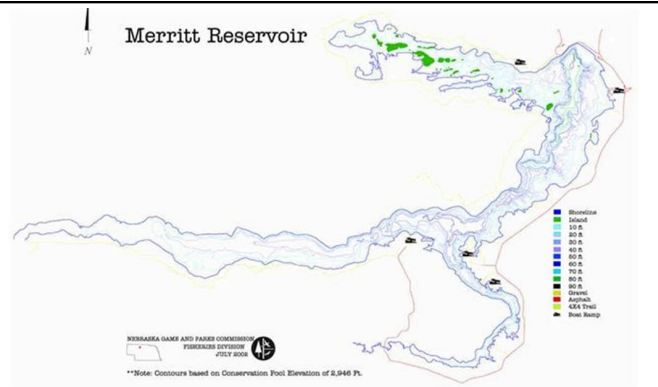


Merritt Reservoir

2012 Creel Survey Summary

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

Zac Brashears, Fisheries Biologist

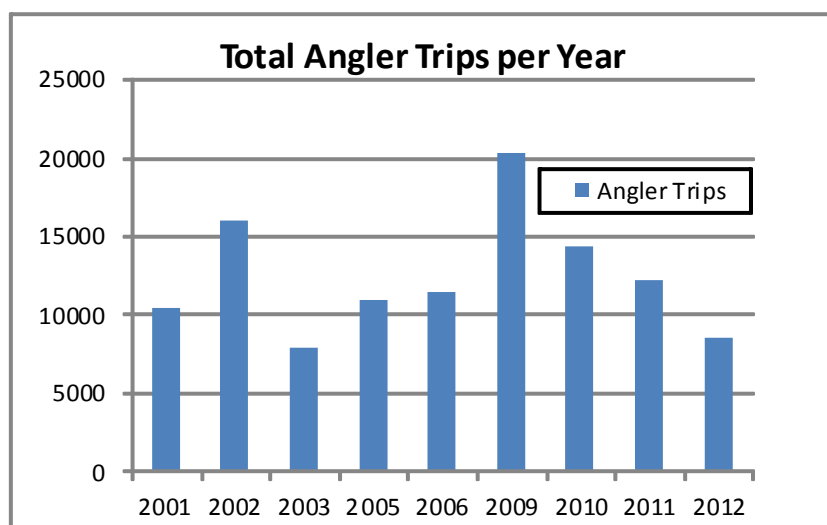


2012 was the fourth year of a five year angler survey being conducted at Merritt Reservoir in Cherry County, Nebraska. This study is being done by an agreement with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and the Nebraska Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit through the University of Nebraska in Lincoln. This survey is run from April 1 through October 31 for the years 2009-2013. During this time anglers are counted and interviewed for twenty randomly selected days per month, fourteen weekdays and six days on weekends. Information gathered from this survey allows fisheries managers and biologists to look at estimates of angling pressure, size structure of fish caught, catch and harvest, and catch rates per hour. This information also allows managers and biologists to monitor how certain regulations are working for that particular body of water. Anglers are encouraged to cooperate with creel clerks, it will only take a few minutes of their time and provides valuable information.

The following text and graphs provide a summary of the creel survey data collected at Merritt Reservoir during the 2012 sampling season along with comparisons of the 2001-2003, 2005-2006, and 2009-2011 surveys.

