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2024 Walleye Fishing Forecast



Walleye fishing opportunities in Virginia should be plentiful in 2024 to allow angler a chance at catching this popular fish species. The collaborative efforts between VDWR fisheries biologists and hatchery staff allow for the propagation of Walleye. Walleye brood stock are collected from the New River, Staunton River, and South Holston Reservoir each spring. Collections are typically during late February to mid-March to coincide with the spawning runs of each system. Walleye spawned or hatched at Vic Thomas, Front Royal, King and Queen, and Buller Fish Cultural Stations, are raised in ponds until they are about 1.5 to 2 inches in length. Ponds are harvested and Walleye fingerlings are stocked in locations across the state. Additionally, female Walleye are crossed with male Sauger to produce the hybrid Saugeye. Saugeye perform well in some systems and are stocked with or in place of Walleye. In 2023, VDWR stocked

approximately 1,781,500 Walleye and Saugeye fingerlings into 19 selected waters. VDWR hatcheries had a banner year of production in 2023 and surpassed the 2022 stocking of 1,166,345 fingerlings. Anglers should expect good Walleye and Saugeye fishing in the near future from the 2023-year class of stocked fish. The following table lists some of the lakes and rivers recently stocked and provides a rating of the population as either “Excellent” (an abundant population), “Good” (decent numbers), or “Fair” (a few). For those anglers who want more in depth information on a particular water what follows are specific reports of Walleye sampling results and fishing details for the individual waters listed in the table. Anglers who want the challenge of catching Walleye or Saugeye should fish one of the locations in this forecast.

Regional breakdown of stocked waters with ratings of each Walleye/Saugeye population

Region	Waterbody	Impoundment Size (acres)	Rating
Southwest Virginia	New River		Excellent
	Flannagan Reservoir	1,143	Excellent
	South Holston Lake	7,580	Excellent
	Hungry Mother Lake	108	Good
South Central Virginia	Staunton River		Excellent
	Philpott Reservoir	2,800	Good
	Leesville Lake	3,400	Fair
Northern Virginia	Shenandoah River		Good
	Lake Anna	9,600	Excellent
	Lake Brittle	77	Good
	Burke Lake	218	Good
	Lake Orange	124	Fair
Eastern Virginia	Lake Chesdin	3,100	Excellent
	Lake Whitehurst	458	Fair
	Little Creek Reservoir	947	Fair

Southwest Virginia

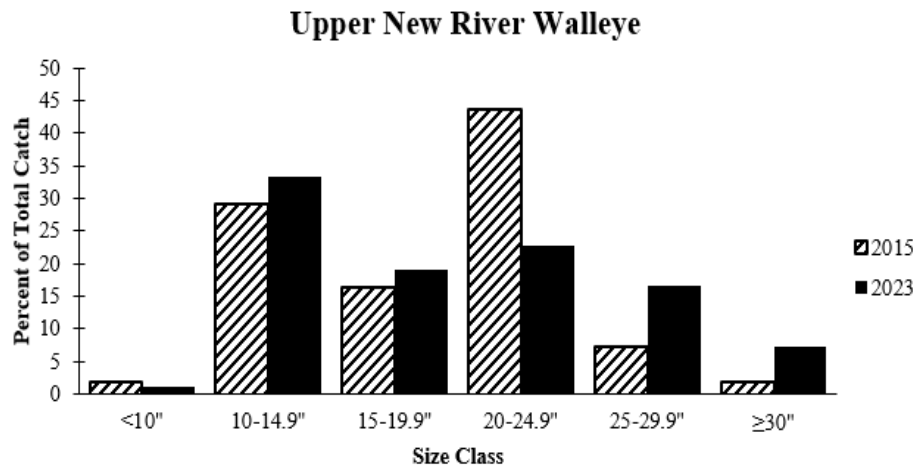
Upper New River



One of the larger female Walleye collected from the New River in 2023.

The New River in southwest Virginia has a unique genetic strain of native Walleye. Since the early 2000's the VDWR has been working to conserve this unique fishery through stocking efforts. These efforts have led to an increase in catch rates for both anglers and biologists, specifically over the last 10 years. Past stocking efforts have focused on areas from Allisonia to Buck Dam. Anglers have reported good catch rates of smaller fish 12-20" and fish greater than 28" in these areas. However, in good production years when excess fish are available, fish have also been stocked below Fries Dam creating a good fishery in the Byllesby pool. Most Walleye in the Upper New River are caught between February- April. Hot spots include Foster Falls, Ivanhoe, Route 100, Fries Dam, and Allisonia on the Upper New and Below Claytor Dam on the Lower New. The Upper New has a protected slot limit in place for Walleye. Anglers can harvest 2 fish per day year-round however, no fish 19-28" can be kept above Claytor Dam upstream to

Fries Dam in Grayson County. This regulation was enacted to help protect spawning size fish while also giving anglers the option to potentially harvest fish.



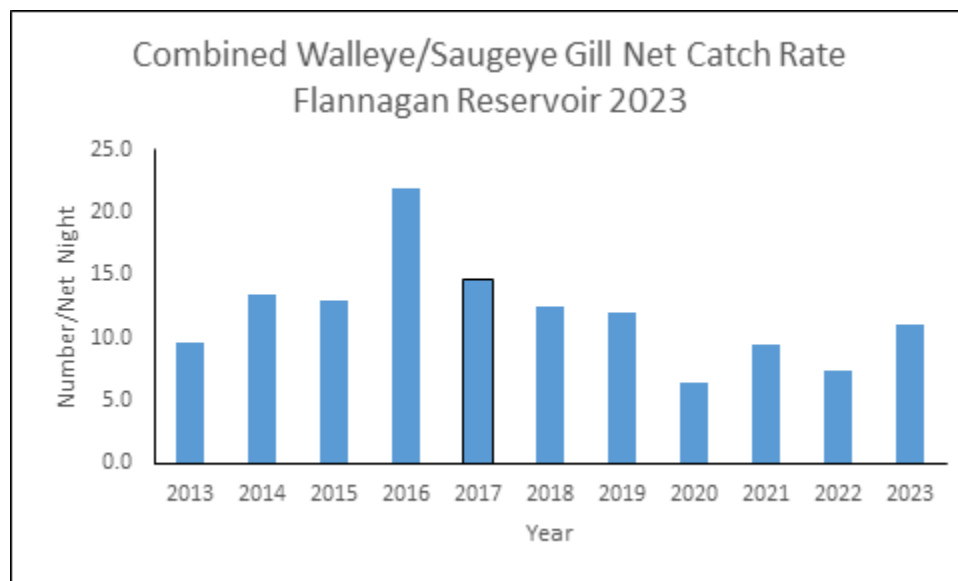
This graph shows the differences in size class catches from spring electrofishing in 2015 vs 2023. In 2015 less than 10% of fish collected were above 25" compared to almost 25% in 2023. We also see over 50% of the total catch in 2023 is less than 20" which suggests that stocked fish continue to recruit into the fishery, and we have less year class fluctuations due to VDWR's stocking efforts.



Flannagan Reservoir

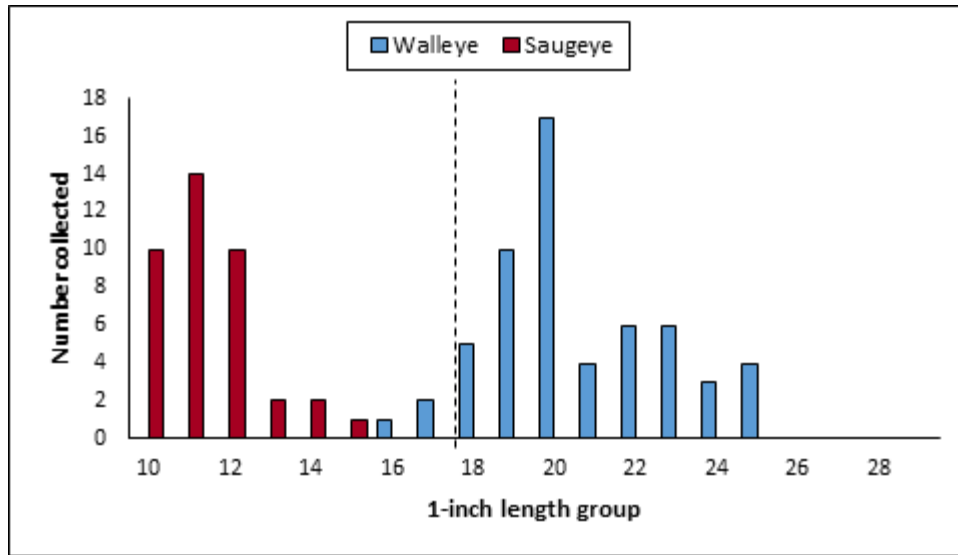
Fishing for Walleye on Flannagan Reservoir may continue to be somewhat challenging for anglers in 2024, but with stockings reaching or exceeding stocking recommendation, there are several age classes that should be reaching harvestable size. VDWR biologists use the catch rate of Walleye in annual gill nets samples as a measure of the relative abundance of this species in the lake. The attached graph shows the combined catch rate of Walleye and Saugeye (measured as the number collected per net set overnight) from 2012 – 2021. The catch rate in 2023 (11.1 /net night) represented a 33% increase in relative abundance compared to 2022 (7.4 /net night). It is an 8% decline from the 10-year average (12.0 /net night). This slight decline over the 10-year average can largely be attributed to missed stocking cohorts in 2016 and 2018 which were a result of insufficient hatchery production. Flannagan also received a reduced stocking rate in 2019 and 2021 due to some of the same issues. These age classes have

