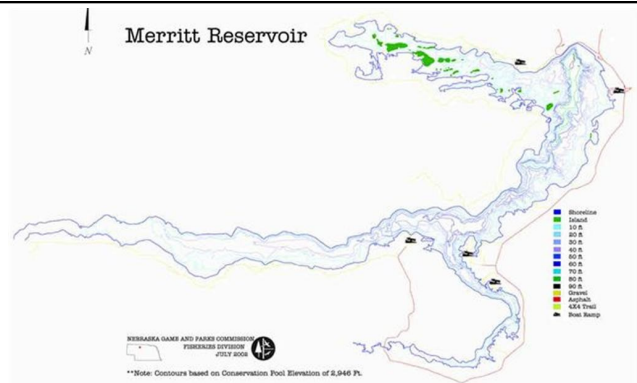


Merritt Reservoir

2013 Creel Survey Summary

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

Zac Brashears, Fisheries Biologist

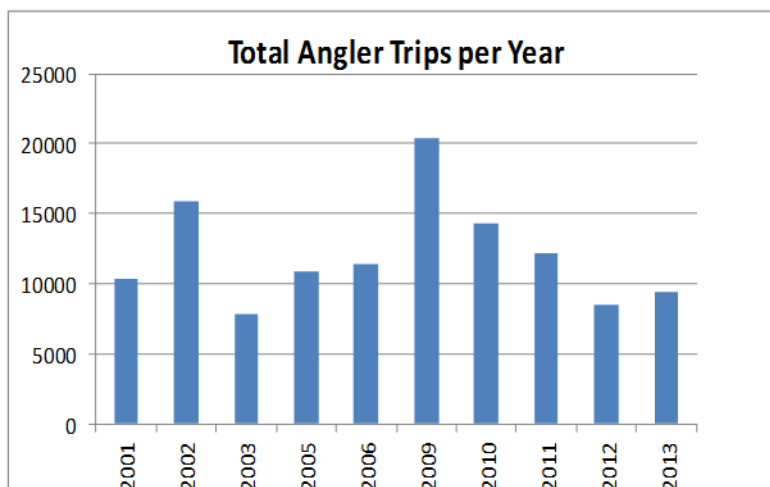


A five year angler survey was just completed at Merritt Reservoir in Cherry County, Nebraska. This study was done by an agreement with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and the Nebraska Fish and Wildlife Research Unit through the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. The 5 year study ran from April 1-October 31 during the years of 2009-2013. During this time, anglers are counted and interviewed for twenty randomly selected days per month, fourteen week days and six weekend days. Information gathered from this survey allows fisheries managers to look at estimates of angling pressure, size structure of fish caught, catch and harvest, and catch rates per hour. The information collected is used to compare to historical creel data. Plans are for the creel to continue for another 5 years (2014-2018) at Merritt Reservoir with the same agreement. Anglers are encouraged to cooperate with creel clerks: it will only take a few minutes of their time. Information gathered from the creel survey will help managers provide an optimum sport fishery.

The following text and graphs provide a summary of the creel survey data collected at Merritt Reservoir during the 2013 sampling season along with comparisons of the 2001-2003, 2005-2006, and 2009-2012 surveys.

Anglers Trips

During the seven month survey period in 2013 anglers made an estimated 9,345 trips to Merritt Reservoir. This was a slight increase from 2012 but still below the average of 12,101 trips since 2001. Anglers spent approximately 54,726 hours fishing (18.84 hrs/acre) with an average of 5.98 hours per trip. During the survey period 48% of the trips were made seeking walleye, 10% seeking channel catfish, 33% seeking anything they could catch, and the other 9% spent their time seeking northern pike, muskellunge, bluegill, smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, black crappie, yellow perch, and freshwater drum. Anglers from 62 counties and 11 states (14% of the fisherman) fished at Merritt Reservoir during the 7 month survey period. The top 6 Nebraska counties that fished Merritt were Cherry (16%), Douglas (11%), Lincoln (7%), Sheridan (4%), Lancaster (3%) and Hooker (3%).

