



# Lake Nelson 2006



Lake Nelson is a 40-acre impoundment located in Nelson County, Virginia. This reservoir is owned by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) and is managed primarily for fisheries related activities. The only facilities available at this reservoir are a boat ramp and parking areas near the boat ramp and dam. Bank anglers can utilize a large mowed area adjoining the parking lot, a mowed dam, and a narrow strip of VDGIF property that extends around the entire shoreline. The lake is open 24 hours a day. Outboard motors are prohibited but electric motors are permitted.

The reservoir was impounded in 1958 and was stocked with various species of fish such as largemouth bass, bluegill, catfish, crappie, and grass carp. The most popular sportfish species are largemouth bass, black crappie, and bluegill. Grass carp were also introduced to control aquatic vegetation. Any grass carp caught should be immediately released unharmed.

Largemouth bass are abundant but most of these fish are less than 14 inches. Growth for these fish is very good with bass reaching 13½ inches in three years. Largemouth bass were regulated with a 12-15 inch protected slot limit but this regulation was changed to a 14-20 inch protected slot in the spring of 2001. All bass caught between 14 and 20 inches should be immediately released unharmed. The new size limit was initiated to expand the number of larger size bass (> 15 inches) in the lake. There has been little increase in the number of bass over 14 inches since the new regulation went into affect but the size distribution has remained similar to previous years. Too many bass are currently harvested prior to reaching the protected slot limit, significant numbers of slot limit size bass are being harvested, or a combination of the two have prevented major improvements in the number of larger bass since the new slot limit was implemented.

**Table 1.** Largemouth bass collected during the 2001-2005 electrofishing surveys. The top row is the inch group and the bottom rows are the number of fish collected per hour of sampling in each size group.

Size (Inches)	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
# in 2005	31	7	10	12	12	11	11	22	8	3	2	0	0	2	0	2
# in 2003	10	6	13	41	22	23	8	6	3	3	4	2	2	1	2	0
# in 2001	21	3	10	14	10	11	6	17	11	2	4	3	0	0	1	0

The crappie population continues to fluctuate due to varying reproduction success. Current crappie numbers are low since there has not been good reproduction for over 5 years. Crappie routinely have good and bad years when it comes to spawning success. This pattern is typical in small lakes and is expected to continue. The crappie

population at Lake Nelson is no exception. Older fish dominate the current fishery but are in small numbers. The unfortunate side to good and bad reproductive years is that anglers can expect to have good crappie fishing some years and bad in other years. Size limits and creel restrictions used by managers to control fish populations can not make up for years with poor reproduction. With this in mind, anglers may not know what to expect from year to year until they try their favorite crappie holes each spring. Most crappie at this reservoir usually do not exceed 10 inches. Anglers looking for crappie should check beaver lodges or shoreline structure such as fallen trees.

**Table 2.** Crappie collected during the 2001-2005 electrofishing surveys. The top row is the inch group and the bottom rows are the number of fish collected in each size group.

<b>Size (Inches)</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>
<b># in 2005</b>	1	1	0	6	17	1
<b># in 2003</b>	11	11	26	41	4	0
<b># in 2001</b>	162	29	4	1	1	0

Bluegill are the primary sunfish species available at Lake Nelson but there are some nice redear sunfish also available. Small and slow growing sunfish that are less than seven inches in length dominate the sunfish population. If the new largemouth bass slot limit is ever successful at increasing the number of large bass, the number of sunfish may be reduced which should increase the average size of sunfish. A reduction in the number of sunfish is needed to improve growth and size.

There were no channel catfish collected from Lake Nelson in recent years despite annual stockings. Channel catfish stockings were discontinued in 2000 due to poor survival. However, beginning in 2003 this lake received a trial stocking of larger channel catfish to determine if catfish stocked at larger sizes will be successful at producing a catfish fishery.

Lake Nelson has a very abundant fish population but the number of larger bass and the sizes of sunfish could be improved. The bass population is in good condition but could also benefit from additional large fish. It is still hopeful that the new slot limit will increase the numbers of large bass, which may reduce the sunfish population and promote better growth. Overall, this fishery does provide quality fishing opportunities for many anglers. The lake can be reached from Route 29 near Colleen, then take Route 655 about 2.8 miles to Arrington; go through Arrington, then left on Route 812, go about 2.2 miles and watch for the sign. Turn left and follow the road to the lake. For additional information, call 434-525-7522.