historically made up a substantial proportion of the sample, so their absence is reflected in the lower relative abundance observed. Fortunately, the full allocation of Walleye was stocked in Flannagan Reservoir in 2019. In 2022 Flannagan received a full allocation of Walleye with the addition of Saugeye. In 2023 Flannagan received its full allocation as Saugeye. Saugeye are similar to Walleye and serve as a fill in when the production of Walleye does not reach the states allocations. Anglers should start to see increased number of fish due to the full stockings in 2019, 2022, and 2023.



Historical catch rates of Walleye and Saugeye collected from Flannagan Reservoir from 2013 to 2023.

Walleye observed in the 2023 sample ranged from 16 – 25 inches in length with an average length of 21 inches and Saugeye ranged from 13 - 19 inches in length with an average length of 15 inches (see attached graph). Fifty-seven percent of the combined Walleye and Saugeye adult fish collected were ≥ 18 inches and 38% exceeded 20 inches in length. So, although the overall number of Walleye and Saugeye are down, the majority of fish out there are of harvestable-size (18 inches or greater) and should provide anglers with a good opportunity.



Length frequency distribution of Walleye and Saugeye collected during the fall gill net survey of Flannagan Reservoir.

Many anglers target Walleye on the Cranesnest and Pound River arms of Flannagan Reservoir during the spawning run in March through April. However, anglers can also be very successful throwing top-water lures at night in May through early June, which coincides with the Alewife spawn. As the season progresses and water temperatures increase, the Walleye will move deeper in the lake. This will require anglers to switch tactics and troll nightcrawler harnesses and crankbaits.

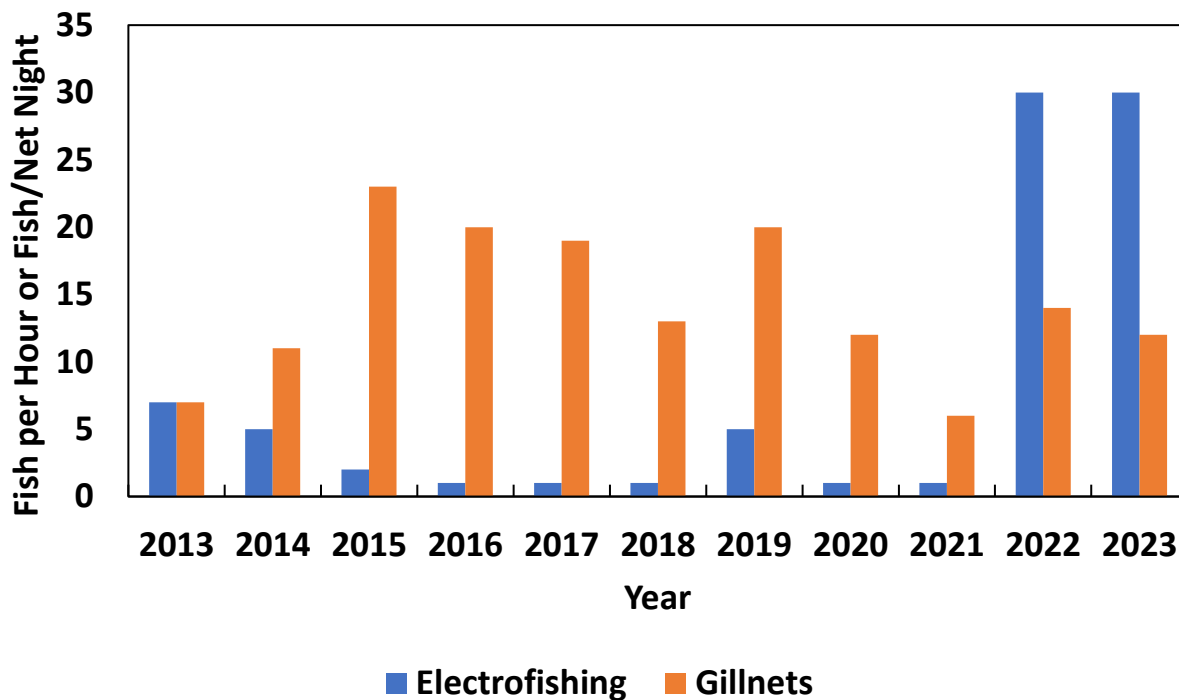
South Holston Lake

Anglers visiting South Holston Lake in 2024 should experience excellent Walleye fishing as the population continues to rebound. Sampling during 2023, including both electrofishing and gillnetting, remained similar to 2022 with a desirable size structure with most adult Walleye collected larger than 18 inches. Electrofishing catch rates during spring 2023 were 30 fish/hr. which was like 2022 and well above the long-term average (7 fish/hr.), while the 2023 gillnet catch rate decreased to 12 fish per net and was at the long-term average (12 fish/net night). Winter gillnet surveys provide a more complete picture of the Walleye population at South Holston Lake in terms of population densities, growth rates, and survival of stocked fingerlings. A reduced stocking in 2016 of 42,640 Walleye fingerlings due to hatchery production issues resulted in a missing year class, which is corroborated by our sampling efforts. However, anglers should still enjoy the current state of the fishery as the population has quickly rebuilt due to more consistent stockings.

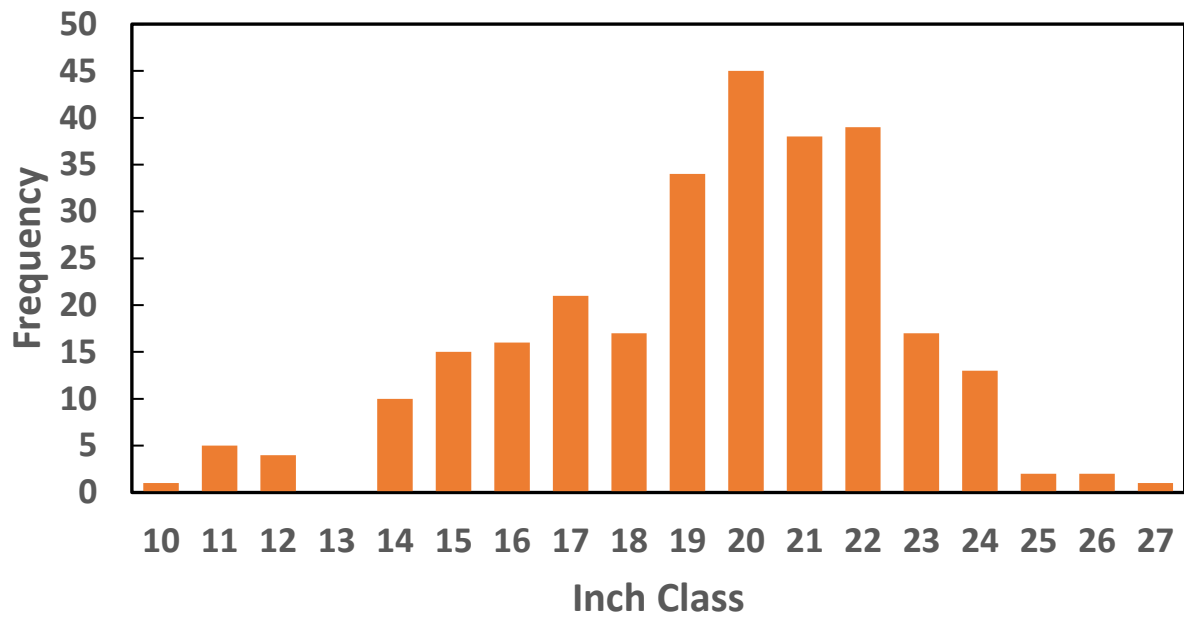
Anglers can expect average fishing during the spring spawning “run” on the South Fork Holston River due to a reduced but building lake population. Anglers congregate near the community of Alvarado from February through April to catch Walleye on the spring spawning “run”. During May and June, anglers find Walleyes feeding along the shorelines of the lake. The post spawn top water bite in the lower lake will yield the best Walleye fishing Virginia has to

offer. When Walleyes move deeper during the summer months, successful anglers troll crawler harnesses on lead core line or use jigging spoons to reach the depths. Fall and winter fishing call for jigging spoons or jigs and live minnows.

