Cheney District Fisheries

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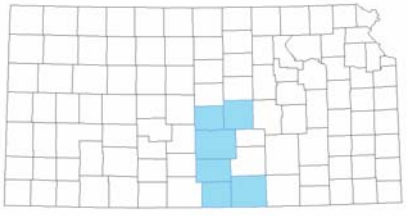
Cheney District Update

Hot weather and water conditions have slowed angling, but cooler weather and fall fishing awaits.

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

I'm sure by now, most of you have heard about the "toxic" algae problem Cheney Reservoir experienced this summer. While blue-green algae does present a serious risk to recreational boaters and swimmers that come in contact with the water, anglers generally don't need to worry about getting sick, as long as they are careful to avoid prolonged contact with the water and properly clean their catch. Although fishing pressure has been almost non-existent at Cheney Lake since the first algae warning was issued in late July (all warnings and advisories have been lifted), some reports of good fishing have come in lately. Fishing for nice wipers has been really good this year. Concentrate your efforts on drop-offs and humps like Walleye Island (which is now out of the water for easy reference; almost straight out from Wenzel Cove) and the points on the east shore. Also try depth contours between Heimerman point and the dam. Young gizzard shad are the main forage base in the lake right now, so match baits to the size of the shad, which are currently 3-4" in length. Walleyes will also be feeding on those shad. Some reports of keeper walleyes have been coming in lately. Research from Kansas indicates that walleyes put on the majority of their growth during the fall, so all those 19-20" fish that nglers were catching this spring may be reaching legal size soon. Some really nice channel catfish have been caught this summer. I recently weighed a channel cat for an angler that weighed close to 20 pounds. Drifting shrimp and cutbait has produced good catches this summer. *Continued on page 2…*

Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism



Understanding blue-green algae

Blue-green algae has been a hot topic throughout Kansas this summer. Understanding the algae will hopefully decrease negative consequences of the sometimes-toxic bacteria.

"Algae" is a term that attempts to group photosynthetic organisms (that use light to produce food) together based on similar traits; however, algae are different from plants because of their relatively unorganized cellular structure. I'll spare you the boring biology lesson, but the bottom line is algae are a very diverse group of organisms that contains critters like giant ocean-dwelling kelp to the bright green felt-like "moss" in Kansas ponds and streams. Algae also include the toxin-producing photosynthetic bacteria that have been drawing attention at our lakes and reservoirs this summer. Yes, blue-green algae are actually bacteria that thrive during extremely hot, dry, sunny conditions. Excessive nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorus that entered aquatic systems during last summer's runoff events are a main contributor to the algae problems.

A blue-green algae accumulation zone at Cheney Reservoir. Blue green algae can have the appearance of paint floating on the water and have a strong earthy scent.

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If you are searching for another fishing hole in the district, Kingman State Fishing Lake has an exciting opportunity in summer northern pike fishing. Although pike are a cool-water fish, the summer can be the best time to catch them as they congregate in the north end around the cool-water springs. Rattle traps, large rooster tail spinners, and neutral-buoyancy crankbaits seem to be the best baits this summer. Keep an eye out for yellow tags in the pike and report any catches to 620-459-6922. I've had quite a few reports of tagged pike coming in lately, so the fishing has been pretty good!

If you're looking for some good fall catfishing, head up to McPherson SFL north of Canton. This hidden gem has produced some really nice catfish this summer. Fish near the feeders in the mornings and evenings. Bring along some top water bass lures for a chance at some of the 5+ pound bass that cruise the weed lines during low-light periods.

McPherson SFL has good numbers of channel catfish like this 10+ pounder

Finally, if you're looking for saugeye and wipers, Wellington City Lake has been tremendous this summer. From this spring into the summer, anglers were catching upwards of 50 saugeye per day at Wellington CL! Many of those fish were short of the 18" length limit, but those fish will be putting on length this fall. Also, wiper fishing has finally picked up at the lake. Look for these fish chasing shad on the surface and throw road runners or jigs into the schools and hold on! Due to low water at Wellington CL, the lake is closed to all boating, but a lot of fish are still being caught from shore or by wading on the points and flats.