Anglers Trips

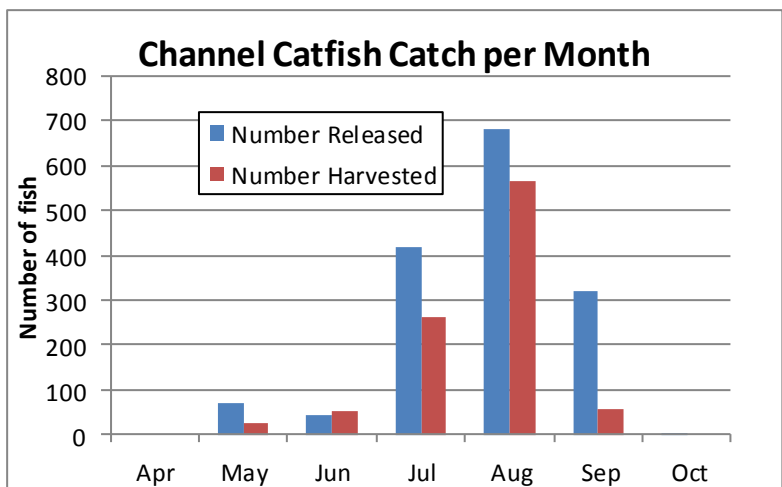
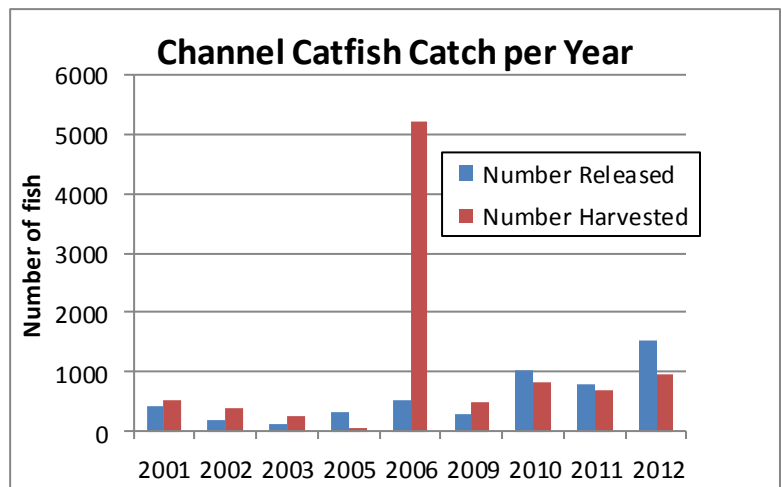
During the 2012 creel survey period anglers made an estimated 8,513 trips to Merritt Reservoir which continued on a declining trend since 2009 and was well below the average since 2001 of 12,407 trips. Anglers fished Merritt Reservoir for approximately 50,113 hours with an average of 5.98 hours per trip. During the survey period 42% of the trips were made seeking walleye, 9% seeking channel catfish, 37% seeking anything they could catch and the other 12 % spent their time seeking northern pike, muskellunge, white bass, bluegill, smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, black crappie, and yellow perch. Anglers from 63 Nebraska counties and 14 states (7% of the fisherman) fished at Merritt Reservoir during the 7 month survey period.



Channel Catfish

Channel catfish catch has been on an upward trend since 2001 with the exception of 2006. In 2012 anglers caught 2,491 fish. Of these fish caught 1,530 were released and 961 were harvested. The average size of fish harvested was smaller this year and averaged 17.5 inches when compared to the 2001-2011 average of 24 inches. The largest fish harvested during the survey period measured approximately 36 inches. Anglers who sought catfish at Merritt Reservoir caught .06 fish per hour and harvested .02 fish per hour. Anglers are reminded there is no size limit on channel catfish with a daily bag limit of 5 fish.

Catfish anglers had their best success in August although July and September were good as well. Anglers should see similar to better success in 2013 with an increase in abundance of channel catfish.

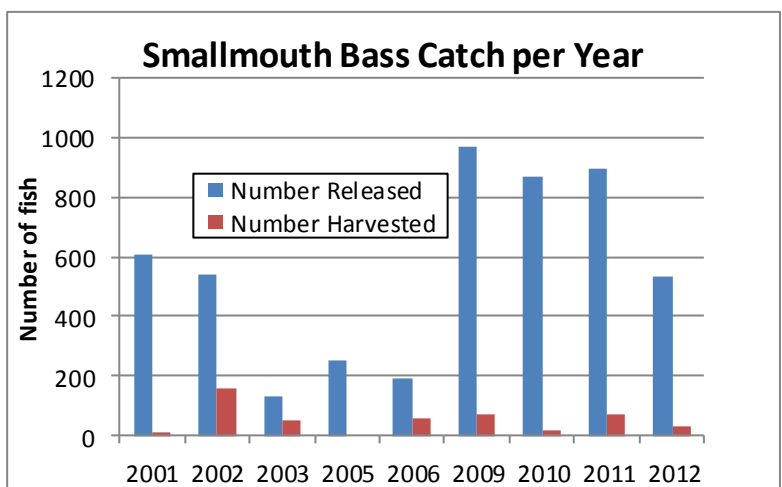


Smallmouth and Largemouth Bass

The smallmouth bass catch in 2012 was slightly lower when compared to the 2009-2011 surveys. An estimated 568 fish were caught by anglers in 2012 and 534 (94%) of these fish were released. The average smallmouth bass that was harvested measured 15.1 inches and the largest measured 16.9 inches.

