



## **Powhatan Lakes 2011**

Nestled in the northeastern corner of the Powhatan Wildlife Management Area, the Powhatan Lakes are long-time angler attractions of Powhatan County. The lakes, both between 34 and 40 acres, are contiguous impoundments of Stegers Creek. In June of 2004, a severe storm event caused breaching of both dams. After nearly four years of construction, the Powhatan Lakes were reopened in April of 2008 with some major improvements to the facility including the construction of two new fishing piers, upgrades to the boat launches, and new wildlife viewing trails. Before 2004, the lakes were well known for their quality largemouth bass, sunfish, and crappie fisheries. When the lakes refilled these species reestablished population from fish residing in Stegers Creek. Additionally, a number of F1 hybrid largemouth bass (Florida Strain Female x Northern Strain Male) and bluegill were stocked in 2008 and 2009. The fisheries have been protected under a catch and release only policy since refilling. Channel catfish are scheduled for stocking in the lake in the fall of 2011. In the spring of 2010, the fish communities of the Powhatan Lakes were sampled by boat electrofishing. This report summarizes the results of these surveys and what anglers can expect to catch in the lakes.

The fish communities of both lakes contain numerous species whose composition continues to change annually (Table 1). The management goal is to reestablish quality largemouth bass and sunfish fisheries in both lakes. Each year the largemouth bass populations continue to grow and continue to add more adult bass (Tables 1 and 2). The largemouth bass populations are well on their way to historical numbers and fish up to 20 inches have already been captured in surveys. Additionally, there have been numerous angler reports of catches of bass in the 18-20 inch range. Up until 2011, the bass have been managed under a catch and release only regulation, but this regulation is scheduled to change in the spring of 2011. This spring a protective slot of 14-22 inches will be incorporated to protect the adult bass population and allow for harvest of small bass that tend to overcrowd. Additionally, anglers will only be allowed to harvest one bass greater than 22 inches per day. These two harvest restrictions will help to build the size structure of the population and protect the quality and trophy bass that anglers historically enjoyed catching at the Powhatan Lakes.

The sunfish fisheries in both lakes are primarily composed of bluegill and pumpkinseed sunfish. Pumpkinseeds were quickly established after refilling from the resident populations in Stegers Creek. This species is prone to stunting and has limited growth potential (rarely see pumpkinseeds above 8 inches). Bluegill and redear sunfish were stocked in both lakes to establish more desirable sunfish fisheries. Sampling data indicates that bluegill are replacing pumpkinseeds as the dominant sunfish species in both lakes (Tables 1 and 2). The redear stockings have not been as successful and this species will be restocked in future years. Sunfish are becoming abundant in both lakes and numerous bluegill in excess of 10 inches have already been collected. For this reason the catch and

release regulation will be lifted and statewide regulations for sunfish will apply by the spring of 2011.

Crappie catch rates were very high, especially in the upper lake, with the entire crappie catch composed of black crappie. Although catch rates were high, the majority of crappie collected were small with all but one crappie collected measuring less than 8 inches. The one large crappie collected measured longer than 14 inches indicating potential for excellent crappie growth. In the future, more of these large fish should start appearing in the crappie population. To eliminate stunting of the crappie populations, the populations will be opened to angler harvest in the spring of 2011. The fishing piers on both lakes have sunken Christmas trees at their bases that make excellent holding and fishing locations for crappie.

The Powhatan Lakes are in close proximity to the Richmond area (< 1 hrs drive) and offer great angling opportunities to citizens of Central Virginia. The lakes offer many amenities listed above and both lakes are well on their way to establishing the historical fisheries that anglers enjoyed before the dams failed. Both lakes also offer limited fisheries for chain pickerel and bullhead catfish. Channel catfish are scheduled for stocking in 2011 to add additional fishing opportunities for anglers. Each lake offers well maintained concrete launches for trolling motor only boat access. Anglers should look for the regulation changes in the spring of 2011. Come out and enjoy the Powhatan Lakes and also take time to enjoy the rest of the Wildlife Management Area.

For more information on the Powhatan Lakes, please contact:

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Table 1. Species account and catch rates for fish collected throughout the Powhatan Lakes in 2009 and 2010.

