

Loyalhanna Lake

Westmoreland County

April 2018 Trap Net Survey

Loyalhanna Lake is a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers impoundment near the town of Saltsburg, PA in Westmoreland County. The 480-acre lake (summer pool) is managed under statewide regulations for all species and contains a variety of naturally reproducing gamefish and panfish species such as Largemouth Bass, Black Crappie, White Crappie, Yellow Perch, Bluegill, and Pumpkinseed. The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) stocks the lake with fingerling Muskellunge, Tiger Muskellunge, and Channel Catfish. The lake is also one of the few waters in western PA with a population of White Catfish. White Catfish are not native to the Ohio River drainage.

Loyalhanna Lake was surveyed in both 2014 and 2016 using trap nets as part of a statewide evaluation of Muskellunge and Tiger Muskellunge. Catch rates of Muskellunge and Tiger Muskellunge were poor during both survey years with a total of six fish captured in 2014 and two fish captured in 2016. The lake was again surveyed in 2018 using trap nets to evaluate the Muskellunge and Tiger Muskellunge fishery and to determine if the water should continue to be stocked as well as remain in the statewide study.

Sixteen trap nets were fished the week of April 23rd and a total of one Tiger Muskellunge was captured. As part of the statewide Musky study, all Muskellunge and Tiger Muskellunge that had been previously captured were tagged with a Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) tag that allowed us to identify re-captures, assess survival, and track the fish's growth rate over time. The lone Tiger Muskellunge re-captured in 2018 was 38 inches long and weighed 14.5 pounds; no Muskellunge were captured. The Tiger Muskellunge was originally captured in 2014 at 35 inches and 10 pounds and was recaptured in 2016 at 37 inches and 11.5 pounds. Unfortunately, as this was the only Muskellunge or Tiger Muskellunge captured in 2018, which indicates survival of these species is well below expectation, we will be discontinuing stocking of these species at Loyalhanna Lake.

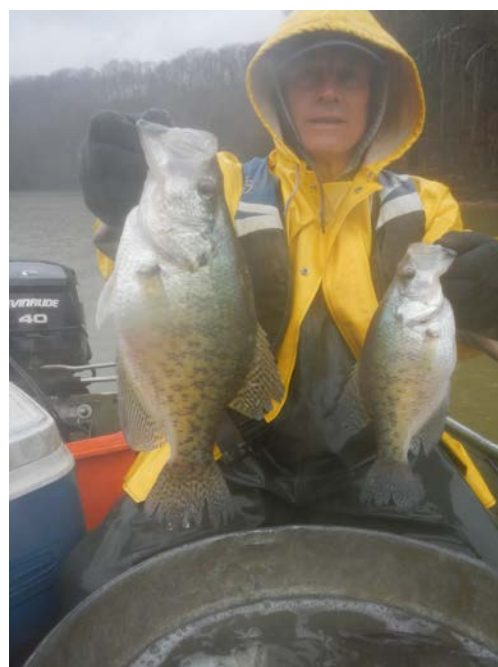


A big Yellow Perch and nice White Crappie from trap netting at Loyalhanna Lake in 2018

Besides Tiger Muskellunge, 17 additional species were captured in trap nets in 2018 (Table 1). Gizzard Shad, Bluegill, Black Crappie, and White Crappie were the most abundant species captured with over 2,300 individuals of these four species captured. Of these four species, White Crappie would be of the most interest to anglers, as over a quarter of the fish captured were over 9 inches. Some of the White Crappie were extremely nice sized and reached up to just under 15 inches and over 2 lbs. Bluegill sizes also showed improvement from recent surveys, with fish over 7 inches regularly caught in our trap nets. Yellow Perch numbers were low, but some sizable perch are available to anglers.

Table 1. Length and frequency distribution of sampled fish from trap nets in 2018.

Species	Number caught	Size range (inches)	Notes
White Crappie	356	3 – 14	28% over 9 inches
Black Crappie	564	3 - 13	5% over 9 inches
Yellow Perch	17	5 - 13	24% over 9 inches
Bluegill	586	2 - 8	22% over 7 inches
Pumpkinseed	13	4 - 7	8% over 7 inches
Channel Catfish	71	7 - 31	72% over 15 inches 46% over 20 inches
White Catfish	136	4 - 19	53% over 12 inches
Brown Bullhead	54	8 - 14	72% over 12 inches
Yellow Bullhead	8	9 - 11	None over 12 inches
Tiger Muskellunge	1	38	
Largemouth Bass	3	14 - 17	
Common Carp	2	Not Measured	
Gizzard Shad	837	Not Measured	
Golden Shiner	4	Not Measured	
Tiger Trout	4	Not Measured	
White Sucker	67	Not Measured	
Silver Shiner	1	Not Measured	
Hybrid Sunfish	1	Not Measured	



Former Area Fisheries Manager Rick Lorson with a 13 inch and 9-inch White Crappie

The highlight of the fishery at Loyalhanna Lake continues to be the catfish fishery. Channel Catfish and White Catfish, and to a lesser extent Brown Bullhead, continue to provide good fishing opportunities at this impoundment. Particularly impressive was the Channel Catfish population. Fish were well distributed throughout the size range (7 – 31 inches) with ample opportunities for anglers to catch some trophy sized catfish. Our largest fish went over 31 inches and weighed over 15 pounds. Most of our nets had at least one or two Channel Catfish over 25 inches. The White Catfish population also provides anglers with ample opportunities to catch catfish in the 14 – 17-inch size range, with a few trophies reaching around 20 inches. Anglers are reminded that White Catfish are non-native to the Ohio River basin and are discouraged from moving them to other water bodies. White Catfish can be distinguished from Channel Catfish by their moderately forked, rounded caudal (tail) fin lobes, head that is generally wider than the body, and number of anal fin rays (19-23). Channel Catfish also have forked tails but generally have more pointed caudal fin lobes, a narrower head, and a higher number of anal fin rays (24+). Other catfish species in Loyalhanna Lake that may be confused with White Catfish include Brown Bullhead and Yellow Bullhead; however, both of these have caudal fins with little to no fork.



31-inch, 15 lb. Channel Catfish that was enjoying an easy meal of shad in our trap net



Two-foot Channel Catfish were rather common during our 2018 trap net survey

Overall, Loyalhanna Lake provides good fishing opportunities for a variety of fish species such as Channel Catfish, White Catfish, White Crappie, and Bluegill. Although we did not survey the Largemouth Bass population during this survey, the lake is a popular bass fishing destination. We will sample the bass population during our next comprehensive survey of the lake in a few years.

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