

# Ellsworth District Fisheries Newsletter

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## District Newsletter Aims to Keep Anglers More Informed

This district fisheries newsletter is another effort by the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks to keep you informed about what is happening on the fishing scene. In addition to the KDWP website at [www.kdwp.state.ks.us](http://www.kdwp.state.ks.us), newspaper articles, public meetings, Fishing Information Nights, printed literature, radio and TV spots, and contact in person or by phone, the new district newsletter is just another way to keep you informed about fisheries management activities, management concerns, and the many opportunities available to anglers here in Kansas. 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 lakes: Lakewood and Indian Rock in Salina and Holyrood City Lake; and 13 F.I.S.H. properties.*

## **Wilson Lake – Fishing Forecast For 2010**

Wilson Lake had an interesting year in 2009. The lake stayed full all year, and it got mixed reviews from

anglers. I heard a number of good comments about the walleye fishing, but there seemed to be some who could not find the fish. The same went for the stripers. The better striper anglers caught lots of nice fish but other anglers including the wade-fishing anglers could not really find those either. That makes two years in a row when the stripers did not cooperate particularly well, even though there are lots of stripers in the lake!

Black bass anglers found the bass fishing pretty darned good for both smallmouth and largemouth bass, and I think that will probably mean a few more bass tournaments on Wilson in 2010. There were some really nice channel catfish taken out of the lake, but I did not hear of anyone really slaying the catfish. I also had mixed reviews from white perch anglers. Some indicated a lot of smaller perch pestering them all the time, and other anglers were asking where the perch were. I know they found the white perch when the ice came on – got lots of reports of big numbers of nice perch coming through the ice up around Horseshoe Bend in December and January.

Fall netting efforts collected good numbers of fish and the following table gives a little netting history for the lake. The numbers are total numbers of those species caught each year from 2000 through 2009. You might want to refer to these numbers when you are reading this forecast to see how the numbers change from year to year. Then too, it was late fall when the dreaded Zebra Mussel showed up in our beloved lake – that was not the news we wanted to hear!

Get your friends, get your family  
... and FISH KANSAS!



Numbers Sampled Each Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Walleye	142	235	322	274	372	249	308	487	272	178
White Bass	111	189	173	107	119	140	227	209	72	52
Striped Bass	73	90	92	139	94	80	148	113	248	91
Channel Catfish	94	10	46	96	63	43	59	49	51	40
SM Bass	169	142	106	229	53	100	167	54	28	97
LM Bass	117	77	49	33	NS	202	111	76	NS	136
White Perch	590	630	270	325	617	230	138	262	207	368
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1296</b>	<b>1464</b>	<b>1060</b>	<b>1203</b>	<b>1323</b>	<b>1044</b>	<b>1158</b>	<b>1250</b>	<b>909</b>	<b>962</b>

**Walleye – Good** Walleye numbers continue to be quite high in the lake and 79 percent of the fish taken in the fall nets were over the 15-inch minimum length limit. The overall catch numbers were down from last year because we did not catch as many young-of-the-year fish this year – only one per 1-inch gill net versus 7.5 per net last year. After that huge year class in 2007, we have now had a couple of years of limited recruitment, which likely means a little tougher fishing in the next few years. A real positive this year was that we caught more larger fish -- up to 5 pounds -- than we have for a number of years. The population appears to be diversifying in size for a change, and all the walleye were in very good to excellent body condition – they had plenty to eat last year. We also caught almost as many walleye in trap nets as gill nets so they were roaming around pretty shallow last fall, too. Wilson Reservoir continues to have a **15-inch minimum length limit** on walleye despite some rumors that go around yearly.