Largemouth bass catch was up from the 2011 survey (992 fish) with an estimated 1,345 fish caught. Anglers released 1,316 of those fish which

averaged 13.6 inches. The average largemouth bass harvested measured 16.2 inches and the largest fish measured 18.1 inches. Anglers should see similar results for catch and harvest of black bass species in 2013. Anglers are reminded there is a statewide minimum of 15 inches on all inland waters for all black bass species and a daily bag limit of 5 fish. The daily bag limit may only include one fish greater than 21 inches in length.

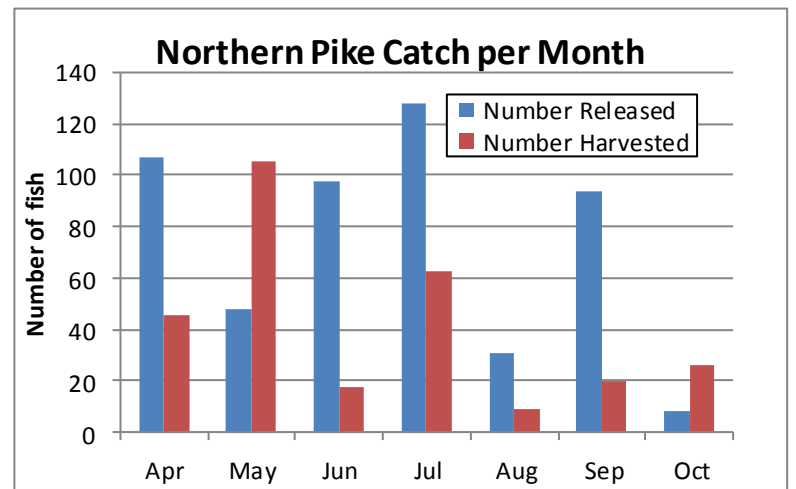
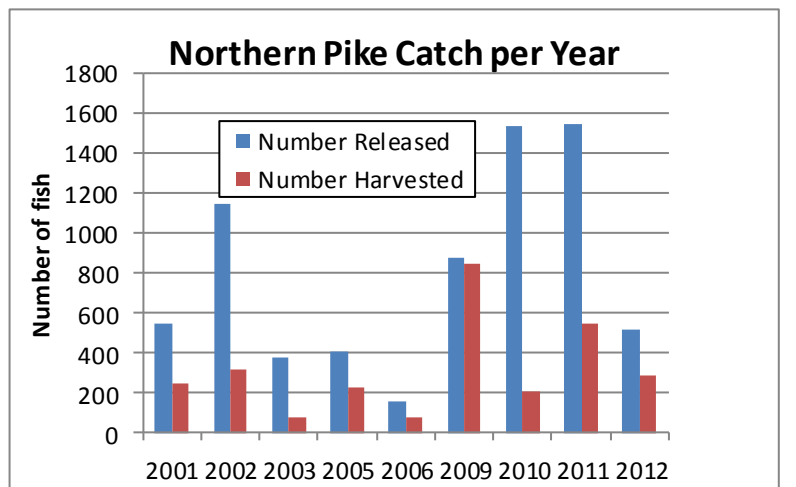


Northern Pike

The northern pike catch in 2012 was down from the past 3 surveys with an estimated 799 fish caught. Anglers released 512 of those fish which averaged 26 inches in length. Harvested northern pike (287 fish) averaged 28 inches compared to the 2001-2011 average of 26.3 inches. The largest northern pike measured during the survey period was 40.1 inches. Anglers who sought northern pike caught .11 fish per hour and harvested .06 fish per hour. Northern pike regulations at Merritt Reservoir are a daily bag limit of 3 fish with no size restrictions.