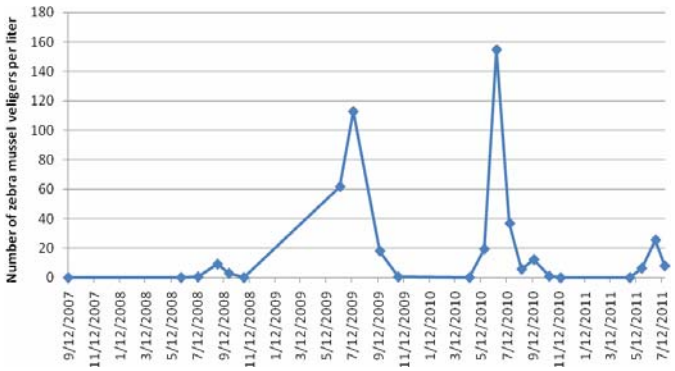
Interesting trends in zebra mussels seen at Cheney Reservoir

Biologists learning more about the nuisance mussel populations throughout the state.

When zebra mussels were discovered in El Dorado Reservoir in 2003, biologists were unsure how the non-native species would fare in Kansas waters. That question was quickly answered with the almost immediate infestation at El Dorado. From that time, it became apparent that zebra mussels would be a force to be reckoned with by Kansas biologists, municipalities, and sportsman alike.

In North American waters, where zebra mussels are non-native, infestations follow a prounounced boom and bust cycle, in which they colonize quickly and eventually run themselves out of space and resources. El Dorado's zebra mussel population followed true to this pattern and crashed in 2008, shortly after the mussel was documented in Cheney Reservoir.

By 2008, zebra mussels had a firm hold in Cheney Reservoir and in 2010, the reservoir had some of the highest zebra mussel densities ever seen in the state. However, the samples from 2011 show drastically reduced numbers of zebra mussel veligers (the free floating larvae of adult mussels), possibly indicating a crash in the population. Future samples from Cheney Reservoir will be needed to confirm this decline, although zebra mussel veliger densities have decreased over six-fold compared to this time last year.

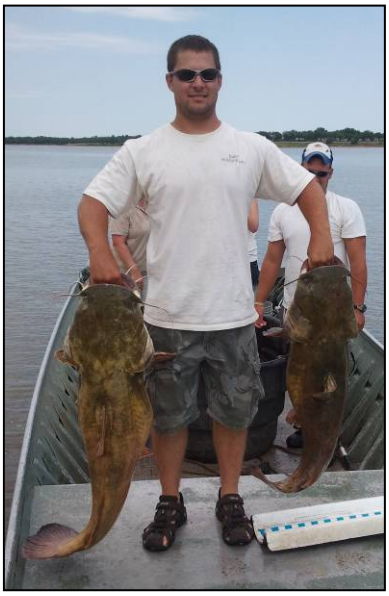


Number of zebra mussel veligers (free swimming larval juveniles) per liter of Cheney Lake water from 2007 until 2011. Veligers are sampled as a surrogate for adult densities because obtaining accurate counts of adult zebra mussels is highly difficult.

Looking for BIG flatheads???

Recent sampling at Wellington City Lake indicates trophy potential for flathead catfish.

During mid-summer, biologists often utilize specialized electrofishing procedures to inventory flathead catfish populations in Kansas lakes and rivers. This July, flathead catfish sampling was conducted at Wellington City Lake and biologists were pleasantly surprised by the number and size of flatheads collected. In just over a half hour of shocking, nearly 200 flathead catfish were captured, measured, and released. Because our scale has a maximum capacity of about 20 pounds, we could not get precise weights many of the flatheads. A few of the bigger fish undoubtedly were pushing the 50 to 60 pound mark.



A couple of nice flatheads captured at Wellington City Lake this summer.

Flathead catfish are generally found near some sort of structure as they wait for something lively to swim by. The highest density of flatheads was seen near the new dam at Wellington, although bigger fish were generally collected near woody structure. Flatheads are top predators that almost exclusively eat live fish, so if you head out in search of big flatheads, use lively sunfish, shad, or minnows. Anglers are advised that limblines and setlines are not legal in Kansas on waters under 1,201 surface acres, so rod and reel is the only way to get at Wellington flatheads. Although Wellington CL is a relatively small lake compared to big reservoirs like Cheney and El Dorado, you won't find a better flathead fishery in southern Kansas. Good luck!

