are active, are moving around, and are more predictable. Points are the dinner tables for fish in the fall. Shad and other forage fish like to get up on the points where the water warms during the day, and then slide back to deep water when things cool down. Stripers, white bass, white perch, walleye, catfish, and smallmouth bass all like to show up at the 'Point Cafe' in October. Slab spoons become the bait of choice in this fall period but soft bodied jigs will also work. If the fish are not on the points, then they will be in deep water close by.

Some anglers will fish deeper and deeper as the water gets cold. The river channel areas in front of the dam to Lucas Point are popular walleye spots.

The old Lucas-Wilson roadbed is an October hotspot – it goes shallow to deep so it is just a matter of finding the fish or the bait fish. If the water cools down normally, by months end the water temp should be in the 40's. When it gets that cold, there seems to be a migration of stripers, white bass, walleye, and white perch to the upper end – around Duval and Elm Creek. Often some of the white perch will stop off at the deep brushpiles at Minooka and I have seen boat anglers camped over them really having a ball.

November: Fishing activity tapers off fast now. The deeper brushpiles are the place to go for crappie, white perch, and even white bass. Some anglers move back down lake and fish the deep river channel in front of the dam for early winter walleye. The fish are getting ready for the winter and they bunch pretty tightly. Shoreline anglers can find a variety of fish this month off the steep rocky bluffs in Hell Creek, Minooka, and Elm Creek. You need to fish near brushpiles or where the creek or river channels bend right in next to the bluffs. You need to be able to cast to the deepest water, let your jig or spoon fall to the bottom and then bounce it slowly back up the edge or over the brush.

December: Very few really dedicated anglers are left. Those with boats are fishing the deep brushpiles or the edges of the deep river channel with slab spoons or soft bodied jigs. This is when you might hear about someone who found the big crappie stacked up somewhere - usually they really get into them one day and the next day they are gone. Reports are few and far between – these really dedicated anglers in December are amazingly successful, real tight lipped, and the Fisheries Biologist has just about got to get down on his knees and beg for a truthful fishing report!!!!

By the end of the month we may see ice forming in some years and that first ice fishing is often the best. Unfortunately, there are some anglers who press their luck and venture out onto 1 or 2 inches of ice so they can be the first to catch fish. Guys, there is no fish nor any amount of fish that is worth a drowning or a COLD dip in the lake in winter!!!! Be careful out there!

Have fun at Wilson Lake this year and good fishing!!! With everything taken into account, it looks like it will be a good fishing year – at least the fish will be there. As usual, a lot depends upon the weather, the amount or lack of rainfall, and the water temperatures at those critical times of the year.

State Record Striper Age and Growth Information

Back in April of 2010, Paul Bahr from Ellsworth caught the current state record striper, which weighed 44 pounds. Actually the fish weighed nearly 45 pounds but lost some weight as he spent hours trying to find a certified scale to weigh it.

I did a little investigation on stripers before I settled on my final aging. First off, I looked at some age and growth information that I had from stripers taken back in the fall of 1998 from the lake. That info is as follows:

Age	Length inches	Avg. weight lbs	Growing Seasons
1	5.2		1 – 1998
2	12.3	.80	2 – 1997 and 1998
3	19.5	3.13	3 – 1996 thru 1998
4	25.0	7.59	4 – 1995 thru 1998

The 4-year-old fish were the oldest we had in the sample that year.

I also went back in my records to see when brood fish from the Milford Hatchery were stocked in the lake. We now raise our own brood fish at the hatchery so that we can provide our own fish for stocking and not have to rely on other states for our stripers. The hatchery sent back that they have had the following year classes of striper brood stock - 1993, 1995, 1997, 2002. Those 68 stripers that averaged 25 pounds that were stocked in October 2010 were 2002 year class fish - 8 years old in the spring of 2010 and actually 9 growing seasons. The following information is the stocking information on brooders into Wilson from Milford:

09/04/2002	858	21.5 per pound juveniles	2002 year class
10/02/2001	198	18 pounds each	1995 and 1997 year class
10/12/2000	67	15 pounds each	1995 year class – probably females
10/24/2000	99	10 pounds each	1995 year class – probably male
05/26/1999	186	7.15 pounds each	1995 year class – probably male
06/01/1999	25	4 pounds each	1995 year class – probably females
04/30/1998	600	Adults – no size available	1993 or 1995 year class?
05/27/1997	263	Adults – no size available	1993 year class?

The Milford Hatchery does not have very good records on their stripers before 1999 unfortunately as to what age the fish were that were surpluses.

My thoughts were that the Milford stripers might be growing faster than the lake stripers that are stocked as fingerlings each year. Also since the Milford stripers are in cool water year-round they do not lay down the same annuli that lake stripers do. The Milford fish are living in raceways and getting fed on a regular schedule - the stripers in the lake have to work on their own to get their food.