**Striped Bass – Excellent** Numbers of stripers remain high and the body condition was the best last fall that I've seen for years. We still have a lot of those 4- to 8-pounders, but bigger fish are showing up every year. Fish in the teens are fairly common and that occasional 20- and 30-pounder really gets lots of attention! The smaller stripers are fat, and we have several good year classes coming on. We are stocking stripers heavily as a predator on the white perch, and so far they have been doing a pretty good job! Wilson is the No. 1 striped bass reservoir in the state and should provide lots of exciting striped bass angling in 2010 if the darned things will bite well.

**White Bass – Fair.** White bass numbers fell to an all-time low last fall in our sample. The data is puzzling because anglers continue to report good catches of nice white bass. Numbers certainly are down from the early years of Wilson. There is a diversity of sizes with some up into the 2-pound-plus range. We continue to see small whites coming on so they are spawning successfully, and if we could get a couple of high-river-flow years, the white bass would likely respond well. The white perch have certainly taken up a portion of the niche that the white bass used to occupy! Wilson is currently No. 18 among reservoirs in white bass density.

**Smallmouth Bass/Largemouth Bass – Good** Numbers got a real boost with the increased water levels last year, and the bass had plenty to eat and are as fat as ticks! Smallmouth used to outnumber largemouth by a wide margin, but we have seen a tremendous increase in largemouth numbers this past couple of years. Currently, Wilson is No. 2 in SMB density and No. 4 in LMB density compared to other reservoirs in the state. All black bass species are available in a wide variety of sizes with fair numbers over the 15-inch legal limit. The vegetation growing in the coves, creeks, and around the exposed shoreline is now flooded, and bass really like that substrate for spawning, nursery habitat, and shoreline cover. Crank baits thrown around the rocks will interest the SMBs. Spinner baits or plastics thrown up into the vegetation will catch both SMBs and LMBs, and if you want some really exciting action, throw a top water chugger bait up there and **HANG ON!**

**Channel Catfish — Good.** Catfish are not overly abundant in Wilson, but there are plenty of them to make fishing interesting. There are all size ranges, and the larger fish look like fat footballs. Wilson now ranks No. 12 in catfish density when compared to other reservoirs in the state. There are a few flatheads showing up every year, so don't be surprised if you tie into one of them, too. We have been stocking blue catfish for three years now (to provide another predator on white perch) but because of the 35-inch minimum length limit, those catfish will not be available for harvest for several years. Anglers have reported catching a few of these blues occasionally, and we caught 10 in our nets this past fall. Floatline fishing will again be allowed on Wilson during daylight hours from July 15 through September 15 under the second year of the pilot program.

**White Perch – Good.** White perch numbers showed a moderate increase this year, and the average size of the fish declined slightly. We thought that they might respond to the increase in water levels but were not sure what kind of response we would see. The increase in shoreline vegetation and escape cover might have reduced predation to some degree. The quality of the fish remains good, and anglers continue to be pleased with the size and taste of the filets. Lots of white perch were taken thru the ice this past winter – especially around the Horseshoe Bend area. Keep plenty of worms on hand for next summer and let's hope the white perch cooperate.

**Remember too, keep all you catch so that we can remove as many as we can to reduce numbers as much as possible.** The white perch is an Aquatic Nuisance Specie (ANS) on the prohibited species list, which means they must be dead if you keep them in your possession for consumption or if you keep them for bait or any other reason. Cut the small ones in half and feed the other fish if you catch ones you don't want to keep – do not throw any live white perch back!

**Crappie – Fair** Crappie numbers remain low, but there has been some recruitment due to the high water and the flooded vegetation. There is a fair size distribution at the current time with some of the crappie ranging up to 2 pounds. Black crappie prefer the clearer waters on the lower end of the lake, white crappie are mostly found in the upper end. Crappie are scattered all over the lake but just not in any big concentrations.

**Special Projects for 2010 –** We plan to run a creel survey on the lake in 2010. We generally try to do that every five years, and the five-year rotation would have placed it in 2011. However, we are watching the white perch population closely and decided to run a creel this year to get a better handle on the overall harvest of fish from the lake. We also want to survey angler attitudes about white perch and encourage anglers to harvest or eliminate all the perch they catch. Another reason for the creel is to alert all anglers about the presence of zebra mussels and to ensure that everyone is well versed with the "Clean, Drain, and Dry" rule!