Walleye growth is outstanding, so anglers should find plenty of fish larger than the minimum size of 18 inches. Most Walleye exceed 10 inches in their first year and measure 15 to 18 inches in their second year. Walleye generally reach 20 inches by their third year. Walleye growth slows after age four and males seldom exceed 24 or 25 inches in length, while females may reach lengths of 30 inches or more.



Sampling catch rates for Walleye in South Holston Reservoir 2013-2023. Blue columns represent spring electrofishing catch rates (fish per hour) and orange columns represent fall gillnet catch rates (fish per net).



The current size structure of Walleye collected during sampling in 2023 (see graph above) shows that anglers can expect to find walleye up to 27 inches, with the bulk of legal fish (18 inches) ranging from 19 to 22 inches.



Hungry Mother Lake

This 108-acre lake provides anglers with a great opportunity to catch Walleyes in a small lake setting. Located in Hungry Mother State Park, the lake is also a great destination for families. The Walleye population is stable or slightly increasing. There are good numbers of fish up to 20 inches and just enough larger ones to cause anglers to lose some sleep this summer. Walleyes up to 28 inches in length have been landed in recent years. April, May, and June are the three best months, with night fishing generally being more productive. Most anglers use artificial lures, but live shad, minnows, and night crawlers are also very effective.

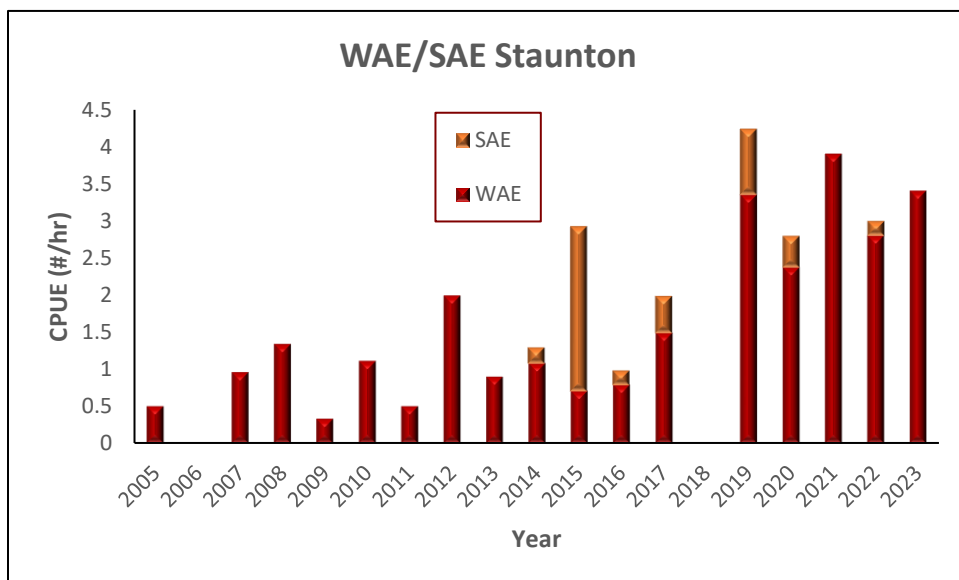
South Central Virginia

Staunton River

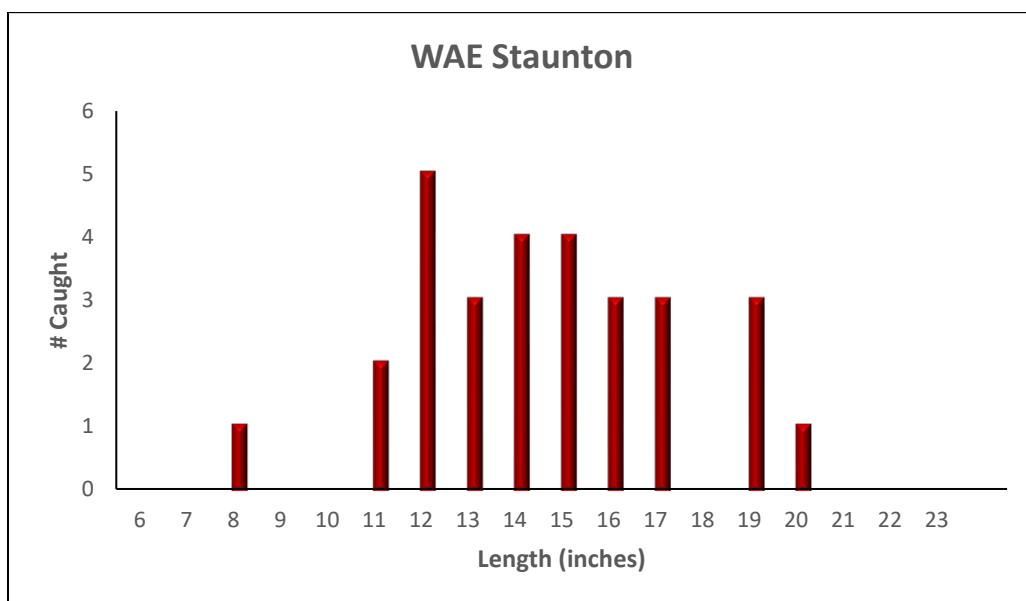


Walleye fishing has really taken off in the Staunton River, especially from Leesville dam to Altavista. Quality Walleye are now consistently being caught and sampled all the way to Brookneal. Fingerling and fry stockings into the Staunton historically resulted in limited success. Fortunately, recent stockings of Walleye into Leesville Reservoir have been much more successful, and anglers are reaping the rewards. A portion of the Walleye stocked into Leesville Reservoir pass through the dam and provide a boost to the Staunton fishery. The first figure below shows how VDWR sampling success, measured by the number of fish collected per hour (CPUE), with fall electrofishing surveys has improved over time. Saugeye, a Walleye x Sauger hybrid, which were stocked for three years when Walleye were unavailable, dominated the 2015 sample but now Walleye densities are improving, and anglers are

seeing good creels of Walleye. Few Saugeye remain in the population, and none were collected in fall electrofishing samples in the Staunton in 2021 or 2023.



The second figure shows the lengths and numbers of Walleye sampled in fall electrofishing surveys. The largest fish sampled in 2023 was a 20-inch Walleye but larger individuals are certainly found in the river. Several 18 to 20-inch Walleye were collected and will provide excellent action for those anglers looking for a late winter, early spring fishery. Remember that the legal minimum length limit is 18 inches and five fish can be harvested per day. For information on catching Walleye in the Staunton please view our video at the following link. <https://dwr.virginia.gov/blog/staunton-river-walleye-fishing/>



Another benefit of the stockings in the Roanoke/Staunton watershed is a boost in the Walleye fishery at Kerr Reservoir. While they're still hard to target in this 50,000 acre reservoir, the opportunity to catch Walleye is improving each year. Good Walleye numbers are seen mid-lake around Goat Island in the fall and winter months but uplake fishing should be good in early spring.

