

Dutch Fork Lake

Washington County

April 2018 Trap Net and April 2019 Night Electrofishing Survey

Dutch Fork Lake is a 91-acre Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) owned impoundment located in Washington County near the town of Claysville, PA. The lake's spillway was damaged in 2004 due to flooding from Hurricane Ivan and was subsequently drained later that year. Upon completion of repairs to the spillway and dam upgrades and then subsequent refilling of the lake in 2013, the PFBC began restocking the lake with warmwater species such as Bluegill, White Crappie, Largemouth Bass, and Channel Catfish to reestablish a fishery. In addition, management for stocked trout also resumed at the lake the following year.

Biologists from the Area 8 Fisheries Management Office in Somerset, PA surveyed the lake in April 2018 using trap nets to assess the panfish population and in April 2019 using night electrofishing to assess the Largemouth Bass population. A total of 13 species were captured trap netting with Common Carp and White Sucker being the two most abundant species (Table 1). Neither species was stocked into the lake after refilling; both likely resided in the stream upstream of the lake and have taken advantage of this "new" lake situation to flourish.

Table 1. Length and frequency distribution of sampled fish.

Species	Number caught	Size range (inches)	Notes
Black Crappie	68	6 – 10 inches	19% over 9 inches
White Crappie	63	3 – 13 inches	52% over 9 inches
Green Sunfish	1	4 inches	
Bluegill	65	2 – 6 inches	None over 7 inches
Hybrid Sunfish	3	3 – 6 inches	
Largemouth Bass	7	9 – 16 inches	
Channel Catfish	1	19 inches	
Yellow Bullhead	5	8 – 12 inches	
Common Carp	306	Not Measured	
Golden Shiner	3	Not Measured	
Northern Hog Sucker	1	Not Measured	
White Sucker	111	Not Measured	
Rainbow Trout	25	Not Measured	

Black Crappie and White Crappie were captured in similar numbers during the trap net survey in 2018. Overall, combined crappie catch rates were lower than during previous surveys, but the catch rate of fish over nine inches was higher than in previous years (Figure 1). Historically, crappie populations in Dutch Fork Lake were abundant but suffered poor size structure. Very few crappie species reached nine inches historically. This was likely due to the abundant population of Gizzard Shad, which compete for food with panfish such as crappie and Bluegill. Our 2018 trap net survey captured no Gizzard Shad and a 2016 survey on Dutch Fork above the lake also captured no shad, so we were cautiously optimistic that the long-term drawdown and dewatering had removed them from this impoundment. However, low numbers of shad were observed during our 2019 electrofishing survey indicating that some fish had survived the drawdown or have been recently reintroduced to the impoundment.

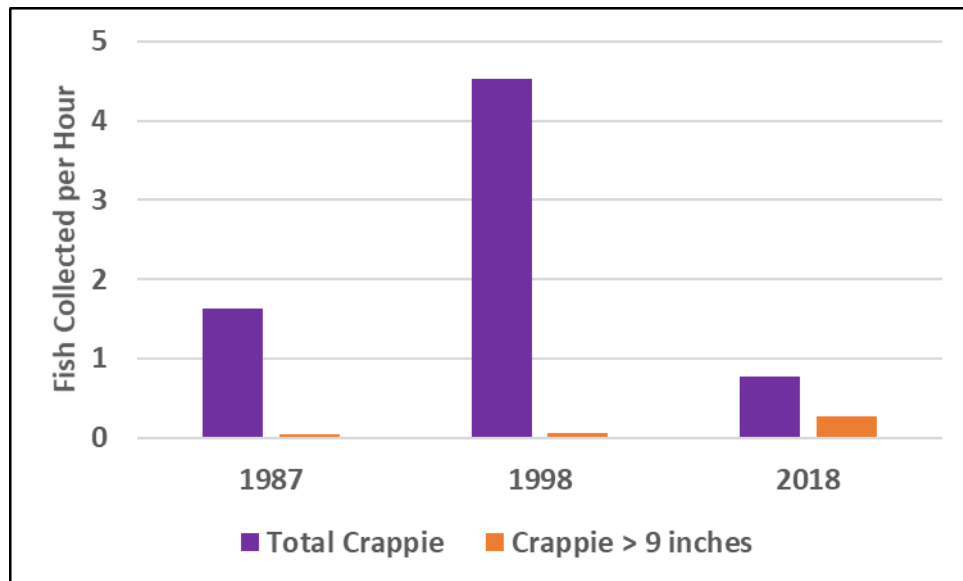


Figure 1. Trap net catch rates of crappie at Dutch Fork Lake.