We continue to stock all the stripers that we can get our hands on, and we continue to request blue catfish as an additional predator on the white perch. We caught 10 blue cats last fall, all appearing to be from the 2008 year class. They ranged from 14.3 to 15.6 inches and averaged just a shade under 1 pound each. Anglers reported catching some blues, too, and we hope to see just how many are reported during our creel surveys. We did not get our blue cats that were requested for stocking in the fall of 2009 because they were not available from the hatchery.

We may try and beef up some more brush piles in the spring if time and manpower allow.

Wilson is a popular fishing lake and very important to the anglers of central and western Kansas. We work hard to keep the fishing good and lets all hope Mother Nature helps us out too! We have some real challenges with the white perch and zebra mussel situations, and we will be doing all we can to manage against these Aquatic Nuisance Species. We have clear water and relatively stable water levels, and we hope that will be a plus in regards to management of these ANS species. Let's all be very thankful for what we have here and work together to keep this lake as one of the best fishing lakes in the state of Kansas.

See you at the lake!

# Kanopolis Lake – Fishing Forecast For 2010

Lake conditions at Lake Kanopolis going into 2010 look pretty darned good. The lake stayed full last year and you guys hauled the fish out of the lake in record numbers! I am surprised the lake did not go down a foot or more just in fish removed! The flooding of the shoreline vegetation and the full lake level created some great habitat for spawning and for the young fish in the lake. That provided the game fish with lots of forage to grow on the last two years – growing some really nice fish to stretch your line!

Fall netting results were very encouraging in the fall of 2009. The weather was not the best for being on the lake, but we managed to brave the cool and the wet to get a good sample of fish. In early October when we got to the lake for our fall sampling, the water was about 3 feet above conservation level – a bit lower than normal fall level – they were letting water out to drop the lake so the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) could work on the outlet area. We were able to set our gill nets and trap nets in just about the ideal locations that we try to find every year. Let's take a look at each fish species by species and see what we have to look forward to next year.

## Rainbow Trout and Brown Trout

**Rating is Excellent.** The seep stream below the reservoir is normally stocked six times with 1,400 - 1/2 pound average trout – October through March. The new pools backed up behind the five new grade control structures/engineered rock riffles were very popular, and we drew anglers from all over the state of Kansas. If you remember, we tried an experiment with brown trout last year to see if they would survive over the summer. When we went back in September with an electrofishing unit, we found only a few browns and a few rainbows but they were all on the far upper end where the main cool water discharge is.

This has become a very popular stream trout fishery and receives intense pressure at times. Remember, the trout season starts on October 15 and runs through April 15. A trout permit is required of **ALL** anglers except for youngsters under 16 if they want to fish and keep only two trout per day. A fishing license is also required by those from 16 to 64 years of age. We implemented a new regulation on the stream that started January 1, 2010. Artificial Lures only are now allowed between high line poles 9 thru 16 – the center 2 pools in the stream. No bait fishing will be allowed in this stretch from this date forward. Read more about our stream enhancement project we accomplished last year and our plans for next year.

Kanopolis – Total Numbers Sampled									
Species	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
White Bass	114	323	246	386	419	220	291	76	716

**Rating is Excellent.** Numbers of whites have been high for several years now with good numbers of fish in all size ranges. The numbers sampled in 2008 indicated a declining trend but I was sure we would rebound and we did in a BIG way! Kanopolis was No. 5 in the rating of all reservoirs in Kansas for density of white bass in 2007 but the numbers dropped us to No. 11 in 2008. This year we jumped back to No. 2, just barely behind Glen Elder. We have lots of fish, and they are fat and healthy going into 2010! Our shoreline seining in August showed high numbers of young-of-the-year white bass so another strong year class is developing. Look for whites in the upper end early as the water starts warming up and off the points as summer nears. The spring river run is always dictated by the flow in the river in April, and we are primed for another good year. The river had plenty of water last year, and anglers caught spawning white bass as far west as Ellsworth. Some whites will spawn on the dam and the rocky/sandy points even if the river is flowing well – they don't all go west. The whites usually stage in the upper end in the early spring right after the ice goes off so get your jigs, roadrunners, or small shad colored crank baits ready for that.