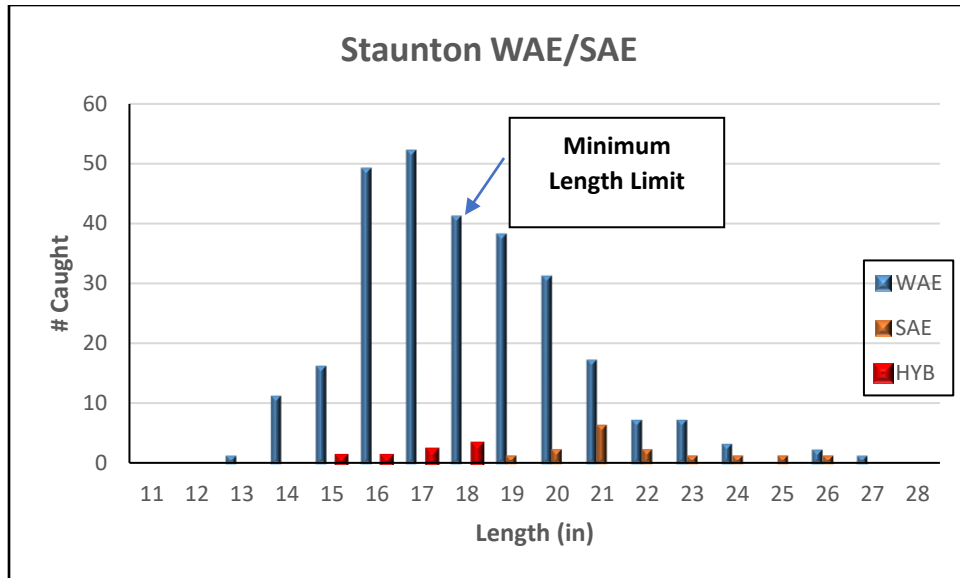
Exploitation Study

A tag reward study was performed in the Staunton River system from 2020-2023 to assess the extent of angler exploitation of the Walleye/Saugeye fishery.

Year	% Capture	Corrected % Capture	% Harvest	% Card Return
2020	10	15	24	67
2021	13	19	49	67
2022	5	6	67	83
2023	11	23	36	47
AVG	10	16	44	66

In 2020, 260 Walleye and 40 Saugeye were tagged for a total of 300 reward tags. Of those 300, 50 were released into Leesville Lake to determine fishing pressure in the reservoir. Thirty tags were returned in 2020 for an exploitation or catch rate of 10% (corrected to 15% due to non-reporting bias). In 2021, 300 additional tags were placed in Walleye (290) and Saugeye (10) with 50 again going into Leesville Lake. Forty tags were returned in 2021 for an exploitation rate of 13% (corrected to 19% due to non-reporting bias). As in 2020 and 2021, 300 tags were placed in Walleye (282) and Saugeye (18) with 50 going into Leesville Lake in 2022. Fourteen tags were returned in 2022 for an exploitation rate of 5% (corrected to 6% due to non-reporting bias). Finally, in 2023 298 additional tags were placed in Walleye (276), Saugeye (15), and hybrids (7). No fish were transported to Leesville in 2023. Thirty-three tags were returned in 2023 for an uncorrected capture rate of 11% (23% when corrected for not-reporting). These results indicate that this fishery had consistent fishing pressure for the four years of the study. There was a decline in 2022 for unknown reasons but the percent of tagged fish returned changed very little with an average, corrected, capture rate of 16%. Only four tags from fish moved up to Leesville Reservoir were returned. Three of those were caught from the river meaning those fish passed through the dam and one was caught in the reservoir itself.

The final figure shows the size and density of Walleye and Saugeye tagged in 2023. We are beginning to detect Walleye X Saugeye hybrids (HYB) in the population. Hopefully they will not become a significant portion of the overall population.

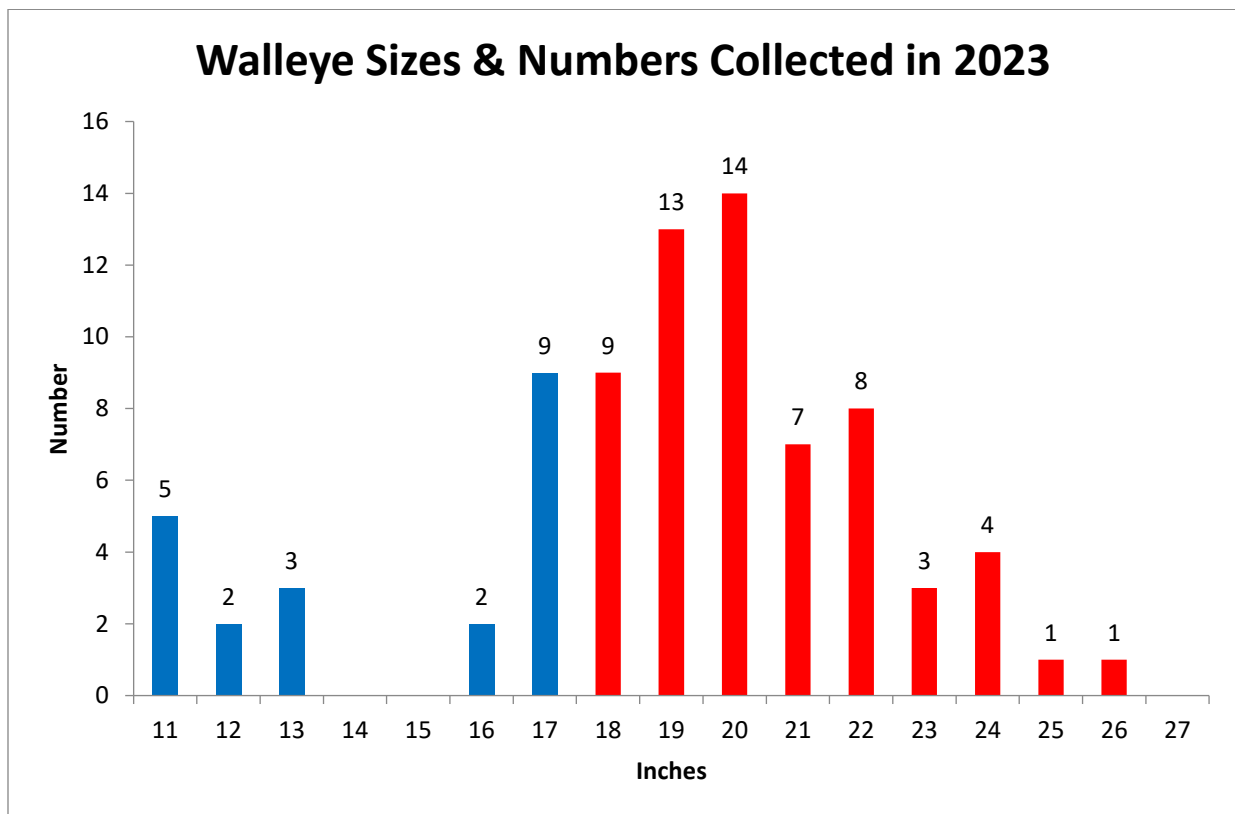


Numerous sub-legal (less than 18 inches) Walleye were tagged in 2023 indicating a strong fishery for several years to come. The Staunton River provides ample opportunity for anglers and paddlers alike. Enjoy this quality Walleye fishery!