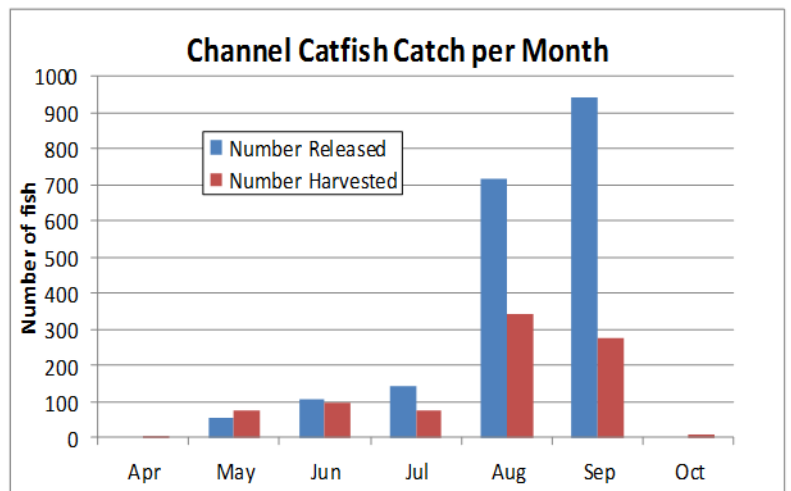
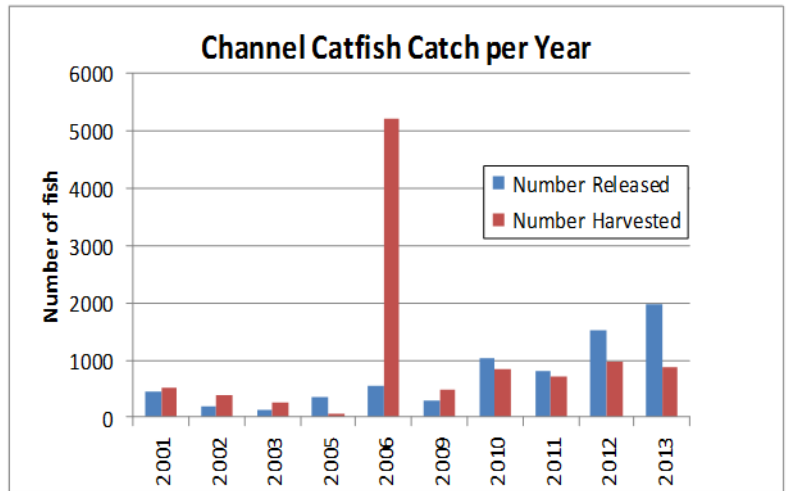


Channel Catfish

Channel catfish catch has been on an increasing trend since 2009. Anglers in 2013 caught an estimated 2,828 fish with 871 harvested and 1,957 released. The average size of catfish harvested in 2013 (20.1 inches) was slightly smaller than the average since 2001 (22.8 inches). The largest fish harvested during the survey period measured approximately 37 inches. Anglers who sought channel catfish at Merritt Reservoir caught .07 fish per hour.

Channel catfish regulations: No size limit with a daily bag limit of 5 fish.

Catfish anglers had the best success in August and September for both catch and harvest. Similar angling success should be seen in 2014.

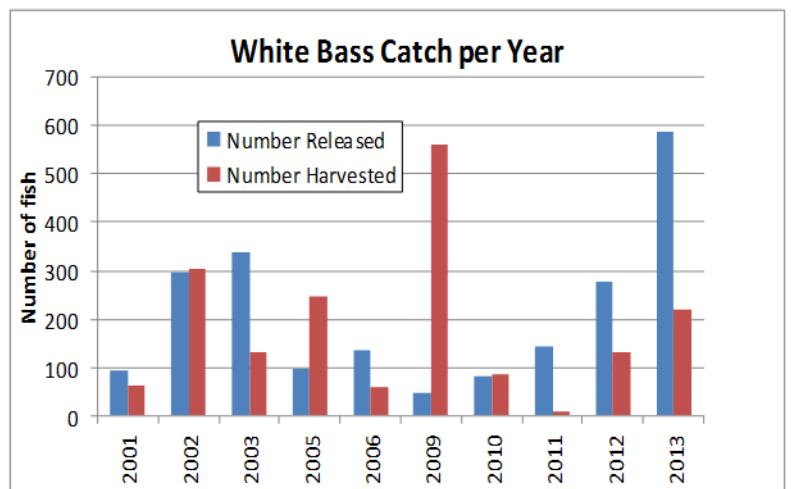


White Bass

Anglers observed improved catch rates for white bass with an estimated 807 fish caught. This number still remains well below management goals for this species. Anglers harvested 219 fish which averaged 12.7 inches in length and released 588 fish which averaged 10.7 inches. The largest fish measured during the survey period was 17.3 inches.