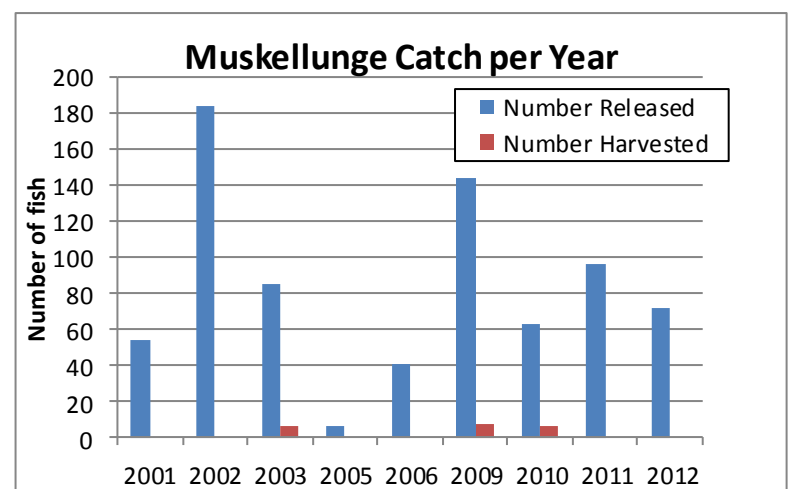


Northern pike success remained high throughout the seven month survey period with declines in catch happening in August and October. Anglers should see fair to good success on northern pike greater than 28 inches in 2013.



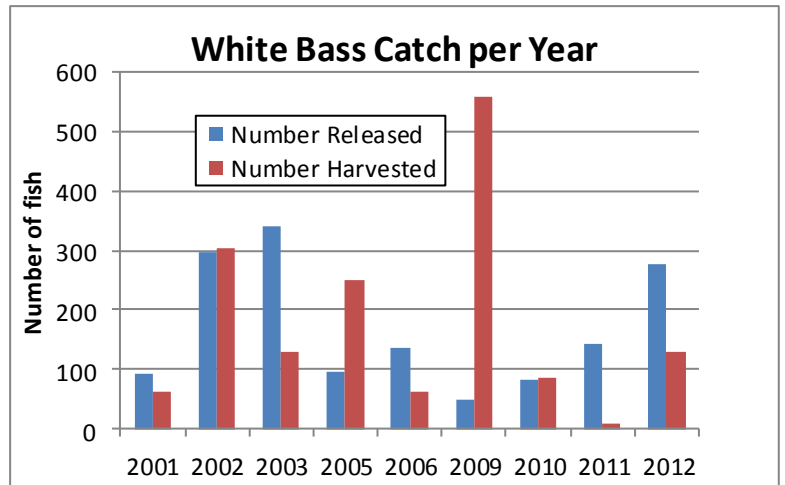
Muskellunge

In 2012 no muskellunge were harvested although anglers who target these fish often take pictures of their fish and release them to be caught another day. Anglers released an estimated 71 fish which fell below the 2001-2011 average of 86 fish caught per year. In 2012, the average length of muskellunge released was 24.7 inches and the largest released was 36 inches. Anglers from several states travel to Merritt each year just to target trophy muskellunge. For more information on muskellunge fishing at Merritt be sure to check out the Merritt Reservoir Survey.



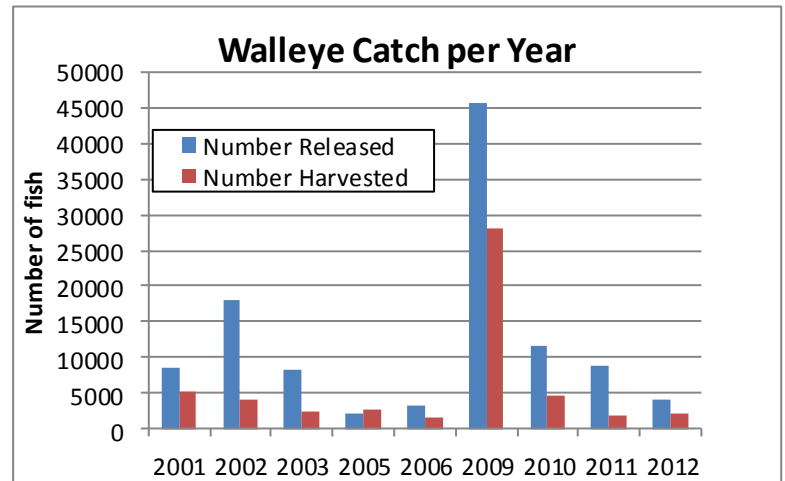
White Bass

White bass catch continued on an upward trend since 2010 with an estimated 408 fish caught in 2012. Of the fish caught 278 were released and 130 fish were harvested. The fish that were harvested average 12 inches and the largest measured 17.3 inches. White bass anglers should see similar to improved fishing for white bass over the next couple years with chances of master angler fish possible. Regulations at Merritt Reservoir allow a daily bag limit of 15 fish for striped bass, white bass, and wiper in combination with only on fish over 16 inches in the daily bag.