Philpott Reservoir

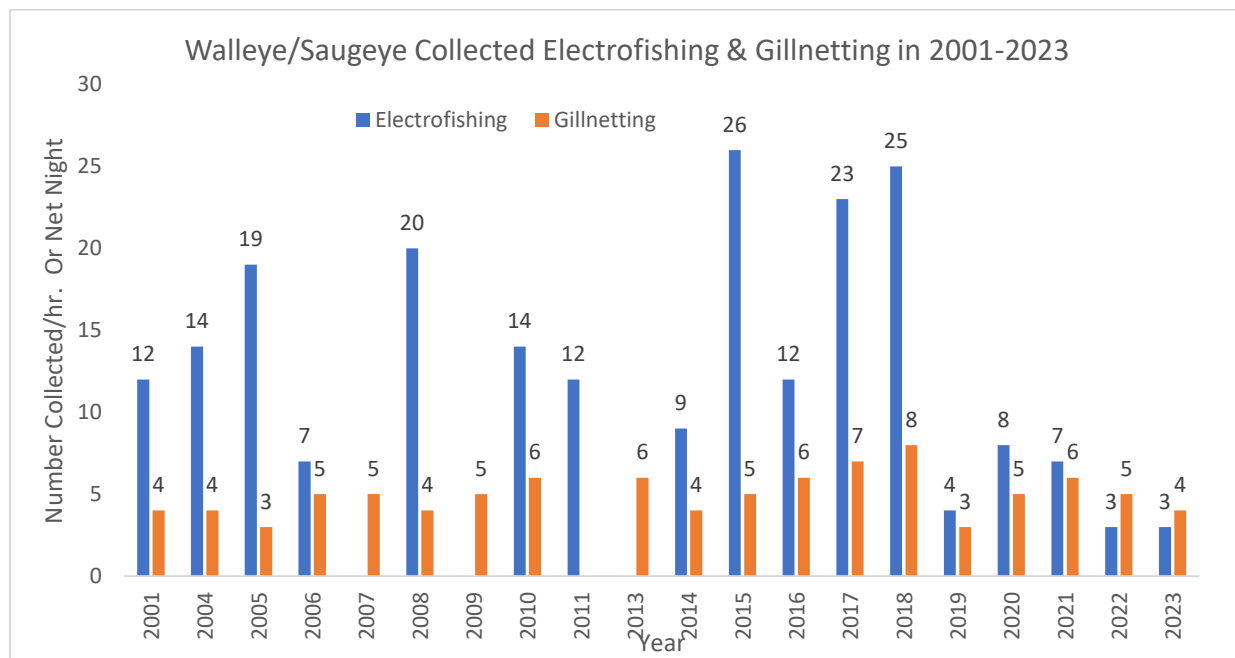


Walleye anglers reported catching fewer Walleyes in Philpott Reservoir in 2023 when compared to years past. This is likely due to lower Walleye population numbers following four years (2016-2019) of reduced stocking numbers. However, from 2020-2023 stocking numbers have ranged from 148,000 to 197,000 and the numbers are increasing again. Fish population surveys from 2023 showed that most of the catch is in the 17–22-inch range. A total of 81 Walleye and Saugeye combined were collected in 2023 with an average total length of 18 inches (2-2.5 pounds). Sixty-nine percent of the Walleyes collected in 2023 sampling efforts were 18 inches or longer. The following chart shows the sizes and numbers of Walleye and Saugeye biologists collected in 2023. The red bars on the chart indicate legal size (18”) fish. Walleye reach 18 inches at about 2½ years of age and most male Walleye grow very slowly after reaching this size. Female Walleye typically grow well for another few years, with some achieving larger sizes.



Walleye population abundance in Philpott Reservoir is measured using two sampling methods: electrofishing in the spring and gillnets in the fall. The reason for using two sampling methods is that when compared to bass, Walleyes are less likely to be associated with shoreline habitat during early April. Because this daytime electrofishing catch rate may not always accurately represent the Walleye population, gillnets are also used. Electrofishing catch rates vary

considerably from year to year, as seen in the chart below. Electrofishing catch rates for the May 2023 sample was (3/hr.) and the gillnet catch rate of 4 fish per net was low.



Historic trend data of catch rates of Walleye/Saugeye from the electrofishing and gill net surveys conducted on Philpott Lake from 2001 to 2023.

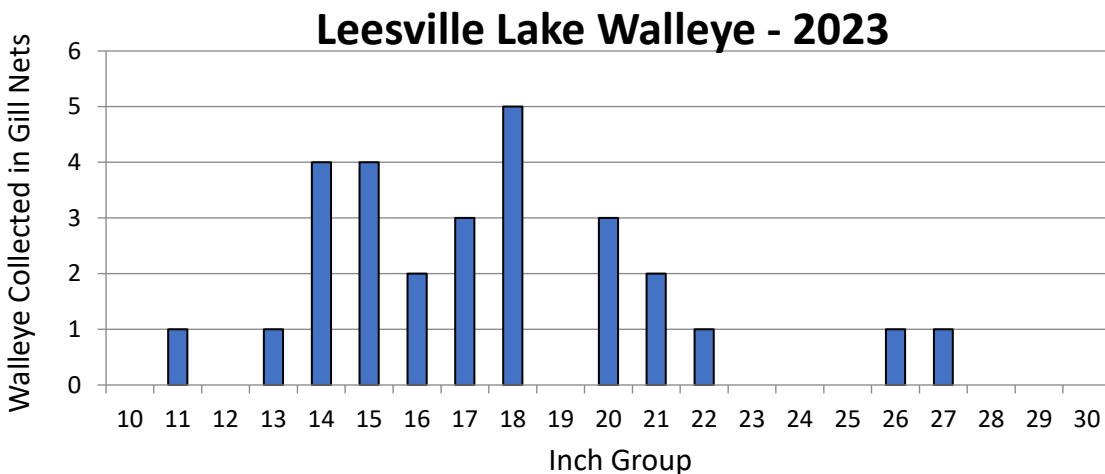
Skilled anglers, who spend time learning effective techniques for Walleye and find areas that are productive, should have successful fishing trips. Top-water night fishing is very popular and productive during the Alewife spawn in May and June. By late June, Walleye start moving into deeper water and are caught on nightcrawler harnesses and plugs trolled in deeper water. As water temperatures increase throughout the summer, Walleye continue to move deeper seeking cooler water. Anglers must fish deeper throughout the summer or fish at night to capitalize on this fishery. Catching a few Walleyes per outing is considered good, however, some reports from anglers in 2023 reported difficulty locating and catching a few Walleyes per trip, so it may take more time and skill in 2024 to boat Walleye.

Leesville Lake

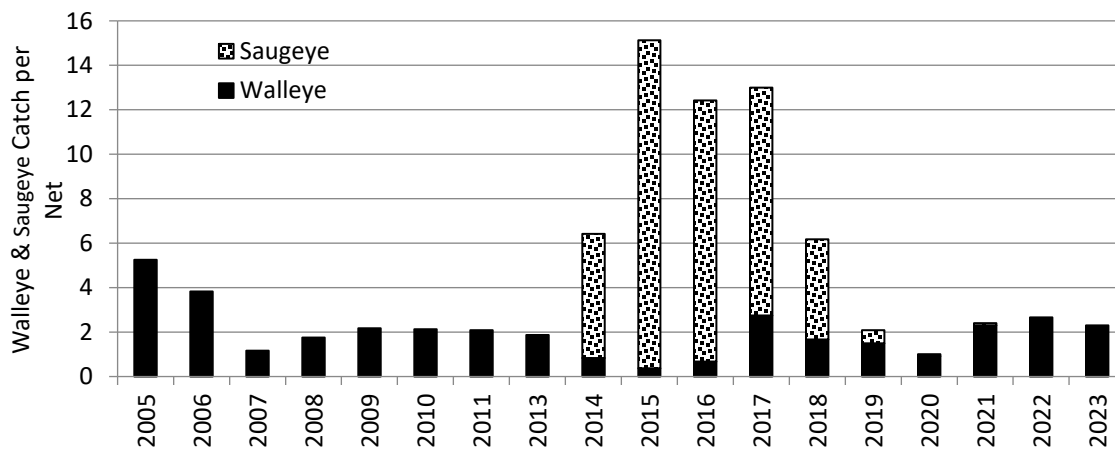
The 2024 fishing season for Walleye at Leesville Lake will continue to be challenging. Fishing has historically been poor due to low retention of stocked Walleye in the lake, as most Walleye eventually pass through the Leesville dam and into the Staunton River. Various data collections within Leesville Lake and the Staunton River confirm that most Walleye, regardless of size, pass through the Leesville Lake dam every year. Saugeye were stocked in 2013-2015 but only Walleye have been stocked since 2016 to preserve the Staunton River Walleye population for hatchery broodstock collections.

This fishery usually contains limited numbers of Walleye with overall numbers of Walleye remaining lower than any other Virginia lake stocked with Walleye. The 2021 and 2022

year classes were better than average for Leesville Lake and those fish will be primarily 17-22 inches in 2024. Even though recent stockings have improved the population, most of those fish will leave the lake and end up in the Staunton River. While the Leesville Lake Walleye fishery remains less than desirable, stockings into the lake are essential to maintain the Walleye population in the Staunton River, Walleye stocked directly into the river have very low survival. The only way to sustain the river fishery and Walleye broodstock in the river for hatchery production and stocking, is to continue stocking Leesville Lake. Walleye that remain in Leesville Lake have good growth rates and typically reach 18 inches between ages two and three.



Length frequency distribution of Walleye collected from the fall gill net surveys of Leesville Lake.