A nice sized White Crappie captured trap netting at Dutch Fork Lake

Bluegill numbers were similar in magnitude to Black Crappie and White Crappie with a total of 65 Bluegill captured trap netting in 2018. Size structure of the population was poor with no fish over 7 inches in length captured (Figure 2). However, it is important to remember that only fish aged 5 and under were present in the population due to the refilling of the lake in 2013. It may take an additional few years for Bluegill to reach quality size in this impoundment. Unfortunately, the possibility exists that the size structure of the Bluegill population will remain poor, much like during the historic surveys prior to the impoundment being drained.

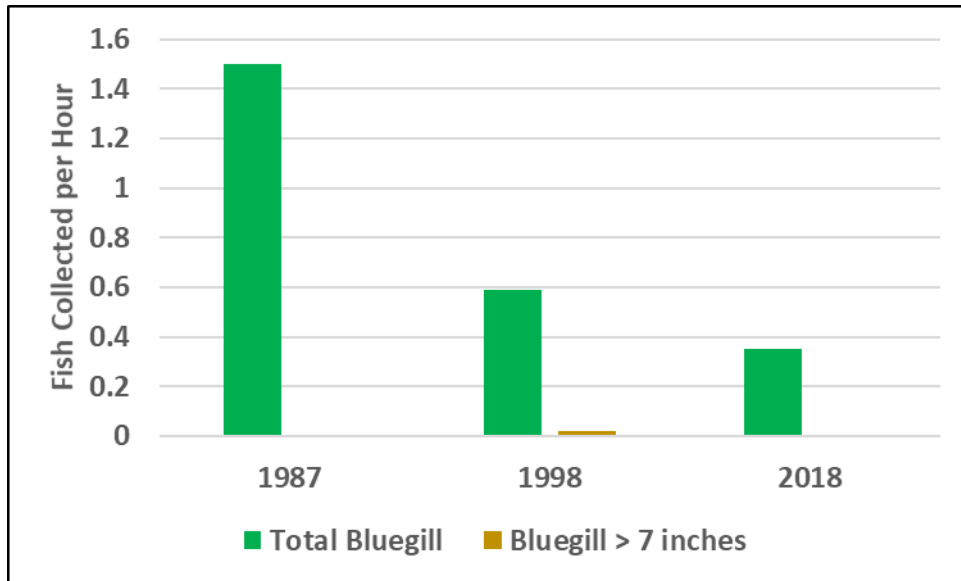


Figure 2. Trap net catch rates of Bluegill at Dutch Fork Lake.

Night electrofishing was performed in April 2019 to assess the Largemouth Bass population at Dutch Fork Lake. Overall catch rates were down from prior to the lake drawdown as expected as the population continues to rebuild (Table 2 and Figure 3). However, catch rates exceeded Big Bass Guidelines of 35 total fish/hr, 7 fish/hr over 12 inches, and 2 fish/hr over 15 inches. The Largemouth Bass population is recovering nicely with fish over 20 inches already present in the lake and plenty of quality fish over 15 inches present. Largemouth Bass fishing should continue to be excellent and only improve as the population of bass increases in this impoundment.

Table 2. Length and frequency distribution of Largemouth Bass from night electrofishing.