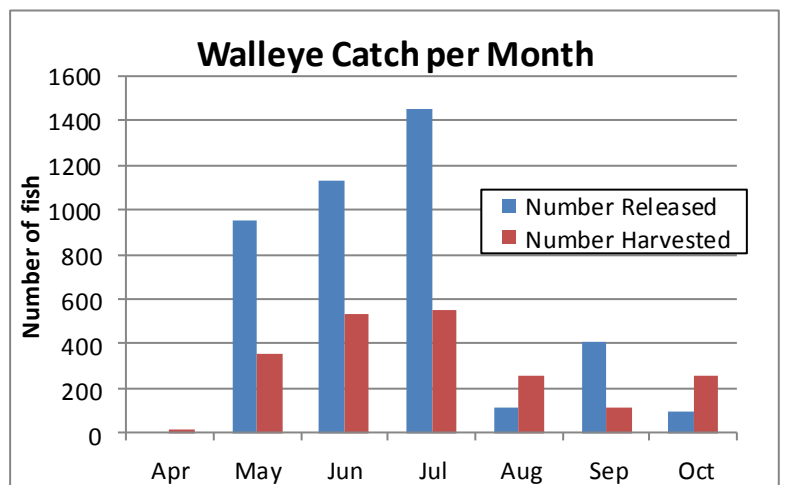


Walleye

Walleye catch continued on a downward trend again in 2012 with an estimated total catch of 6,235 fish. Of the total catch, 66% were released and averaged 13.5 inches. There was an estimated 2,081 walleye harvested which averaged 17.8 inches in length. The largest fish measured during the survey period was 30 inches. Anglers who sought walleye at Merritt Reservoir caught .22 fish per hour and harvested .04 fish per hour. Anglers at Merritt are allowed a daily bag limit of four which may include one from 15 to 18 inches and three over 18 inches (it is allowable to have all fish over 18 inches) but no more than one fish over 22 inches is allowed in the daily bag).



Angler success was greatest from May to July for both numbers of fish released and fish harvested. Success declined from August through September but that is mainly due to angling pressure. Be sure to check out the Merritt Fall Survey for more information on walleye fishing at Merritt. Surveys indicate a good size structure of walleye with good numbers of fish over 15 inches.

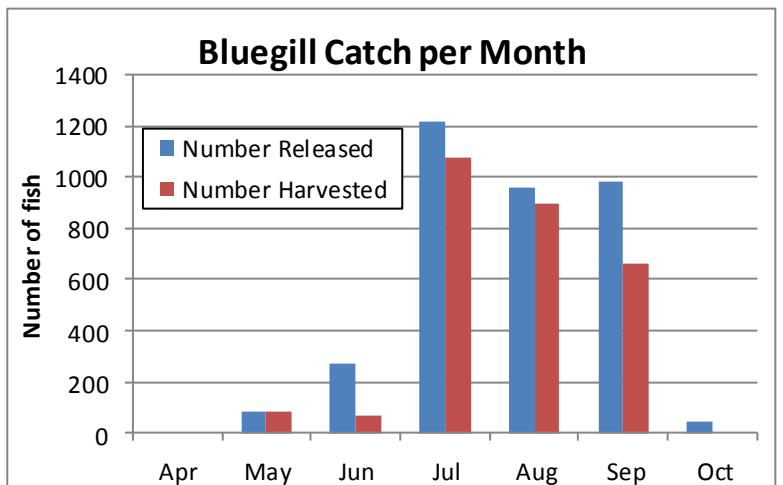
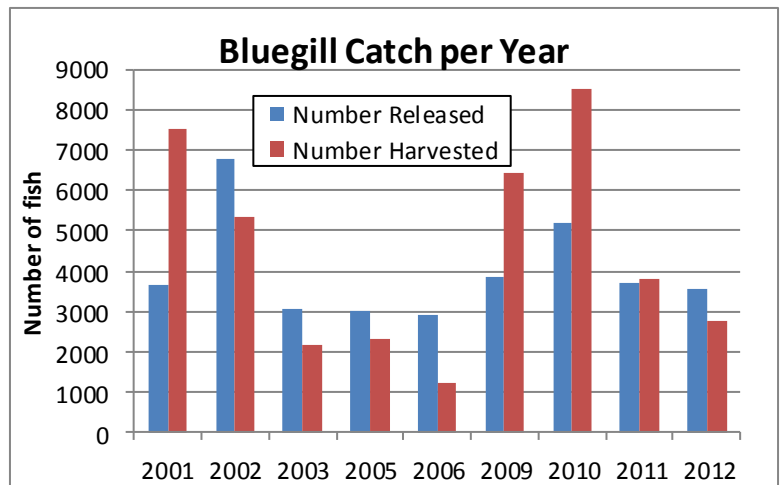