Historical trend data depicting the catch rates of Walleye and Saugeye from Leesville Lake from 2005 to 2023.

The most productive Walleye fishing is typically between Leesville Dam and mile marker 6. Night fishing in May and June, with floating or shallow running plugs cast to the shoreline, should not be overlooked. These fish often frequent shallow water during the night in spring and early summer. During daylight hours in the spring, fish the shoreline contour, targeting depths of 10-20 ft., then move deeper if those depths are unproductive. Walleye are very light sensitive and

prefer dark or shaded habitat; consequently, these fish will frequent shallower depths if the water is shaded or stained but will remain deeper during the day if the water is clear. Rock cliffs and steeper shorelines should be the most productive, with some coves also holding fish. As water temperatures increase in late spring and throughout the summer, fish continue moving deeper, seeking cooler water, and become most active during nighttime hours.

Leesville can be a challenge due to extreme daily water fluctuations and low fish densities, but anglers who spend time learning productive Walleye angling techniques for Leesville and concentrate on habitats that hold Walleye, may encounter some of these elusive fish. Leesville Lake experiences very light fishing pressure and can provide solitude for anglers looking to avoid crowds and boating traffic.

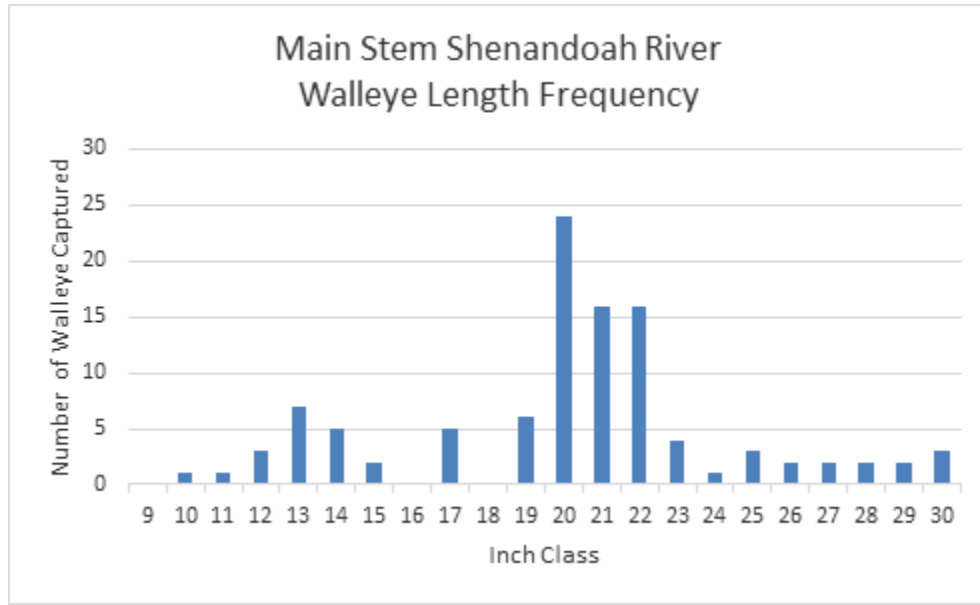
Northern Virginia

Shenandoah River

Walleye can be found in the Shenandoah River from Warren Dam in Front Royal downstream beyond the Virginia / West Virginia State line. Although they are not as numerous in the Shenandoah as they are in other rivers they are increasing in number and can reach lengths exceeding 25 inches. In the spring of 2014 VDWR began an annual stocking program of Walleye fry in the Shenandoah River to supplement the natural population and increase the number of Walleye present for anglers to target. In 2023 the river received its eighth stocking of 42,988 fingerling Walleye. This was double the yearly allocation due to a surplus production year in our hatcheries.



Anglers should expect to see an increase in numbers in the coming years due to the surplus fingerlings. During our January sample we captured 25 Walleye at a rate of 8.1 fish per hour, which is slightly below the long-term average. During the February spawning run, biologists sampled the spawning grounds upstream of the Morgans Ford ramp. They handled 80 fish averaging 20 inches in length, the largest female measured 30 inches. Anglers can expect the bulk of the population measuring in the 20-22" range. Local anglers are starting to reap the benefits of this fishery, so plan a trip to the Shenandoah soon.



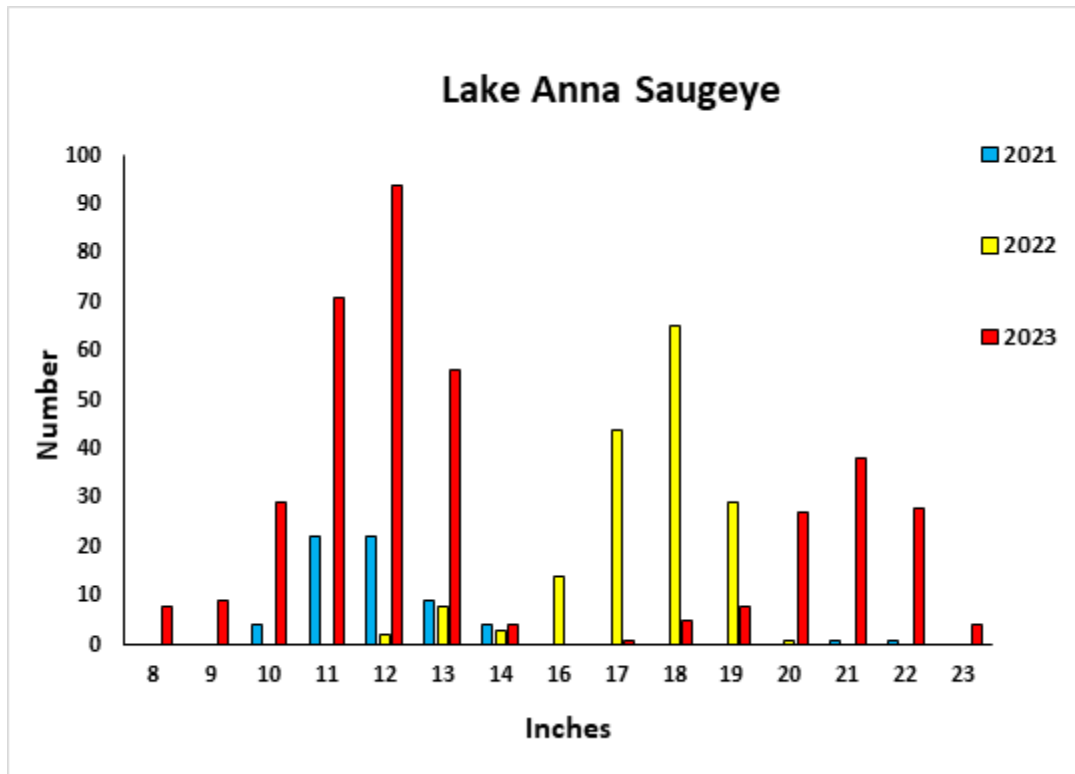
Length frequency distribution of Walleye collected from the electrofishing surveys of the Main Stem Shenandoah River in 2023.



Lake Anna

Anglers looking for a fun challenge and some good table fare should look no further than the new Saugeye (SAE) fishery at Lake Anna. As a result of the experimental 2013 stocking success, biologists have decided to maintain the SAE fishery by continuing to stock every 2 to 3 years or as production allows. The Saugeye population within Lake Anna is dependent on VDWR stocking efforts. Lake Anna received Saugeye fingerlings at the rates of 5/ac (2021) and 10/ac (2023) from the two most recent stockings. The fall gill net surveys of 2021-23 indicated high abundances of Saugeye, with collections of 63, 166, and 374 fish. Saugeye collected in 2023 ranged in size from 8 to 23 inches, with an average of 14 inches. Gill net catch rate was 10/net night in 2023, double that of 2022. The 2023 survey resulted in 29% of caught fish being legal size (18"), which was expected as a large proportion of the sample were age 0 fish (10-12") from the 2023 stocking. The Saugeye population at Anna is taking advantage of the strong forage base available in the lake as fish are reaching harvestable size by age 3. There is an 18" minimum/5 per day creel limit of Saugeye at Lake Anna.

