



Walnut Creek Reservoir 2007



A recent addition to the many fine Albemarle County parks and lakes, 45-acre Walnut Creek Lake was impounded in 1990 and is the primary attraction at Walnut Creek Park. The lake has populations of largemouth bass, bluegill, crappie, redear sunfish, and channel catfish. Although the lake bottom was cleared of trees prior to impoundment, fish attractors have been added at several locations. In addition to fishing, the lake provides other family-oriented recreational activities including swimming, canoeing, and picnicking. The county has provided excellent parking and ramp facilities for accessing the lake.

A 12-15-inch slot limit was implemented for largemouth bass in the 1990's to try build and maintain an adequate spawning stock. In addition, regulations stipulate that only one bass longer than 15 inches can be harvested per day. Supplemental stockings of bluegill and redear sunfish were also made at that time to bolster weak populations. These measures appeared to have helped somewhat based on sampling done in 2000.

The lake was sampled using electrofishing during April, 2006 to evaluate fish community status. Catch rates for all sizes of bass were two to three times those of the sampling in 2000. However, they were relatively small on average; only five exceeded 13 inches. In addition, bass body condition was a little thinner than preferable.

The combined numbers of bluegill and redear sunfish in the sample barely exceeded the total numbers of bass. Because these species comprise the primary forage for bass, a balanced community would contain many more sunfish. A few of the sunfish were eight inches in length. A few black crappie and, for the first time ever, green sunfish were collected. No catfish were collected though they are stocked annually. However, electrofishing is not typically a good method for collecting them in lakes.

Based on the relatively low abundance of quality size bass, the low overall abundance of sunfish, the below average body condition of all species, and the water clarity (indicating a low abundance of plankton), it appears that water fertility is limiting the potential of this fishery. There was no evidence that the slot limit was causing stockpiling of bass. In fact, there were not a lot of bass in the slot, so it is recommended that this regulation remain in effect. There are a few large fish of each species present, but anglers will have to temper their expectations for this lake.