



## **Philpott Reservoir 2009**

Philpott Reservoir is a 2,880-acre impoundment located near Martinsville Virginia. This reservoir is situated in the mountains of Patrick and Henry Counties, which is a picturesque setting for outdoor enthusiasts. Philpott Reservoir is owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and is managed primarily for flood control and hydroelectric power generation. There is no residential development along its shoreline but there are numerous boat landings, picnic areas, campgrounds, and hiking trails scattered throughout the reservoir.

Black bass (largemouth and smallmouth bass) are the most sought after species by anglers at Philpott Reservoir. According to Virginia Department of game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) electrofishing samples, the largemouth bass comprise the bulk of this fishery far outnumbering smallmouth bass. However, smallmouth are a very popular portion of the fishery in the spring and fall, producing many quality smallies. Both black bass species have remained stable in recent years with good numbers of bass in the 2-3 pound range.

Good largemouth bass fishing can be found throughout the reservoir but smallmouth bass densities appear to be greater in the lower end, particularly along the main lake channel. Clear water, especially in the lower half of the lake, can make fishing a challenge. Anglers should look for bass in deeper water and around fallen trees if the area being fished has very clear water. Night fishing can also be productive in shallow water as bass tend to come up shallower after dark.

Black crappie are present in Philpott Reservoir but this lake does not contain high densities of crappie. Crappie recruitment has been consistently low for many years. This reservoir does not contain adequate habitat for producing high numbers of crappie but it does provide excellent sizes with most fish in the 9-13 inch classes.

Philpott Reservoir has one of the better walleye populations in Virginia. This fishery does not contain many large fish but does support excellent numbers. Most adult walleye average 18-21 inches. There is no or very limited natural reproduction of walleye so the population is sustained with approximately 144,000 annually stocked fingerling walleye.

The most productive walleye fishing is from June through August. In March, walleye can often be found in less than 10 feet if the water is stained and along the shoreline at night as they move shallow to spawn. Most walleye spawning concludes by the first or second week of April. The headwaters of the reservoir above mile marker 12 near the first shallow riffles of the Smith River, Runett Bag Creek arm, and from mile marker 3 to the dam are all areas walleye congregate during the spawn. These fish redistribute throughout the lower nine miles of the reservoir after spawning with the highest concentrations typically remaining in the first 4 miles of the reservoir. Walleye are very light sensitive and prefer dark or shaded habitat. Consequently, anglers need to adjust their tactics accordingly. During daylight hours, many walleye can be found in only a few feet of water in the spring if the water is stained or muddy but will remain

deeper during the day if the water is clear. The reservoir in March typically has very clear water near the dam but turbid water in the upper reaches of the reservoir. Walleye will only be in very shallow water near the dam at night. For those willing to brave the nighttime temperatures of late March, points and cliffs along the main channel up to mile marker 3 are the most productive areas.

After spawning, walleye begin to feed heavily for the next couple of months. Since water temperatures remain cool through April and most of May, walleye are attracted to shallow water to capitalize on food sources. Sunfish species make up a portion of walleyes spring diet and these fish are concentrated in shallow water along the shoreline. Alewives are likely the most important part of the walleyes spring diet. Most alewife spawn at night in May and June along the shoreline at the waters surface. The erratic spawning behavior of the alewife makes them easy targets for the hungry walleye. Walleye are sensitive to light and remain in deeper water during the day but make their way to very shallow water at night to capitalize on the forage. Night fishing with floating or shallow running plugs cast to the shoreline can provide some of the hottest walleye action of the year. Walleye often frequent water less than 2 feet deep during these dark hours. During daylight hours, fish the shoreline contour but in deeper water (10-20 ft) than at night. As water temperatures increase in late spring and throughout the summer, walleye continually move deeper seeking cooler water. Anglers must fish deeper throughout the summer to capitalize on this fishery. However, in the upper half of the lake, walleye will hold on the thermocline and fishing below the thermocline will not be productive since there is no oxygen present usually after mid July. A very important point to remember is fish deeper in clearer water during the day, regardless of season.

VDGIF is conducting a walleye tagging study at Philpott Reservoir. This study was developed to better manage the lake's walleye fishery. Information gathered from the study will give biologists important data concerning walleye catch and harvest rates by anglers. In addition, biologists will gain insight on walleye movement, survival, and population dynamics. Approximately 600 walleye were tagged in 2002-2003 and another 500 were tagged in 2006. These tags are orange and approximately three inches in length and attached to the abdominal area extending along the exterior portion of the fish. Approximately 250 walleye will be tagged in 2008 and 2009 with a blue tag located in the dorsal fin area. Any tagged walleye caught by anglers should be easily recognized without dissection. Tagged fish do not have to be harvested to collect the reward. Cut or clip tags (do not pull tags loose) from fish you wish to release. Anglers are encouraged to submit any tags collected from walleye to the address printed on the tag. Special envelopes for tag returns have been distributed to the USCOE office and some bait and tackle stores in the Philpott Reservoir area. There is a reward for all returned tags but anglers must provide the following information to receive a reward; date of capture, fish length, approximate location where the fish was caught, was the walleye harvested or released, and how many other untagged walleye were caught on that fishing trip.

A new walleye minimum size limit for walleye was instituted in July of 2006. The new size limit requires the immediate releases of all walleye less than 18 inches, the creel limit has remained at 5 fish per day. This new regulation was instituted to maintain this quality fishery and prevent the over harvest of small walleye since over 95% of the walleye caught were harvested prior to the new size limit. The number of walleye over 20 inches in the population has declined substantially in recent years from the increased walleye fishing pressure.

Additional information on Philpott Reservoir facilities can be obtained by contacting the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at 276-629-2703.