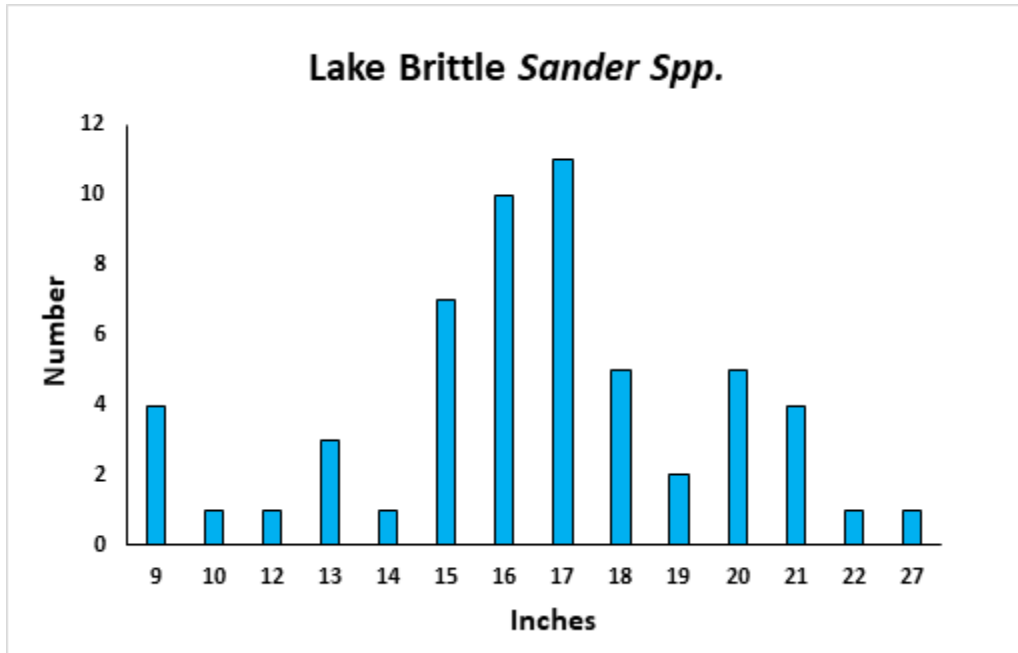




Length frequency distribution of Saugeye collected from the last three gill net surveys of Lake Anna.

Lake Brittle

Lake Brittle's *Sander spp.* population continues to recover from a downtrend after stocking at a higher rate the previous five years. Electrofishing catch rates slightly decreased to 25 fish/hr. in 2023 (from 29 fish/hr. in 2022); however, they remained above the 10/hr. goal and included fish up to 9 lbs. The catch rate was attributed to fish from multiple years of higher stocking rates recruiting to the fishery. Stocking rates of Walleye were historically 100/acre, but due to a declining population it was increased to 200/acre in 2019. The decline was likely a result of poor Walleye juvenile survival from 2014 through 2017. Biologists have also switched from stocking Walleye to Saugeye (Walleye/Sauger hybrid) due to observed higher survival and growth rates. A variety of environmental issues could have contributed, including lake drawdowns during dam and spillway renovation, emergence of dense *Hydrilla*, and prolonged high/turbid water conditions due to increased storm water runoff. Biologists are working to mitigate some of the issues leading to poor survival and are hopeful that survival of Saugeye stocked since 2019 will help the lake rebound from the current low population resulting in improved fishing and size structure. The lake still provides a suitable population of Walleye and Saugeye and has some of the best bank and boat access in Northern Virginia. During 2023 electrofishing surveys, 32% of *Sander spp.* collected were legal (greater than the 15% in 2022). Average size of *Sander spp.* caught during the 2023 survey was 16.5". The statewide 18" minimum/5 per day limit is in effect at Lake Brittle.



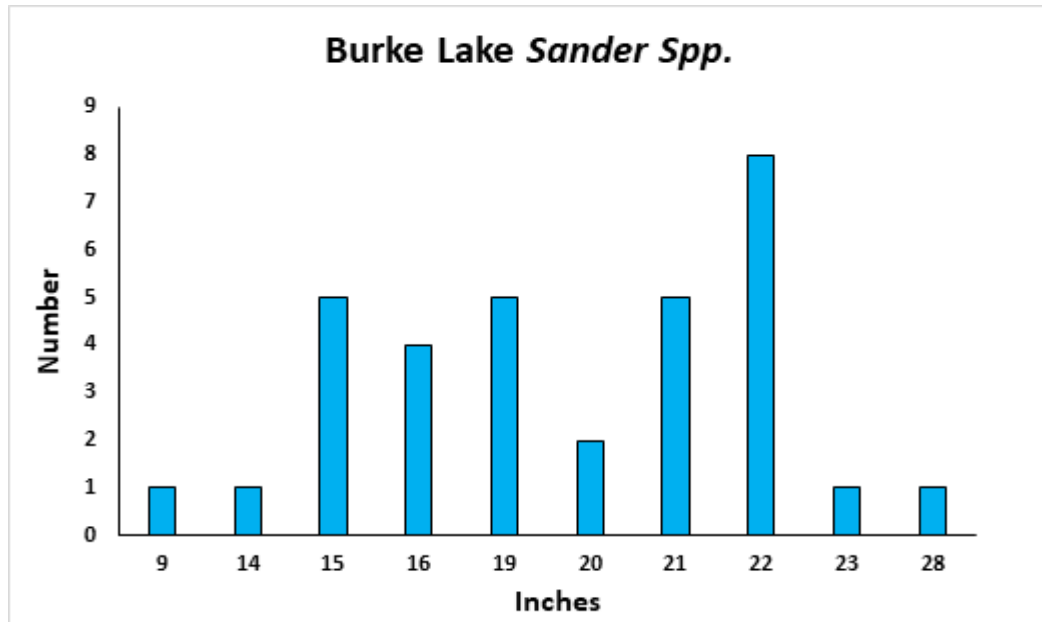
Length frequency of Walleye/Saugeye collected during the night electrofishing surveys of Lake Brittle in 2023.



Burke Lake

Burke Lake is located in Fairfax County – just a stone’s throw from Washington D.C. Anglers in pursuit of Walleye and Saugeye can expect to find most fish in the 2 to 3-pound range, with some fish as large as 9 pounds. Electrofishing catch rates were 11 fish/hr. in 2023, a significant decrease from the 44 fish/hr. in 2022 yet above the goal of 10/hr. for small impoundments. Burke Lake was drawn down several feet for a shoreline repair project which

affected the usual sampling locations. Spring 2023 surveys resulted in 67% of *Sander spp.* being legal with a 19” average. The statewide 18” minimum/5 per day limit is in place at Burke Lake.



Length frequency distribution of Walleye and Saugeye collected from the night electrofishing surveys of Burke Lake in 2023.

Lake Orange

Anglers looking to catch Walleye and Saugeye in the central Virginia Piedmont should look no further than Lake Orange. The fishery is known for producing fish over 5 pounds. Electrofishing catch rates in 2023 were 3/hr., less than those of 2022 and the desired goal of 10/hr. Spring 2023 surveys resulted in only 3% of Walleye being legal (≥ 18 ”), indicating the population is mostly comprised of younger fish with a 16.7” average. Most fish are caught during the late spring and early summer by anglers fishing for bass, although a few anglers do specifically target Walleye here. Anglers should note that an 18” minimum/5 per day limit is in place at Lake Orange.



Biologists will continue to monitor the *Sander spp.* populations at Lakes Brittle, Burke, and Orange again in 2024. A cash reward of \$20 is offered for the return of the tag and catch information to VDWR Fredericksburg office. Anglers can remove the tag by cutting through the monofilament attachment with a knife or scissors, then the fish can be released or harvested. Return the tag and catch information to the address printed on the tag. Catch information includes: date; general location of catch; “Was the fish harvested or released?”; “Were you fishing for Walleye?” and “Did you catch any other Walleye on this fishing trip?”