<i>Upper Lake</i>	<b>Electrofishing 2009</b>			<b>Electrofishing 2010</b>		
<b>Species</b>	<b>Number Collected</b>	<b>Catch Rate (fish/hour electrofishing)</b>	<b>Percentage of Catch</b>	<b>Number Collected</b>	<b>Catch Rate (fish/hour electrofishing)</b>	<b>Percentage of Catch</b>
<b>Black Crappie</b>	1	1	0.6	118	96	36.3
<b>Bluegill</b>	22	20	14.3	48	39	14.8
<b>Brown Bullhead</b>	5	4	3.2	8	7	2.5
<b>Chain Pickerel</b>	2	2	1.3	9	7	2.8
<b>Channel Catfish</b>	None Collected			3	2	0.9
<b>Creek Chubsucker</b>	4	4	2.6	1	1	0.3
<b>Golden Shiner</b>	None Collected			4	3	1.2
<b>Green Sunfish</b>	4	4	2.6	5	4	1.5
<b>Largemouth Bass</b>	41	37	26.6	61	50	18.8
<b>Pumpkinseed</b>	52	47	33.8	54	44	16.6
<b>Redbreast</b>	1	1	0.6	1	1	0.3
<b>Warmouth</b>	1	1	0.6	3	2	0.9
<b>Yellow Bullhead</b>	21	19	13.6	10	8	3.1
<i>Lower Lake</i>						
<b>Black Crappie</b>	17	19	6.2	17	22	11.5
<b>Bluegill</b>	43	49	15.7	59	75	39.9
<b>Brown Bullhead</b>	19	22	6.9	5	6	3.4
<b>Creek Chubsucker</b>	32	36	11.7	8	10	5.4
<b>Golden Shiner</b>	3	3	1.1	2	3	1.4
<b>Green Sunfish</b>	9	10	3.3	1	1	0.7
<b>Largemouth Bass</b>	39	44	14.2	34	43	23.0
<b>Pumpkinseed</b>	92	104	33.6	14	18	9.5
<b>Redear</b>	None Collected			3	4	2.0
<b>Warmouth</b>	2	2	0.7	2	3	1.4
<b>Yellow Bullhead</b>	18	20	6.6	3	4	2.0