This is what I got from the scales on your striper after spending several hours trying to identify every possible annulus. Since you caught the fish in the spring, the last annulus should be on the outer edge of the scale. I am still not sure if I found all of the annuli because this fish would be a 12-year-old fish - 1998 year class with 12 growing seasons. If it takes Milford nine years to get a 25-pound fish, you would think it would take the lake longer than 12 years to grow a 44-pound plus fish. But, too, if you look at the size of your fish at age 3 and 4 you can see it was actually smaller than the fish we aged back in 1998. Those 1998 fish were growing from 1995 through 1998 - the boom years after the floods of 1993 and 1995. Your fish would have started in 1998 and grown through the drought years in the early to mid 2000s when the lake was receding to its all time low level of 7 feet low in 2007. But, some of the fastest growth was in 2005 and 2006 - perhaps as the water levels were receding, the forage fish were more concentrated and the stripers had easier pickings.

Age	Inches	Growth per year	Growing Season
1	4.4	4.4	1998
2	11.19	7.5	1999
3	15.8	4.2	2000
4	19.4	3.6	2001
5	23.3	3.9	2002
6	25.7	2.4	2003
7	28.1	2.4	2004
8	33.0	4.9	2005
9	36.1	3.1	2006
10	37.8	1.7	2007
11	40.0	2.2	2008
12	41.0	1.0	2009

Also went back and looked at striper stockings of fingerlings in the years around 1998 for Wilson. Here are those fingerling stocking numbers:

1999	45000
1998	9135
1997	No fingerlings stocked
1996	52106
1995	80245

This is my best judgment looking at the scales. I had several of our research guys from Emporia look at the scales, and they pretty much agreed with me – thinking there might have been 13 instead of 12 annuli. I certainly could be off a year or two but it looks like it can't be one year back as none were stocked in 1997. Although Milford had a brood stock year class that year, if it would be one of those I would think the annuli reading would be quite a bit different than the ones we found in the early age of your fish. Stripers grow fast and get big if they have plenty to eat, so we could certainly have a 12- to 15-year-old fish that weighs 40-plus pounds if the hatchery can get them to 25 pounds in 9 growing seasons.



Gizzard Shad – Another Important Food for Fish

I want to provide a little information about a species of fish that is probably the most important food source for fish in Kansas - the gizzard shad.

Shad are also found in many waters of the state, especially our streams, rivers, and reservoirs. From what I can find, they are apparently native to the eastern part of the state where they occurred in the large river systems of the Missouri River drainage. They were stocked into western Kansas after the reservoirs were built and have been stocked in some of the smaller state and community lakes too.

This little fish is the most numerous fish species in the state, bar none. They are on the bottom of the food chain and can reproduce at a fantastic rate. This abundant reproduction can be both good and bad when it comes to providing food for other fish. In some reservoirs, gizzard shad can reach numbers of 5,000 to 10,000 per acre and can add more than 1,000 pounds per acre to the weight of fish that live there. That is a lot of food for the game fish and often shad can powerfully influence angling success.

Gizzard shad are pelagic in habit, meaning that they prefer relatively large bodies of calm water. They scatter their eggs over rocks, vegetation, or brush and do not prepare a nest site. They do not care for the eggs or the young. They generally spawn in late April through June when the water temperature is above 58 degrees. Most of the time shad spawn just about the time that white bass or crappie spawn.

Shad feed on plankton, those little microscopic plants and animals in the water. They are filter feeders, meaning that they strain their food through their gill rakers. Therefore, they do not compete directly with most fish for food. They are a schooling fish and it is common to see large schools of shad cruising the shoreline or near the surface in the middle of the reservoir. Since they are so abundant and can be found all over the lake, they are a very important source of food for shoreline bass, structure oriented walleye, open water stripers and white bass, and all other fish species in between.

Shad can also be a problem. At times they compete with baby game fish for plankton food. They also have proven to compete with bluegill for food. At times, they grow so fast that they become too large to feed fish like crappie and small game fish for more than a few short weeks.

So, they are not a perfect fish food by any means. Another problem with shad is that they are not a hardy fish. They die quickly during quick changes in water temperature or when there is a reduction in oxygen in the water. They do not handle well as bait unless anglers have large circular tanks and reliable aerators and then they will die if you look at them wrong!

It is common to see large numbers of dead shad around the shoreline in the spring after ice out on many lakes. Severe winters will thin shad populations down greatly and often mild winters will not affect them at all. In many Kansas reservoirs, shad numbers increased greatly during and after the floods of 1993. That was both a blessing and a curse. Because of the high numbers, our game fish grew extremely well and growth rates were some of the best ever. But, because the fish had abundant food, they were often harder to catch. Sometimes, when shad populations are high, anglers find game fish fat and harder to catch.

Many a lure is designed to imitate the gizzard shad. Spinners, spoons, crank baits, and a multitude of jigs are made to look like shad and work well to catch most of our game fish. Even real shad make good bait, both alive and dead, and stinky old shad sides and gizzards will even attract catfish. Just about any fish worth catching on a hook will eat the lowly shad.

The ideal shad spawning situation is when they spawn for a month or more in the late spring and we have a variety of sizes of shad throughout the summer. Biologists like to see shad smaller than 4 inches in the fall so that all sizes of fish have plenty of food going into the winter. Gizzard shad are probably the most important forage in Kansas for our game fish and they are perhaps one of the hardest species to manage.



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