



Horsepen Lake 2010

Horsepen Lake is a 19-acre impoundment located entirely within the Horsepen Wildlife Management Area in Buckingham County, Virginia. The lake is one of several department-owned lakes created in the 1930's. Horsepen provides a warmwater fishery for largemouth bass, bluegill, redear sunfish ("shellcracker"), and channel catfish. Channel catfish are stocked annually at a rate of 15 fish/acre to maintain a fishable population.

Horsepen Lake was drained in 2001 due to failing boards in the riser tower. DGIF personnel used this opportunity to install fish habitat structures using pallets and extended the concrete boat ramp to improve access. After repairs to the tower were completed and the lake refilled, largemouth bass, bluegill, redear sunfish, and channel catfish were restocked beginning in spring 2002 with an additional bass stocking in spring 2003. In an effort to provide trophy largemouth bass fishing, supplemental stockings of F1 largemouth bass (Northern strain bass crossed with Florida strain bass) were completed in 2004, 2005, and 2006. To further encourage development of a trophy fishery, a 22 inch minimum size limit, one fish per day creel limit was imposed on largemouth bass in 2005. In an effort to increase fish growth rates in Horsepen Lake, a fertilization program has been in place since 2007. Fertilization stimulates plankton growth which ultimately moves up the food chain to increase growth potential for largemouth bass.

Recent samples for largemouth bass have shown some promising results. Bass up to 21 inches have been sampled and numerous bass from 12-16 inches have shown up in the population. Bass density in Horsepen Lake is about average for lakes in this region of Virginia and the F1 bass that were stocked are now in the 12-17 inch range and make up an important part of the population. DGIF staff is keeping a careful eye on the maturing bass population to make sure that bass do not become crowded and stunted. We are hopeful that this will become the trophy bass fishery that we are working so hard to achieve.

As is often the case, the sunfish population varies greatly from one year to the next. Bluegill and redear sunfish are the primary prey species in Horsepen Lake and are thus subject to the pressures of predation and angling. Density of bluegill in the lake is average for a Southside reservoir with bluegill up to 9 inches in our spring samples. Redear sunfish are not as densely populated as bluegill but are present in Horsepen. This species has not taken off as we had hoped and we rarely see redear over 8 inches in the population. Hopefully both populations will continue to improve as the fishery is only a few years old at this point.

Unfortunately species we did not stock ended up back in Horsepen after the lake refilled. Most likely these species survived in the creek and became re-established. Black crappie, warmouth, and brown bullheads have all been discovered in the lake and we encourage anglers to legally harvest all of these species that they can in an attempt to control population size of these species. These fish, especially crappie, tend to over-populate and stunt in small impoundments like Horsepen and will compete for food with largemouth bass and bluegill. There is potential to harvest some decent speckle out of Horsepen Lake as crappie greater than 10 inches have been sampled.

Horsepen Lake can be reached by taking Route 60 to Buckingham and following State Route 638 south to the lake. Signs are posted on route 638 directing anglers to the lake. Horsepen Lake is open to fishing and boating 24 hours a day. Gasoline-powered motors are not allowed on the lake but an electric motor is legal.