Blue-green algae…continued from page 1…

The toxins are a by-product of blue-green algae that have the potential to make humans and other mammals sick, but contrary to popular belief, blue-green algae generally does not directly kill fish. The bigger threat to fish occurs when high-density algae blooms die and decay, which uses oxygen that fish need to live.

Unfortunately, there is little that can be done when blue-green algae pops up, as there is no chemical treatment efficiently controls a blue-green algae bloom. In fact, when the algae die is when most of the toxins are released. If all the algae were killed at once, a very dangerous situation would develop. The best thing we can do is attempt to prevent blooms by decreasing the amount of nutrients entering our aquatic systems. Planting buffer strips, more efficiently using fertilizer, and reducing agricultural runoff are just a few things that could reduce blue-green algae blooms.

For more information on blue-green algae and a current list of harmful algae advisories and warnings, consult the Kansas Department of Health and Environment website.

Thank you Cheney Lake Association!!

Recent litter clean-up shows group's dedication to the lake.

On August 20th, the Cheney Lake Association organized a litter clean-up on the east shore in the state park as well as the Sailboat Cove area on the west side of the lake. Since the lake was about three feet low at the time, there was plenty of shoreline room for the clean-up. Although the volunteers cleaned up pickup loads full of trash, the Lake Association has plans to conduct another clean-up this fall.

In addition to lake clean-up efforts, the Cheney Lake Association organizes many events such as OK Kid's Day. The Lake Association also secures funding for special projects at the lake such as campgrounds, trails, and courtesy docks. For more information on the Cheney Lake Association, visit their website at http://cheneylake.org/. Thank you for your efforts!

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Voluntary public access program aims to increase incentive to landowners

New grant will increase payments to landowners who lease their waters for public fishing.

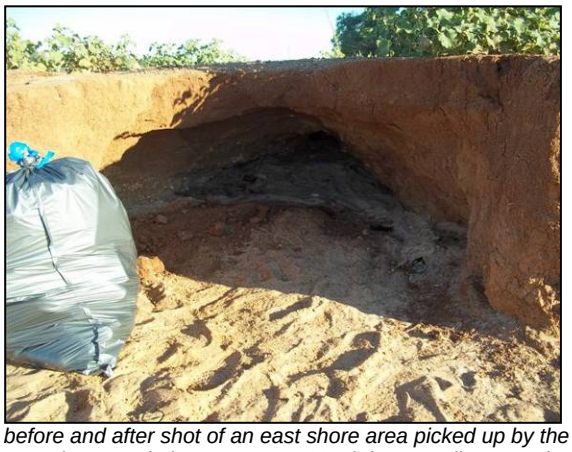
Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism is announcing an exciting upgrade to their Fishing Impoundments and Stream Habitats (F.I.S.H.) program, which leases private waters from landowners in an attempt to provide diverse angling opportunities.

To increase incentive for landowners to lease their land for public fishing, KDWPT is now offering annual leases of up to $1,500 per stream mile for high-quality stream segments, along with additional bonuses for reaches that allow paddlesports access. For impounded waters, leases are available for up to $125 per acre in Rice, Reno, and McPherson counties and $100 per acre in Kingman, Harper, and Sumner counties. Additional bonus rates are also available for leases allowing boating access on impoundments. Arkansas River access is also a priority in the Cheney District. Any landowner allowing access to the Ark River can receive yearly payments of up to $2,000 per year.

In addition to lease payments, additional landowner incentives available for long-term lease enrollments include: habitat management, fish stocking, fence crossers, and parking areas. KDWPT law enforcement officers also regularly patrol F.I.S.H. areas to keep litter, trespassing, and regulation violations to a minimum.

If you are a landowner who is interested in the voluntary public access program or would like more information, click this link or contact Jeff at 620-459-6922 or contact your nearest KDWPT office.

CLA lake clean-up continued from page 3…



A before and after shot of an east shore area picked up by the Cheney Lake Association on August 20. (Photo credit Pat Preisser)

Fall is a very busy time for fisheries biologists. Data gathered from our fall gill and trap netting is used to compose fishing forecasts and fine tune management plans for lakes across Kansas. If you see us out and about netting throughout October and November, feel free to say hello or ask us any questions you may have.

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