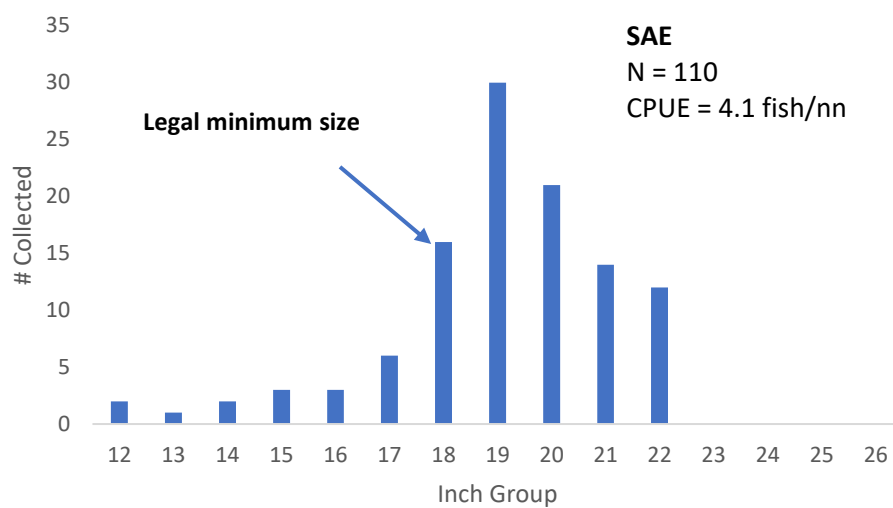
Eastern Virginia

Lake Chesdin

The Walleye and Saugeye populations within Lake Chesdin are highly dependent on VDWR stocking efforts. The initial stockings of Saugeye fingerlings into Lake Chesdin in 2013 and 2014 were extremely successful showing a high survival rate and great growth potential. Past Walleye stockings have not been nearly as successful as the Saugeye stockings, and this has pushed management decisions to go forth with Saugeye as one of the primary introductions into Lake Chesdin. The past five stockings have seen Saugeye stocked in 2019, 2021, 2022, and 2023 with Walleye stocked in 2020. The 2023 stocking consisted of 103,736 Saugeye fingerlings being dispersed in a pelagic manner.

The fall surveys of 2023 revealed a decent abundance of Saugeye with 110 fish collected. The catch rate showed a decline from 2022 which set the record bar at 192 Saugeye collected. The 2023 tally fell close to the 113 Saugeye collected during the 2021 fall survey. Collected Saugeye ranged in size from 12.83 to 22.91 inches, with the average sized fish measured at 19.54 inches. This average length showed a marked increase from 2022 (mean TL = 17.74 inches) due to the decreased presence of juvenile fish. The vast majority of the collected Saugeye were fish from the 2019 and 2021 stockings. The collection revealed 20 fish greater than 4 pounds in weight with the largest Saugeye weighed at 5.83 pounds. Past surveys have topped out with Saugeye in the 7 to 7.5-pound range but that was not the case in 2023.

Lake Chesdin 2023 Saugeeye



Length frequency distribution of the Saugeeye collected from Lake Chesdin during gill net surveys of 2023.





The Saugeye collection revealed 84.5% of fish were greater than 18 inches in total length. This percent of legal fish revealed an increase from the 2022 survey (57.3% \geq 18"). From all indications, the Saugeye population is taking full advantage of the Gizzard Shad forage base. The collection of Walleye has crashed over the past couple of years as VDWR goes in the direction of Saugeye. The 2023 survey revealed the collection of two Walleye, down from the whopping total of seven found in 2022. The largest Walleye was an absolute beast that measured 27.16" and weighed 8.26 pounds. This female Walleye was greater than the max weight of 7.33 pounds collected in 2022.



The gizzard shad population within Lake Chesdin is extremely abundant with a high proportion of fish in the 5 to 8-inch range. Lake Chesdin can be a difficult lake to fish due to the surplus of available forage. Anglers should not get too discouraged if they cannot find a productive pattern that works the first few times out on the lake. Anglers are encouraged to target these schools of shad, as you never know when a Walleye or Saugeye will strike a properly presented lure or bait. Deep diving crankbaits, that mimic the size of gizzard shad, are a good start for targeting the Walleye and Saugeye. Anglers are also encouraged to try trolling around with bottom bouncers and nightcrawler harness rigs. During the fall and winter months, shad schools will typically concentrate toward the lower third of the lake. Anglers and boaters should easily observe the flocks of cormorants that invade the fishery each winter to forage heavily on the shad schools. The vast majority of the larger Saugeye were found toward the lower third of the lake during the December surveys. DWR biologists began tagging collected Walleye and Saugeye from Lake Chesdin in 2015 as part of the statewide tagging program. Anglers should be on the lookout for a Floy tag just below the dorsal fin on the left-hand side of the fish's body.

Appomattox River

Anglers familiar with the Walleye and Saugeye fishing action on Lake Chesdin are most likely aware of the fishable population below the dam. The Walleye and Saugeye populations in the Appomattox River below Brasfield Dam have yielded some positive results over the last few years from fish that escaped the lake. Depending on the time of the year and the water flow, anglers will find fish stacked up within close proximity to Brasfield Dam. At other times of the year, fish may be congregated near VSU by Patton Park. Anglers have caught Saugeye in the James River as there is no telling where some of these fish will slide on down the system. With continued stockings of Lake Chesdin, there is fair to decent chance that the fishing action in the lower Appomattox River will improve. Chesterfield County has the John J. Radcliffe Park situated below Brasfield Dam. This area along the river provides some limited bank fishing access and a canoe/kayak launch area. A recent fishing trip by Mike Minnick found a few nice Walleye willing to cooperate along this stretch of the river. The similar creel limit of 5 fish/person in aggregate with the 18" minimum size limit still applies in the Appomattox River. Any tagged fish caught in the river, above or below the lake, will be honored for a reward check.



Lake Whitehurst

Lake Whitehurst, located in Virginia Beach, is a 458-acre lake that has been stocked in the last few years with both Walleye and Saugeye. Whitehurst was once a popular Walleye hotspot, but Walleye stockings were discontinued when the lake's public access was removed in the mid-2000's. The lake has a new boat access located off Shore Drive and DWR has re-initiated the annual Saugeye/Walleye stockings. Anglers should expect moderate success when fishing for these fish, as this fishery is still being established. Angler reports indicate scattered success but a few legal-sized Saugeye have been reported to have been caught. Stay tuned as this unique fishery should only get better in the years to come!



Little Creek Reservoir

Little Creek Reservoir is a 947-acre water supply impoundment owned by the City of Newport News located within James City County near the Town of Toano, VA. The reservoir provides another Region 1 destination for anglers to fish for Walleye and a chance at Saugeye. James City County Parks & Recreation has a great park that provides plenty of access to the reservoir. The water level at Little Creek Reservoir has been drawn down over the last few years in the eventual hopes of having major repair work conducted on the dam. Periodic boat ramp closures the last two falls in response to extreme low water have put a strain on



access. The boat ramp reopened at the end of January 2024 with the water level reaching a safer level for boat access. Anglers are encouraged to contact James City County Parks & Recreation if they plan on making a long trip to Little Creek Reservoir. The fishing pier and some of the adjacent shoreline areas of the park provide suitable access for bank fishing. Fall gill net surveys were not conducted the last few years due to the ramp closures and the low water conditions. The spring of 2023 saw a full-scale allotment of 100,000 Walleye fingerlings stocked into the reservoir in a pelagic manner. This stocking and the sporadic stocking efforts of the previous few years should provide some action. An assessment of the stocked Saugeye fry has not been conducted. Mature Walleye will forage heavily upon the schools of Blueback Herring in this deep reservoir. DWR biologists have tagged Walleye and Saugeye collected from Little Creek Reservoir. Anglers that catch a reward tag can receive a \$20 reward if the tag is returned to the Region 1 DWR office with some catch information. Anglers can release any fish they catch if they so desire as long as the reward tag is cut off first. The creel limit for Walleye and Saugeye is 5 fish/person/day in aggregate.

Tagging Studies



Walleye tagging studies are ongoing in several of the Walleye waters mentioned above and offer valuable information to fisheries biologists about how anglers use the Walleye resources the Commonwealth invests in. If you catch a tagged Walleye or Saugeye, mail the reward tag to the address printed on the tag and VDWR will send you a \$20 reward. Please be patient as it takes time to process the reward payment. Thank you for your part in helping VDWR evaluate our Walleye fisheries.

For more information on the tagging studies, contact the following offices:

Leesville & Philpott Reservoirs: Forest Office (434) 525-7522

Staunton River: Farmville Office (434) 392-9645

Lakes Orange, Burke, & Brittle: Fredericksburg Office (540) 889-4169

Little Creek Reservoir, Lake Chesdin, Appomattox River: Charles City Office (804) 829-6580

Shenandoah River: Verona Office (540) 248-9360

Hungry Mother Lake, Upper New River, South Holston Reservoir, Flannagan Reservoir: Marion Office (276) 783-4860