Anglers should see similar catch on white bass in 2014 with the supplemental stockings that occurred in 2010 and 2011. This was done in an effort to provide an additional late summer angling opportunity. With alewives present in Merritt Reservoir creating a white bass fishery has proven difficult and discussions will be made to determine if supplemental stockings will occur in the future.

White Bass Regulations: Daily bag limit of 15 fish with no more than one fish longer than 16 inches in length.



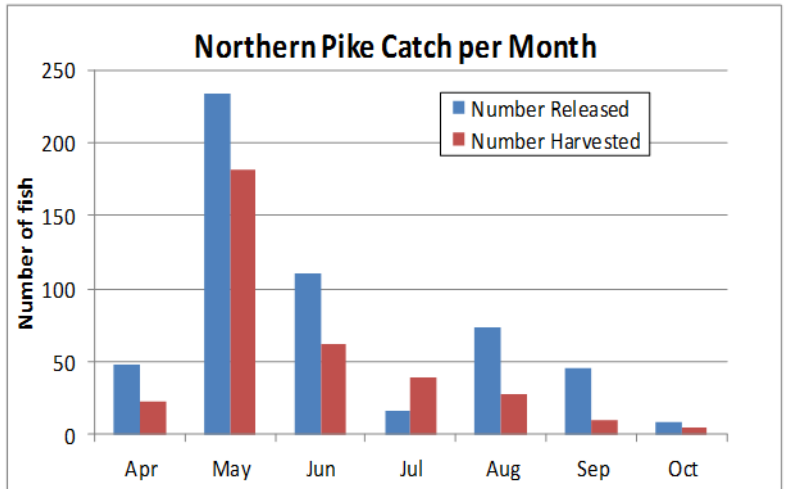
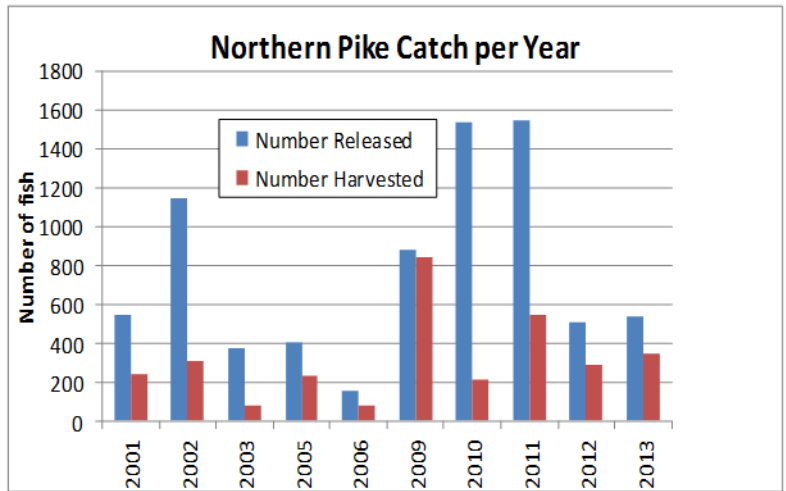
Northern Pike

Northern pike catch was similar to last year. An estimated 880 fish were caught with 347 harvested and 533 released. The average length of pike harvested was 28.9 inches compared to the 2001-2012 average of 26.6 inches. The largest northern pike creel during the survey period measured 37.5 inches. Anglers who sought northern pike only caught .02 fish per hour. Anglers who target these fish often comment on the size and body conditions these fish show when comparing them to other local lakes.