Species	Number caught	Size range (inches)	Notes
Largemouth Bass	46	5 – 20 inches	52% over 12 inches 33% over 15 inches

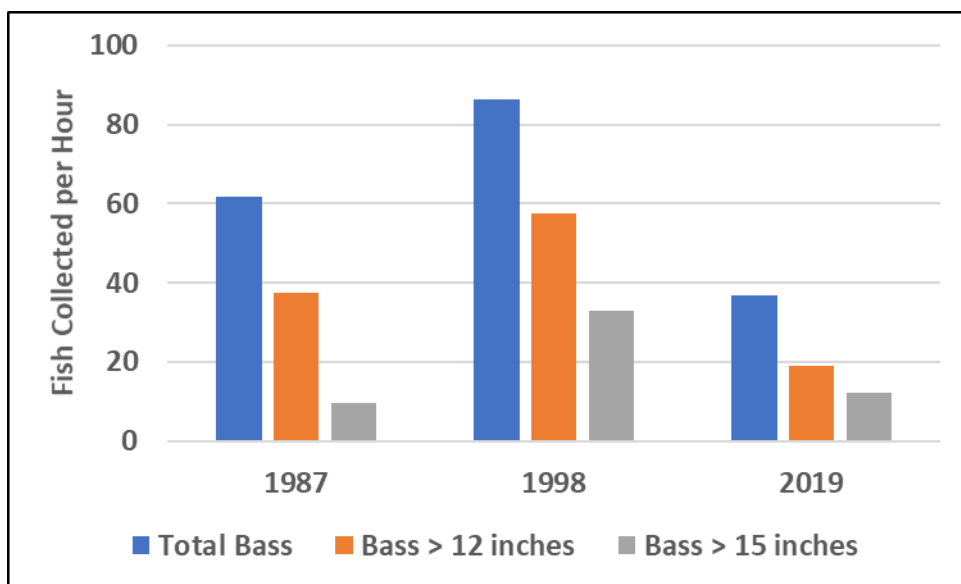
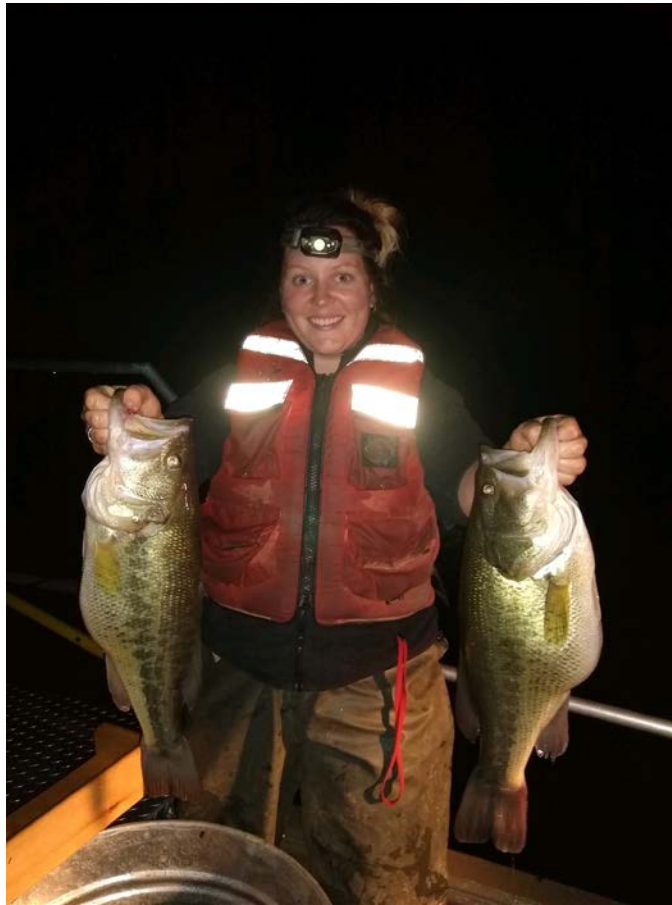


Figure 3. Night electrofishing catch rates of Largemouth Bass at Dutch Fork Lake.



A pair of big Largemouth Bass from night electrofishing at Dutch Fork Lake in 2019

Overall, Dutch Fork Lake contains good fishing opportunities for stocked trout and Largemouth Bass. Fair fishing opportunities for crappie species are present at this lake. Channel Catfish stocking will continue to create an additional fishery at this impoundment. We will return in five years to monitor the recovery of the fish populations and to determine if our stocking has successfully created a Channel Catfish fishery. Timing of sampling in 2018 was too early to get a reasonable sample of Channel Catfish due to cold water temperatures.

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