



Lake Nelson 2010

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. Facilities available at this reservoir are a boat ramp, parking areas near the boat ramp and dam and portable toilets are available April-September. 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 boundaries are marked with T posts and VDGIF property extends from the T posts to the lake. 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, redear sunfish, channel catfish, and crappie. The most popular sportfish species are largemouth bass, black crappie, and sunfish. Grass carp were also introduced to control aquatic vegetation. Any grass carp caught should be immediately released unharmed.

A lake fertilization project was initiated at Lake Nelson in the spring of 2008. This project is designed to improve the production of algae and plankton which is utilized by small fish and later by larger predators. The fertilization project should improve the number and quality of fish in the reservoir.

Largemouth bass are abundant but most of these fish are less than 14 inches (Table 1). Largemouth bass were regulated with a 14-20 inch protected slot limit but this regulation was changed to a 15 inch minimum size limit in the spring of 2009. All bass caught less than 15 inches should be immediately released unharmed. The new size limit was initiated to expand the number of bass in the lake since most bass were harvested prior to reaching 14 inches.

The crappie population continues to fluctuate due to varying reproduction (Table 2). Crappie routinely have good and bad years when it comes to spawning success especially in small lakes and Lake Nelson is not an exception. With this in mind, anglers may not know what to expect from year to year until they try their favorite crappie holes each spring. Current crappie numbers are fair but this population has experienced high harvest rates and most crappie are removed when they reach eight inches in length. To improve the size structure and reduce the impacts of variable reproduction, a nine inch minimum size limit was initiated in 2009. Anglers looking for crappie should check beaver lodges or shoreline structure such as fallen trees and brush piles in the spring and deeper water during other months.

Bluegill are the primary sunfish species available at Lake Nelson but there are some nice redear sunfish also available that contribute significantly to the fishery. Sunfish less than seven inches in length dominate the sunfish population. Improvements in sunfish growth and average size are anticipated with lake fertilization and increased predation on the sunfish with more restrictive bass regulations.

Annual channel catfish stockings at Lake Nelson historically produced very few catfish for anglers. However, beginning in 2003 this lake received a trial stocking of larger channel catfish to determine if catfish stocked at larger sizes could successfully create a catfish fishery. This stocking strategy has been successful in producing a limited fishery. Since channel catfish stocking numbers are limited, restrictive regulations have been initiated to allow for the stocked fish to grow larger and provide a higher quality fish for anglers. The new regulations for catfish include a 5 fish daily creel and a 15 inch minimum size limit.

Lake Nelson has a very abundant fish population but the number of larger bass and the sizes of sunfish could be improved. New regulations have been initiated to improve the bass, crappie, sunfish and catfish populations. The bass population maintains good numbers but not many large fish. 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.

| Size (Inches) | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 |
|----------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 2009 | 37 | 22 | 32 | 13 | 7 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 2008 | 23 | 34 | 20 | 9 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 2006 | 19 | 15 | 17 | 19 | 13 | 6 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 2005 | 11 | 10 | 10 | 19 | 7 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| 2003 | 22 | 23 | 8 | 6 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 0 |
| 2001 | 10 | 11 | 6 | 17 | 11 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |

Table 1. Largemouth bass collected during the 2001-2009 Lake Nelson electrofishing surveys. The top row is the inch group and the other rows are the number of fish collected per hour of sampling for each size group.

| Size (Inches) | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 |
|----------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 2009 | 3 | 23 | 19 | 10 | 2 | 0 |
| 2008 | 10 | 13 | 3 | 11 | 8 | 1 |
| 2006 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 5 | 15 | 1 |
| 2005 | 11 | 11 | 26 | 41 | 4 | 0 |
| 2003 | 314 | 56 | 8 | 2 | 2 | 0 |

Table 2. Crappie collected during the 2001-2009 Lake Nelson electrofishing surveys. The top row is the inch group and the other rows are the number of fish collected per hour of sampling in each size group.

| Size (Inches) | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|----------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 2009 | 83 | 41 | 28 | 9 | 2 |
| 2008 | 44 | 45 | 54 | 26 | 3 |
| 2006 | 64 | 39 | 25 | 7 | 2 |
| 2005 | 104 | 76 | 24 | 16 | 4 |
| 2003 | 149 | 96 | 50 | 11 | 4 |

Table 3. Bluegill collected during the 2001-2009 Lake Nelson electrofishing surveys. The top row is the inch group and the other rows are the number of fish collected per hour of sampling in each size group.