Bluegill

The bluegill catch from the 2012 survey decreased slightly from the 2011 survey (7,510 fish) with 6,342 fish caught. Of those fish caught approximately 43% (2,782) of the fish were harvested and averaged 7.5 inches. These fish measured slightly larger than the 2001-2011 average of 7.3 inches. The catch rates for anglers seeking bluegill was .42 fish per hour while harvesting .25 fish per hour.

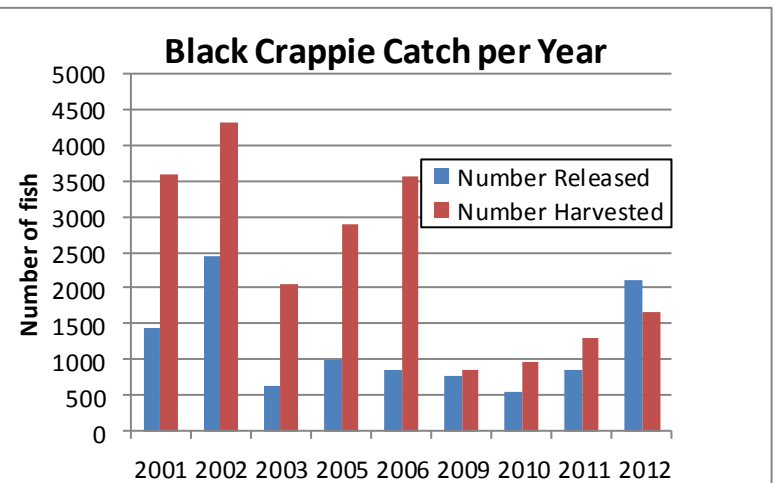


July, August, and September were the best months for bluegill catch and harvest. Anglers find bluegill to be a target of choice during the later summer months and early fall when other species can be tougher to find in Merritt Reservoir.



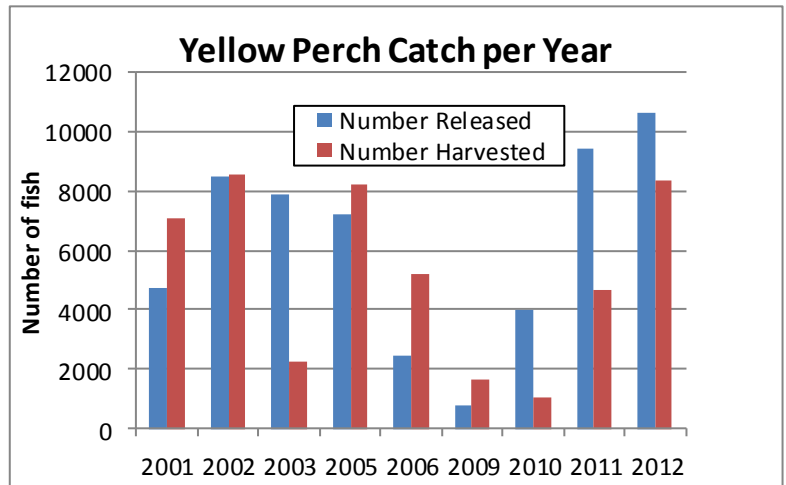
Black Crappie

The crappie catch continued on an upward trend since 2009 with an estimated 3,763 fish caught. Anglers released 2,107 fish and harvested 1,656 fish. Harvested fish averaged 9.8 inches and the biggest measured 13.5 inches. Average size of harvested fish was slightly below the 2001-2011 average of 10.1 inches. Anglers who sought black crappie experienced high catch rates catching 1.39 fish per hour and harvested .46 fish per hour.



