



Lake Burton 2012 Management Report



Lake Burton is a 76-acre impoundment located in Pittsylvania County, Virginia. This reservoir is owned by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries and is managed primarily for fisheries related activities. The only facilities available at this reservoir are a boat ramp and associated parking. Bank fishing is allowed and there is a narrow strip of land that extends around the entire shoreline that can be utilized by bank anglers. The lake is open to fishing 24 hours a day. Outboard motors are prohibited but electric motor use is permitted.

The reservoir was impounded in 1950 and was stocked with various species of sportfish such as largemouth bass, bluegill, and catfish. Lake Burton is an impoundment of Tomahawk Creek and contains a number of fish species that were not originally stocked. These species were either in Tomahawk Creek prior to impoundment or were stocked by anglers. Carp, suckers, and gizzard shad are present and have caused management challenges. Small impoundments such as Lake Burton typically do not benefit from these species because they cause the sport fish populations to become unbalanced. Carp and suckers tend to keep water muddy while gizzard shad contribute to stunted sunfish populations.

Overall largemouth bass abundance is low due to poor recruitment but maintains a much higher number of bass over 18 inches than other lakes of similar size and supports one of Virginia's best trophy bass fisheries. The abundance of crappie, bluegill, and carp may be limiting spawning success and fish survival of young largemouth bass. However the surviving largemouth bass experience very good growth rates from the abundance of forage. The average size of adult bass has recently increased averaging 18 inches with the largest bass reaching 8 pounds. Largemouth bass are most abundant in the lower lake where water depths are generally more favorable.

Lake Burton is regulated with a 'trophy' largemouth bass regulation. A new regulation for largemouth bass was initiated in February of 2007. The new regulations prohibit creeling any size largemouth bass. This regulation replaced the 22 inch minimum size limit that was initiated in 2006. The new regulation is an attempt to create a trophy bass lake by protecting the limited number of fast growing largemouth bass in the population. Recent increasing angler pressure and the sudden reduction in 22 inch largemouth bass were the primary reasons for the latest regulation change. Lake Burton has been stocked for several years with Florida x Northern strain of largemouth bass on an experimental basis since reproduction had been very poor for many years. Eliminating the harvest of largemouth bass, especially larger adults, is necessary to maintain this trophy fishery.

Population estimates for trophy largemouth bass is limited. Estimates in 2006 for largemouth 20 inches or larger is only 24 fish and 9 fish 21 inches or larger for the entire lake. If anglers only harvest a small number of big fish from this reservoir it could easily prohibit this reservoir from ever achieving its potential. More recent sampling has not provided the data for population estimates but has indicated the number of large bass continues to increase.

White and black crappie are both present at Lake Burton. White crappie were the dominant species probably due to the turbid water that had been typical during the spring and is preferred by white crappie for optimal reproduction. However, black crappie are now more prevalent possibly due to more recent clearer water in the spring which favors black crappie reproduction over white crappie. Both species generally experience very poor growth. For good growth, crappie must convert primarily to a fish diet by the time they reach 6-7 inches. Since these fish appear to be too abundant, their growth stops when they reach approximately seven inches. It is very common for crappie to be overabundant and stop growing at this size. When this happens they do not die from lack of food, they just stop growing. Occasionally large crappie are caught but this is the exception with most crappie hovering around 7 inches but the size structure has recently been improving and shows signs of developing into a much better fishery in the future.

Bluegill are abundant and experience slow growth. The overabundant bluegill population is a result of insufficient predation by largemouth bass which also utilize gizzard shad as forage. Adequate predation from largemouth bass is needed to maintain healthy sunfish populations. In addition, gizzard shad and carp can compete directly for the same forage as bluegill. Most bluegill at Lake Burton does not exceed 6 inches.

Turbid water and an abundance of undesirable fish species have resulted in an unbalanced fishery. The highlight of this fishery is the high number of largemouth bass over 18 inches. However, these fish may be hard to catch due to the large quantity of forage.

This reservoir is located west of Chatham and can be accessed by taking one of two routes. From Rt. 40 turn left onto Rt. 799 then turn right onto 649 at Climax then turn then turn left onto Rt. 750 and then turn right onto Rt. 800 and the lake entrance will be on your left. Coming in on Rt. 57 from Climax turn right onto Rt. 750 and then turn left onto Rt. 800 and the lake entrance will be on your left.