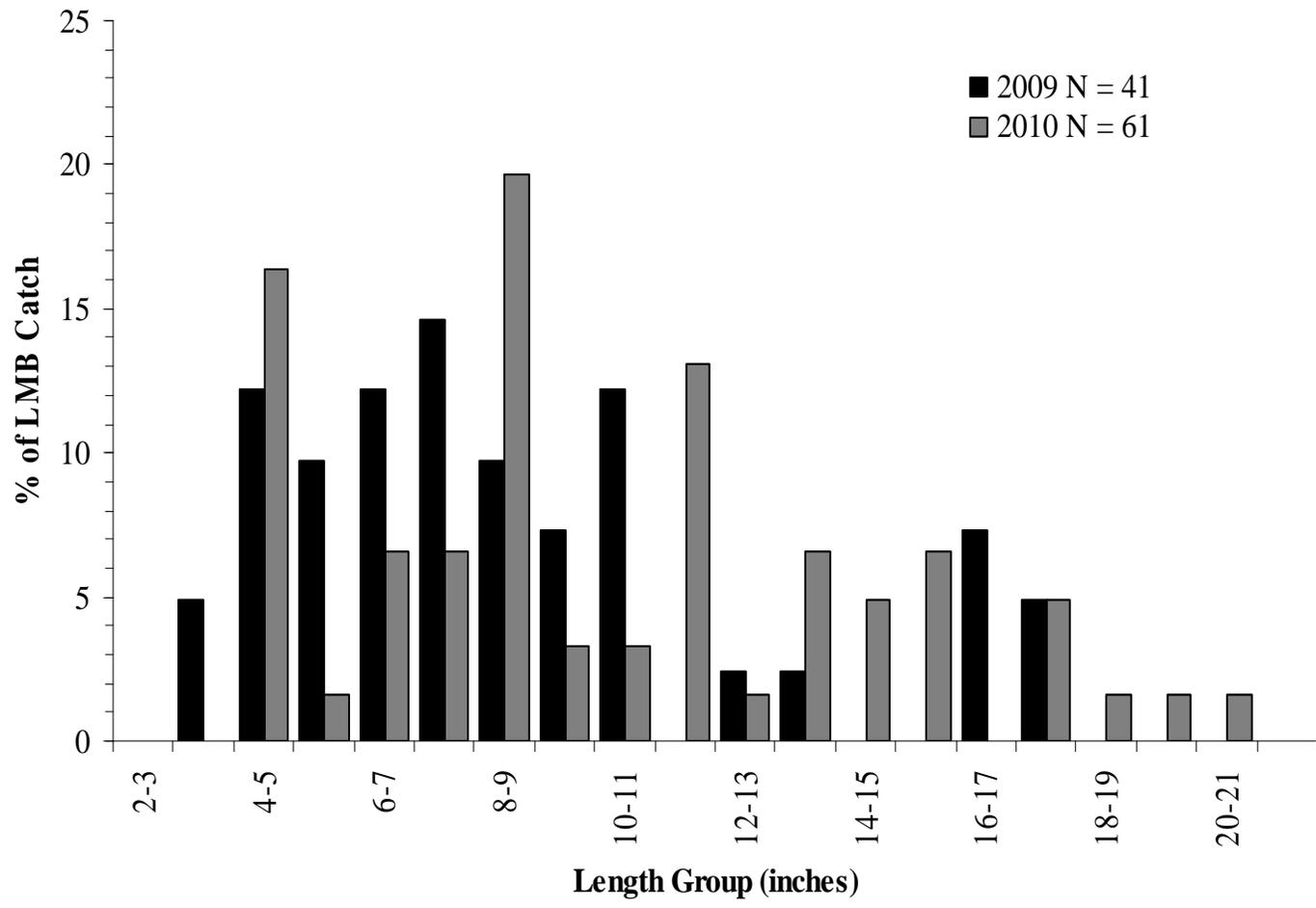


Figure 1. Length distribution of largemouth bass collected with electrofishing gear throughout Upper Powhatan.

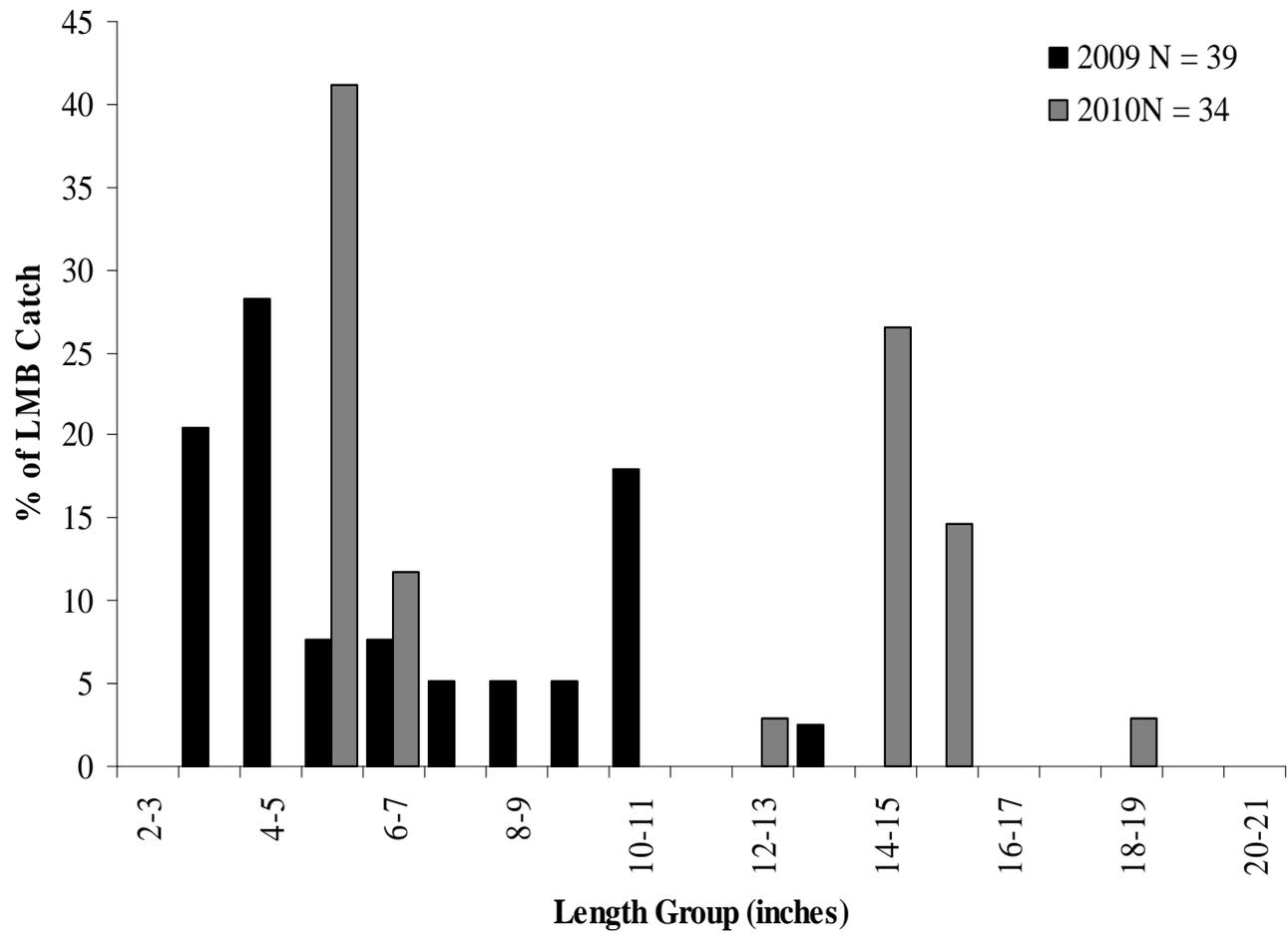


Figure 2. Length distribution of largemouth bass collected with electrofishing gear throughout Lower Powhatan.