Kanopolis – Total Numbers Sampled									
Species	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Saugeye	106	63	121	101	54	41	69	39	60

**Rating is Good for Saugeye, Fair for Walleye** Saugeye numbers are fairly stable, and I really expected the numbers to go down last fall but they did not. You anglers hauled the saugeye out of Kanopolis last spring and early summer by the hundreds – I heard of 10-fish limits for two guys weighing 60 pounds and more. I kept expecting the new state record to be hauled out of there, but it never happened – maybe it got eaten. Our creel survey data is not back yet, but I am certain that it will show a record harvest on saugeye/walleye for this lake!

Three strong year classes in 2003, 2004, and 2007 will continue to provide good numbers of legal fish for 2010 anglers. Currently, this reservoir is rated No. 3 behind Sebelius and Council Grove Reservoirs in saugeye density, so it is hanging in just fine. Walleye numbers are showing a moderate increase due to the stocking of excess hatchery fish and some limited natural recruitment. We saw several walleye over 5 pounds last fall. Check the cheek patch if you want to distinguish between these two fish – smooth are walleye, rough with scales are saugeye. The **15-inch minimum length limit** is in effect for both species in combination on this lake.

You will find them along the dam in the early spring, on the flats in early summer, and the saugeye tend to stay shallow longer into the summer when the walleye tend to go deep. Drifting a jig-n-worm on the flats is the favorite fishing method but you might throw that same rig up into the flooded brush too. Trolling is often effective – Shad Raps are hard to beat whether trolling or casting to shoreline fish. Slab spoons are the bait of choice when fall arrives and the fish head toward the river channel.

Kanopolis – Total Numbers Sampled									
Species	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Wipers	13	43	32	69	34	38	24	5	45

**Rating is Fair** Wiper numbers in fall nets rebounded this year along with most of our other fish species. We caught a variety of sizes of wipers, and they were all in excellent body condition – they had lots of shad to eat. I am still frustrated a bit as I just cannot seem to get them to really take off in this reservoir. The bigger fish are averaging 10 to 12 pounds, so there are some trophy wipers to stretch your line. Kanopolis ranks way down among Kansas reservoirs in wiper density and really takes a back seat to those like Milford, Marion, and even Cedar Bluff. In our August shoreline seines, we saw good numbers of young-of-the-year wipers – I just hope they survived the winter and recruit on through. Wipers are often found in with schools of white bass and are fond of windblown points. Anglers do not want to overlook the brush piles, especially in the fall as the wipers and white bass really stack up around them at times. Live shad are hard to beat but bucktail jigs and shad imitation crank baits are good bets. Last spring anglers were catching good wipers fishing worms on the bottom on the south end of the dam when there was a north wind. Wipers also like crawdads fished on the bottom.

Kanopolis – Total Numbers Sampled									
Species	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Channel Catfish	21	25	12	14	78	53	47	41	27

**Rating is Good.** Channel catfish are available in a wide range of sizes although most of what we catch every fall are under 2 pounds. Larger fish are there, but they just don't seem to show up in our nets. Anglers have been chumming catfish over the humps off the south shore with good success, and I am sure the creel survey will show good numbers of catfish being harvested. This reservoir is rated No. 14 in the state in density of catfish taken in fall 2009 nettings. The supply of flatheads is also good with some that provide a trophy aspect. They catch some really nice ones in the outlet during high releases, but there are not too many who fish for them on the main lake. Shad sides and gizzards or cut bait are good bets for cool water channel catfish and worms and dip baits are hard to beat in the summer months. Fresh-cut shad seems to be a good bet in the fall on windblown shorelines. Flatheads like something alive or fresh dead – not any of that stinky stuff! Floatline fishing will be allowed again on this reservoir this summer.



