



Lake Burton 2020 Management Report

Lake Burton is a 76-acre impoundment located in Pittsylvania County, Virginia. Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) owns and manages the lake primarily for fisheries related activities. The only facilities available at this reservoir are a boat ramp and associated parking. There is limited bank fishing area next to the boat ramp but bank fishing is permissible along the narrow strip of DWR property that extends around the entire shoreline. The lake is open to fishing 24 hours a day. Outboard motor use is prohibited but boats with outboard motors are allowed as long as outboard motors are not started. Electric motor use is legal.

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 not originally stocked. These species either were in Tomahawk Creek prior to impoundment or stocked by anglers. White perch, 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 tend to keep water muddy while gizzard shad contribute to stunted sunfish populations.

Overall largemouth bass abundance is lower than most small lakes 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, white perch, and carp limit spawning success and 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 is very good, averaging 17 inches with the largest bass reaching 9 pounds. Largemouth bass are most abundant in the lower two thirds of the lake where water depths are generally more favorable.

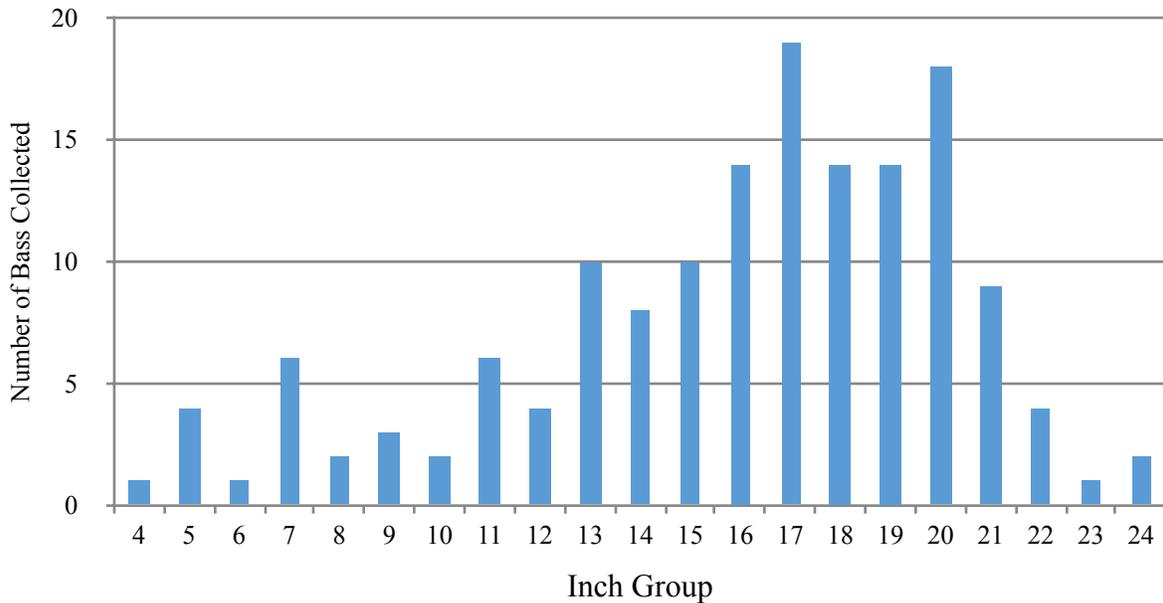


Figure 1. Largemouth bass collected during 2020 electrofishing survey.

Lake Burton is regulated with a ‘trophy’ largemouth bass regulation. This largemouth bass regulation was initiated in February of 2007 and prohibits the creeling of any size largemouth bass. The regulation is an attempt to maintain the trophy bass population by protecting the limited number of fast growing largemouth bass in the population. Lake Burton was 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. Prior to the stocking, the bass were already a genetic mix of Florida and Northern bass, so the stocking closely matched bass that were already in the lake. Eliminating the harvest of largemouth bass, especially larger adults, is necessary to maintain this trophy fishery.

Although the total number of larger bass is not high when compared to some much larger lakes, Lake Burton does have a high density of big bass, containing more per acre of water than any other Virginia public lake. Extensive sampling conducted in 2016 to estimate the number of bass in the entire lake, provided an estimate of 88 bass 20 inches and larger. However, only 24 were citation size and only 6 of those were 23-24 inches. If anglers only harvest a small number of these big fish, it could easily prohibit this lake from maintaining a trophy population.

