



Philpott Reservoir 2011 Management Report



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 and angler surveys, largemouth bass comprise the bulk of this fishery and account for 87% of angler catch of black bass. However, smallmouth are a 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 fishing has very clear water. Night fishing can also be productive in both deep and shallow water as bass tend to come up shallower after dark.

Philpott Reservoir has one of the better walleye populations in Virginia with 13% of the total angler effort directed at walleye. This fishery does not contain many large fish but does support excellent numbers. Most adult walleye average 18-21 inches. Adequate spawning conditions are not available at Philpott Reservoir so spawning fish are unsuccessful and do not provide any natural reproduction. Consequently, the walleye population is sustained with approximately 144,000 annually stocked fingerlings.

The most productive walleye fishing is from June through August. Beginning in March, walleye begin to migrate from deep winter haunts into shallower water for spawning and are typically found at depths of 15-20 feet during the daytime but may be found at depths less than five feet in the upper ends of the reservoir if the water is turbid. Spawning typically occurs in late March and the first week of April at night which brings these fish into very shallow water after dark and returning to deeper waters after daybreak. The headwaters of the reservoir above mile marker 12 near the first shallow riffles of the Smith River, Runett Bag Creek arm, and from the dam to mile marker 3 are all areas walleye congregate during the spawn.

After spawning, walleye redistribute throughout the lower nine miles of the reservoir with the highest concentrations typically within four miles of the dam. Anglers have moderate success at catching walleye in April and May. Sunfish species make up a portion of walleye diet but alewives are likely the most important part of the walleye diet. Alewives spawn at night in May and June along the shoreline at the water 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 great walleye action when alewives are spawning. Walleye often frequent water less than 2 feet deep during these dark hours. During daylight hours, fish the shoreline contour but in deeper water (15-20 ft).

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.

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 500 walleye were tagged in 2008-2009, however these tags are attached near 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 are available at the USCOE office. There is a reward for all returned tags but anglers must provide the following information to receive a reward; date and time of capture, fish length, approximate location where the fish was caught, was the walleye harvested or released, were you fishing for walleye, and how many other 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, over 80% of walleye caught at least 18" are harvested. Most walleye at Philpott Reservoir are between 18-20 inches due to angler impacts.

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. The catfish population is made up of channel catfish and white catfish and provide a limited fishery.

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