## Creel Surveys in 2010

The best part of the 2010 fishing season is just around the corner and a lot of anglers are surely getting excited about the prospects for this new fishing year. Most of our lakes in central and western Kansas are in really good shape going into this fishing year except for Cedar Bluff and Sebelius (Norton). Cedar Bluff is 16.3 feet low but .3 feet up from one year ago. Sebelius is 9.3 feet low and Lovewell is 3 feet low but coming up. All other reservoirs in our part of the world are right about conservation level or within a foot of full.

Since the fishing season kind of gets started in March, that is when creel surveys start on some of the area lakes. Creel surveys are run on all of our lakes about every five years and more often if we have some type of special project going on. Most creel surveys are run for an eight-month period from March through October. Once in a while, we run a winter creel to evaluate ice fishing use and harvest or on some of our trout waters we run creel surveys during the trout season from October 15 through April 15.

Creel surveys are all run to count anglers who are fishing during random time periods. Anglers are also interviewed to find out how long they have fished, what they are fishing for, what they have caught, the demographics of the anglers, and other information about their fishing trip. Surveys are conducted by creel clerks who are hired by the biologists to collect this information. Surveys are run on a randomly scheduled basis both on weekdays and weekends and the information is expanded for the entire fishing season.

This year I will be running a creel survey on Wilson Reservoir. Other reservoirs creeled in 2010 will be Melvern and Big Hill reservoirs, both in eastern Kansas. KDWP will also be surveying Clark, Douglas, Kingman, Scott, and Jewel state fishing lakes.

We ran a creel survey at Wilson in 2006 and a five-year rotation would have put the creel in 2011 instead of 2010. But, because we have just now detected zebra mussels and the white perch numbers are worrying us a bit, we decided to creel this year. We want to get the zebra mussel word out to everyone in an attempt to not have them moved from this lake to any other lakes in the area. We also want to evaluate any change in population by looking at angler harvest, angler preference, and angler attitudes towards this Aquatic Nuisance Species.

With the lake full now and a lot of vegetation growing around the shoreline, we expected an increase in some of the fish populations. We have seen an increase in black bass numbers and if things progress like they should, the black continue to improve for the next few years. We have also seen an increase in crappie reproduction but do not expect Wilson to turn into a crappie fishing bonanza like we saw in some other lakes when they filled up. Unfortunately we saw the white perch increase in numbers, too, and we hope that continued predation will keep those numbers in check! We are also watching closely the water reallocation studies going on with the lake and creel data will provide some continued recreational use data that will be invaluable in that process!



Creel surveys are run to gather information on fish harvest, angler use, angler preferences, and other data that we can use to evaluate special projects and to make management decisions. Clerks drive the length of the reservoir counting and interviewing anglers on both weekend days and week days. Creel census periods last for 4 hours on reservoirs and some reservoirs are large and divided in survey units – Wilson has 2 units. Many of you may have already had some experience with creel clerks in the past.

The information is gathered on a small hand held computer. Anglers are asked a variety of questions such as; how long have you been fishing? How many of you are actively fishing? What are you fishing for? Have you caught anything? And, how do you rate your fishing trip today? The creel clerk then measures any fish that were caught and records them. Fish caught and released are also recorded. All this data is beamed to our Emporia office where it is placed into a bigger computer, month by month. At the end of the season, the data is tabulated and expanded for the entire 8 month fishing season.