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 during the spring spawning period which favors black crappie reproduction over white crappie. Both species generally experienced very poor growth at Lake Burton. For good growth,

crappie must convert primarily to a fish diet by the time they reach 6-7 inches. Since these fish are too abundant, most grow very slow after reaching seven inches. When this happens they do not die from lack of food, they just stop growing. Occasionally anglers catch a large crappie but this is an exception since the crappie numbers decline dramatically after 8 inches. However, the number of crappie has been declining and the general size structure has been improving, showing signs of developing into a much better fishery.

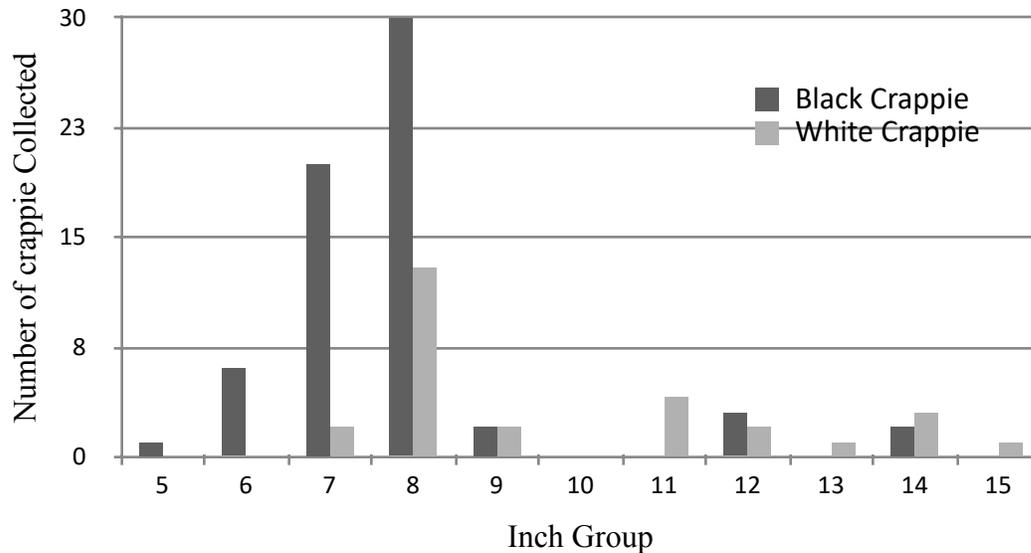


Figure 2. Crappie collected during 2020 electrofishing survey.

Bluegill are abundant but are slow growing. 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 required to maintain a healthy and faster growing sunfish population. In addition, gizzard shad and carp do compete directly for the same forage as bluegill. Most bluegill at Lake Burton do not exceed 6 inches.

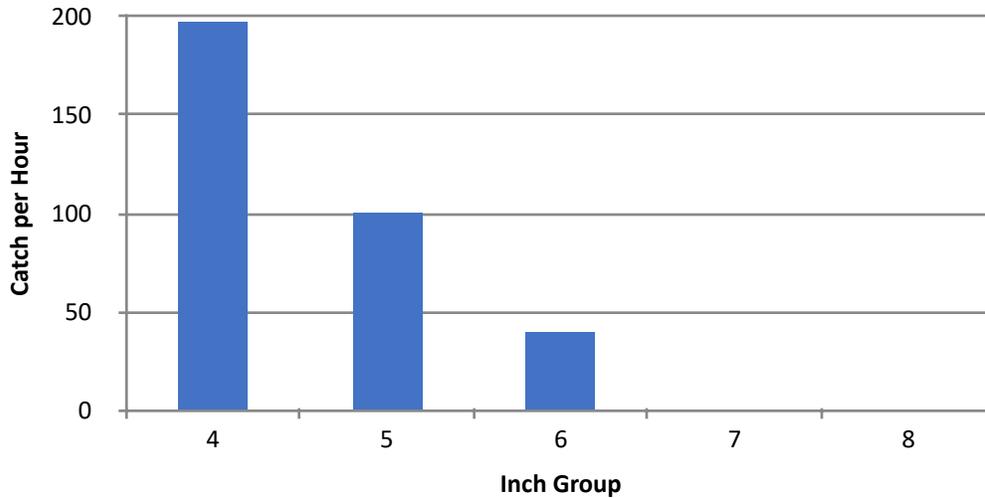


Figure 3. Bluegill collected during 2020 electrofishing survey.

Turbid water and an abundance of undesirable fish species have resulted in an unbalanced fishery but has provided excellent bass growth and the fish populations are becoming more balanced in recent years. The overcrowded sunfish population is not desirable for sunfish enthusiasts but is desirable to sustain good bass growth. 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 available 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, turn right onto 649 in Climax, turn left onto Rt. 750, 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, turn left onto Rt. 800 and the lake entrance will be on your left.