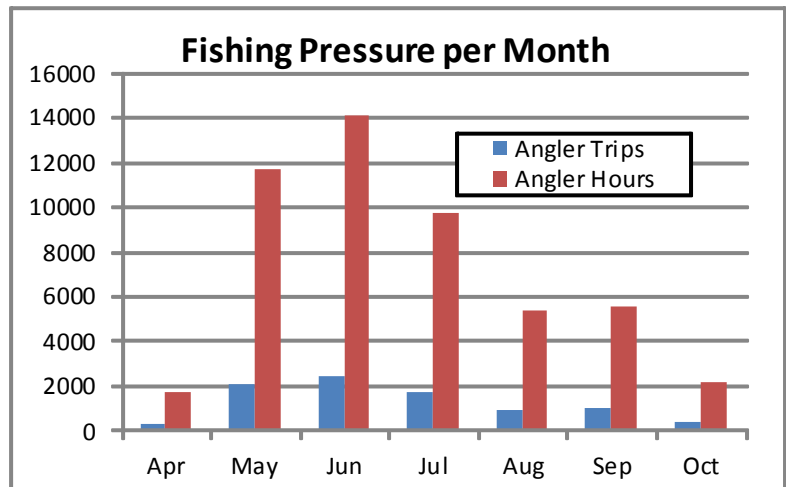
Yellow Perch

Yellow perch catch in 2012 was the highest ever recorded since 2001 with an estimated 18,984 fish caught. Anglers released 10,610 fish and harvested 8,373. Harvested perch slightly increased in size to an average of 7.8 inches and largest measured 12.6 inches. Catch rates for anglers seeking yellow perch caught .48 fish per hour and harvested .40 fish per hour. Fisherman should see good fishing opportunities for yellow perch again in 2013.



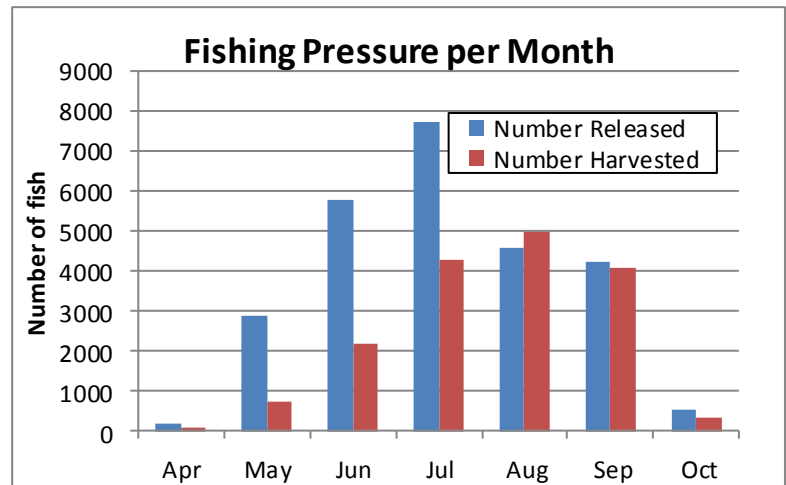
Fishing Pressure by Month

During the survey period at Merritt Reservoir May through July showed the highest fishing pressure while peaking in June and then tapering off into October.



Fishing Success by Month

Anglers had their best success on harvesting fish July through September while releasing the most fish during the month of July.



For additional information about fisheries management at Merritt Reservoir, contact the following NGPC personnel by phone or email addresses listed below.

District Supervisor: Al Hanson, (308) 763-2940 or al.hanson@nebraska.gov

Fisheries Biologist: Zac Brashears, (402) 376-8080 or zac.brashears@nebraska.gov

Fisheries Biologist: Joe Rydell (308) 763-2940 or joe.rydell@nebraska.gov