If you get approached by a creel clerk while fishing at Wilson this year, please take a bit of your time and provide the information they ask for. It does not take very much time and if you get checked more than once, you'll know what they are looking for. The only thing that takes time is measuring the fish you have in your live well, fish basket, or on your stringer. They need to measure each fish to the nearest inch. They'll also ask if you have thrown any fish back and you'll need to provide an approximate size and number estimate. We want to know what you are taking home and what you are throwing back.

So, if the fishing bug is biting, it won't be long until the best part of the season will be here. When you come to Wilson Lake, plan to get checked by the creel clerk at some time during the year. After he gets the information he needs from you, you might want to check with him on where the fish are biting. He'll be around the lake a lot and will know what is biting, where, and on what.

## Kanopolis Seep/Trout Stream Enhancement Continues

Many of the folks around Kanopolis have been hearing talk in the past year or more about some improvements/enhancements planned for the trout stream that lies right behind the dam of the reservoir. We, the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, have been making improvements on the stream to enhance the fish habitat and spread out the angling pressure over a broader area.

The seep stream/Sand Creek is a constantly flowing stream that runs seepage water that flows from underneath the dam. The toe drains of the dam gather seepage water and channel it to the stream through a series of lateral pipes. This water comes out of the ground at a constant temperature between 55 and 60 degrees – making the stream cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter. Unfortunately that water also comes out of the ground with no dissolved oxygen so it has to flow a ways to aerate. It makes for an ideal location for winter trout stocking and we have been stocking trout there since 1986.

Initially stocking was accomplished just on the lower end – south end of the stream. The large pool backed up by the small concrete dam or weir was the initial stocking location. As more trout became available, we began to stock pooled water that was primarily backed up by the beaver further up the stream. Beaver activity has been prevalent on the stream for many years; the only problem was that the beaver did not always put their dam where we wanted them. They also did not always build them high enough nor sturdy enough to weather the occasional flood that came down the stream.

Then in May of 2007 we got the BIG flood and it washed out ever bit of beaver activity. During the summer of 2008 we built 5 grade control structures/engineered rock riffles (fancy name for check dams). They backed up a lot of water and provided some nice trout fishing water that helped spread the fishing pressure out over more area. These riffle/pool areas have been very popular and have attracted anglers from all over the state. As I mentioned earlier, last summer we planted some trees and placed in some floating half log structures.

Starting on January 1, 2010 we designated an Artificial Lure Only section of the stream between high line poles 9 thru 16. This will be a permanent situation from this point on. In this portion, which involves only two of the five pools that we made in 2008, no bait fishing will be allowed. Anglers can use flies, spinners, jigs, panfish tubes, plastics, crankbaits, or any other lure type. Bait fishing anglers can use bait in all other portions of the stream except between poles 9 thru 16. Artificial lure anglers can also fish anywhere along the stream, including the area between poles 9 thru 16. This was done to provide a little more quality fishing in the designated area for those who prefer to cast lures to the trout.

There are some BIG plans for further improvements in April/May of 2010. Due to some mitigation funds becoming available, we plan to repair the highly eroding areas of the east bank all along the stream. The banks will be graded back at a 3 to 1 slope and rock riprap will be placed at the base to prevent erosion. These slopes will be reseeded and 360 feet of lunger boxes will be included in several of the existing pools to provide an undercut bank effect and overhead cover for the trout. We plan to plant more trees, plant some willows and buttonbush in the riprap to stabilize that habitat, and to place a few large boulders into the pools to provide some additional in-stream habitat.

So, if you see a bunch of trucks hauling in rock, see a few big yellow machines alongside the stream, and a bunch of bodies running around down there this summer, you will know what is going on. Hopefully by next fall, the stream will look very different again. Permanent pools with some rocks, riprap, and lunger structures will be ready for trout come October 15<sup>th</sup>. The Kanopolis seep stream should be one of the premier trout fishing locations in the state of Kansas for years to come and should provide many hours of angling pleasure for those who like to pursue wily trout!

