



## Briery Creek Lake 2013

Located just seven miles south of Farmville Virginia, Briery Creek Lake is an 845-acre impoundment owned by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries and is within the Briery Creek Wildlife Management Area. Briery Creek Lake was impounded in 1986 and was stocked with Florida strain largemouth bass, northern strain largemouth bass, bluegill, redear sunfish (shellcrackers), channel catfish, and crappie. Timber in the floodplain was left standing or was drumchopped resulting in an abundance of habitat for largemouth bass and crappie. Biologists hoped that the presence of the Florida strain largemouth bass and the complex habitat would produce a high quality largemouth bass fishery. The lake was opened to fishing on January 1, 1989 with an 18-inch minimum length limit and two fish/day creel limit on largemouth bass. Early production of largemouth bass was excellent and the regulation was changed to a 12 – 15 inch slot limit (5/day) on January 1, 1991 to allow anglers to harvest the abundant smaller bass. By the end of the 1990's, Briery Creek Lake became the premier trophy largemouth bass fishery in the state. Approximately 90 trophy largemouth bass are entered into the Angler Recognition Program each year and the state record was nearly broken again in April 2002 (16 pounds, 2 ounces). Anglers from across the state (and across the country) were coming to Briery each spring in search of a trophy largemouth bass. As the pressure on this fishery increased, the length limit was again changed in 2001 to a 14-24 inch slot limit (no fish may be kept between 14 and 24 inches). The daily creel limit remained at 5 fish but only one fish can be longer than 24 inches. In order to encourage harvest of some smaller largemouth bass and to reduce competition for food for trophy largemouth, the regulation was again changed in 2013 to a 16-24 inch slot limit. The daily creel limit remained 5 fish per day with only one longer than 24 inches.

*The upper end of the slot limit is two inches larger than the minimum length for largemouth bass in Virginia's Angler Recognition Program. Anglers who catch fish that meet the minimum for this program (22 inches) but are within the protected slot may still participate in the ARP by having the fish certified by length (either verified by a witness or taking a photo of the fish next to a measuring tape).*

Biologists sample Briery Creek Lake each spring with an electrofishing boat to monitor the fish populations (abundance, size structure, growth, survival). Largemouth bass are abundant, have a balanced size structure (meaning a good balance of young 'recruits' and adults), and historically grew fairly well. In recent years growth rates have declined for a couple of reasons. First, reservoir aging and associated vegetation have reduced nutrient levels available to support a vigorous food chain. Second, largemouth bass virus (LMBV) has been detected in Briery Creek Lake. LMBV is often associated with reduced growth rates and higher mortality of largemouth bass, especially the larger individuals in the population. Fortunately largemouth bass do build up

a resistance to the disease and populations do recover in several years. Fishing will suffer in the short term but we are confident that it will rebound over the next few years.

Since 1999, biologists have also relied on creel survey data to provide information on the condition of the fish populations at the lake and it is here that we are able to monitor the trophy fishery. During creel surveys, anglers are interviewed as they leave the lake and asked things like how long they fished, what they caught, and what they harvested. It is also a great opportunity for biologists to get information on angler attitudes and opinions and determine what they would like to see done with the fishery. The ability to talk to several hundred anglers each spring has been instrumental in fisheries management at Briery Creek Lake. Here are some highlights from the creel surveys conducted from 1999-2012:

- Fishing pressure is highest in March, April and May.
- Most anglers (75%) at Briery Creek Lake fish for trophy largemouth bass.
- Catch rates for largemouth bass are highest in the summer but the success for trophy largemouth bass is highest in the spring.
- Angler catch rates have not declined even with LMBV present in the system.
- Bluegill and redear sunfish catch rates were highest from late April through June. Anglers had success at this time of year fishing with live bait such as worms and crickets.
- Bluegill and redear sunfish in the 8 – 11 inch range are common making Briery Creek Lake one of the better sunfish lakes in Southside Virginia.
- The crappie fishery is good but success is seasonal. Crappie tend to be caught mostly in the spring although some anglers can find them in the trees during the summer. Several 2-pound fish are caught each year but the average size of crappie harvested is about 11 inches.
- Anglers from across Virginia fish at Briery Creek Lake. Additionally, anglers from 10-15 states come to fish Briery Creek Lake each year.

The VDGIF is committed to maintaining Briery Creek Lake as the state's premier trophy largemouth bass fishery. Although the lake has experienced a recent decline in the largemouth bass fishery we are hopeful that the downturn will be short lived.

Access at Briery Creek Lake is excellent. There are two boat launch facilities (Routes 790 and 701) that have concrete ramps, courtesy piers, restroom facilities, and paved parking. A handicapped fishing pier is located at the end of Route 790 (near the dam). Gas motors up to 10 HP are permitted. The lake opens to boat traffic one-hour before sunrise and closes one-hour after sunset.