



Staunton River Report 2014

From Leesville Dam downstream to the headwaters of Kerr Reservoir, the Staunton River offers 81 miles of diverse fishing opportunities. Over the past 30 years or so the Staunton River fishery has undergone some striking changes based on the flow regime from Leesville Reservoir. Peaking flows were discontinued in 1988 and the fisheries undoubtedly benefited from the stabilized flow regime. Various fish populations have rebounded in the past two decades and the change in flow regime is almost certainly responsible for the improvement. Forty-four species of fish were sampled in the last Staunton River fishery survey! In 1975, 11 miles of the Staunton from Long Island to Brookneal were designated as a scenic river in Virginia. That designation was extended from Brookneal further downstream to the Route 360 Bridge in 2001 and now totals 51.3 miles.

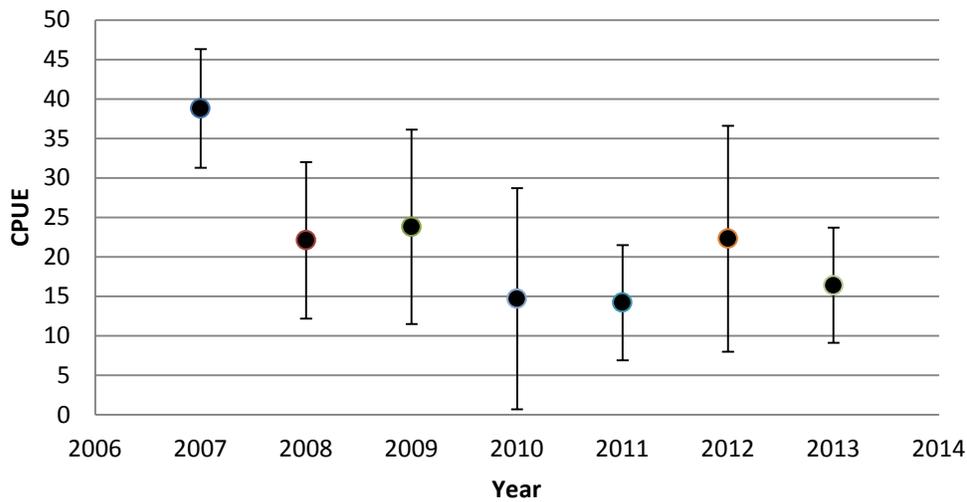
This 81 mile reach of river has two fairly distinct sections based on habitat availability. The area from Leesville Dam to Brookneal has a higher gradient and a better ratio of riffles:runs:pools. For anglers, this equates to excellent habitat for Smallmouth Bass and Walleye. The Leesville Dam tailrace offers some of the best Walleye fishing in Virginia but fish can be found throughout this reach. The Smallmouth Bass fishing is excellent as well, with trophy fish a real possibility. Channel Catfish and Flathead Catfish are found in high abundances in this reach as well. Channel Catfish are collected in greater abundances in the Staunton River than any other river in the state so anglers can anticipate good catch rates. While not as abundant, large Flathead Catfish are found throughout the entire reach.

From Brookneal downstream to its confluence with the Dan River, the Staunton River has less rocky habitat, is wider and has a predominantly sandy bottom. Habitat is abundant along the river banks in the form of fallen trees. Black bass (Smallmouth, Largemouth and Spotted Bass) are still found in this area but densities are generally lower than the upper section. Catfish are still abundant and anglers will have a better chance of catching Blue Catfish below Brookneal than they do above. During the spring, this section of the Staunton River is full of Striped Bass making their spawning run out of Kerr Reservoir. Angling during this time of year in the river for Striped Bass is a great way for fishermen to catch a species that for most of the year is found in deep water of Kerr Reservoir.

Biologists monitor the fish populations in the Staunton River with electrofishing in the fall each year. All species are collected and measured but Smallmouth Bass tend to be the focus of these samples. Biologists track year class strength (how good or bad the spawn was that year), size structure, growth and mortality with data collected from electrofishing surveys. Additionally,

most of the rivers in the state are compared to give biologists a better perspective of the smallmouth populations across the state.

Smallmouth Bass in the Staunton River are generally found in lower abundance compared to other rivers in the state. However, growth and survival are above average and this leads to a fishery where anglers can expect lower than normal catch rates but higher than average size fish. The figure below displays Smallmouth Bass catch rates from 2007 to 2013 sample data. CPUE reflects the number of bass sampled by DGIF biologists in one hour of sampling effort. Average catch over this time period is 21.7 fish/hour so the most recent survey year is below average for the Staunton River. Smallmouth Bass in all rivers exhibit years of good reproduction and years of bad reproduction. Research conducted by VDGIF staff has indicated that flow rate in June is an indicator of year class strength. Too much or too little flow in June can impact that whole year class of bass.



Angler surveys on the Staunton River show that most Staunton anglers come from nearby and that the spring, Striped Bass fishery is very important to them. The main reasons they fished the Staunton were this close proximity to home and also the quality of the fishery. Anglers spent most of their time fishing for the catfish species in the river and angler effort for Striped Bass and Smallmouth Bass tied for second. Other species targeted and detected in the survey included sunfish, Walleye, and White Perch. Catch rates were highest for Striped Bass with over one fish caught per hour in 2013 (1.14 fish/hour caught). Catfish and Smallmouth Bass catch rates were also good with just under one fish per hour caught. This doesn't sound like a lot of fish caught but this relates well with other river systems in Virginia. The most often harvested fish species in the Staunton were catfish and Walleye.

Canoe and boater access is somewhat limited on the Staunton River. Currently, ramps are located at Altavista, Long Island, Brookneal, Clarkton, Watkins Bridge, U.S. 360, and Staunton River State Park. The following table details float distances and estimated duration via canoe.

River segment	Distance (miles)	Duration (hours)
Altavista – Long Island	19.8	12-20
Long Island - Brookneal	11.0	5-8
Brookneal - Clarkton	6.6	4-6
Clarkton – Watkins Bridge	22.0	12-20
Watkins Bridge – US 360	8.9	5-10
US 360 – Staunton River State Park	12.3	10-14

Most of these floats would make for a long day on a canoe excursion but other private river access is present on the Staunton. Obviously, landowner permission is necessary to use these sites. An additional canoe launch is located on Roanoke Creek near Randolph adjacent to the Staunton River Battlefield Park (not to be confused with Staunton River State Park). With Park assistance, this access site can help to break up the distance between Watkins Bridge and US 360 access sites. For information on the location and use of this site please contact the park at 434-454-4312. For more information on public boat launches please visit the following site:

<http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/fishing/waterbodies/display.asp?id=175§ion=maps>

Anglers should also be aware of fish consumption advisories before harvesting fish. However, just because a species may have a consumption advisory imposed does not mean that recreational fishing is diminished.

<http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/fishing/regulations/advisories.asp>