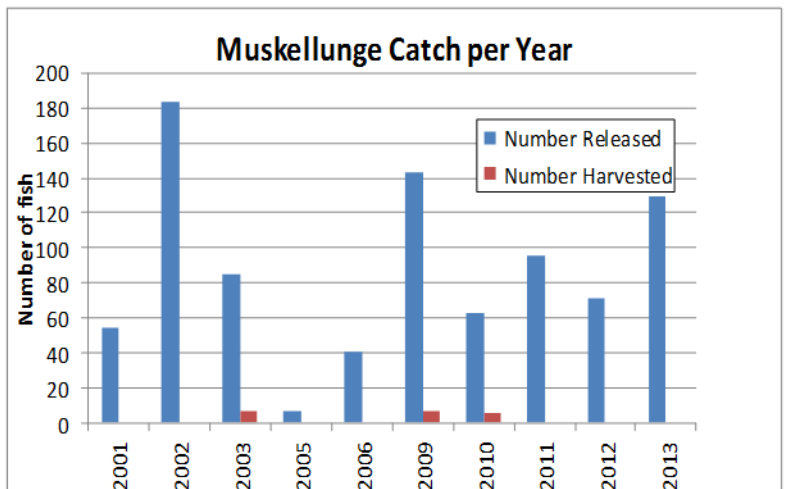
Northern Pike Regulations: No size limit with a daily bag limit of 3 fish at Merritt.

Anglers should see similar to improved success on northern pike in 2014 with chances of catching trophy fish over 36 inches.



Muskellunge

During the 2013 survey period an estimated 129 muskellunge were caught at Merritt Reservoir. No muskellunge were harvested in 2013. However, most anglers who target these fish take pictures and the fish are released to be caught another day. The average size of muskellunge released was 29 inches although 20% of the fish caught were over 36 inches in length. Anglers who targeted muskellunge caught .015 fish per hour.

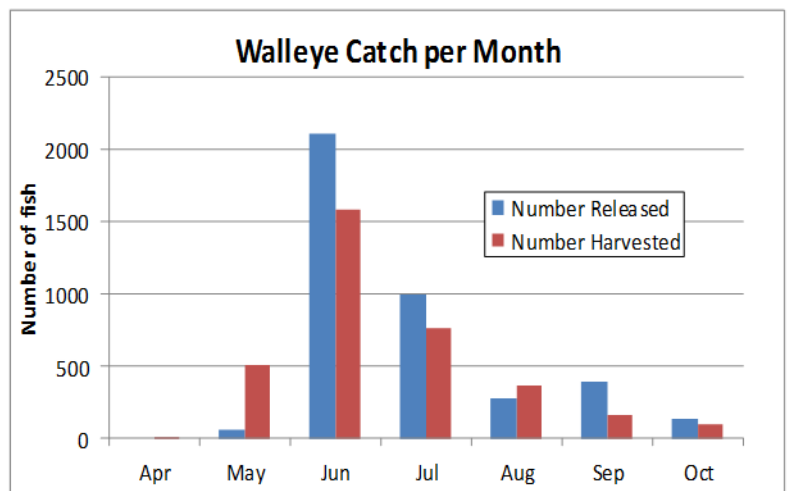
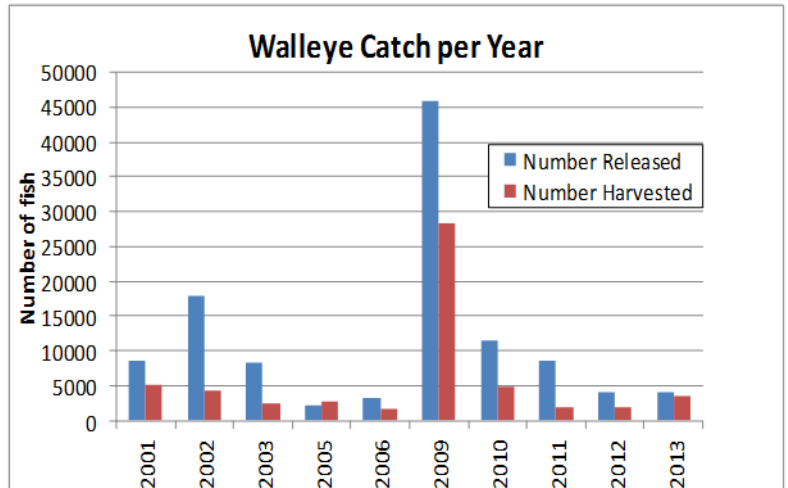


Anglers should continue to see improved fishing results for muskellunge during the upcoming 2014 season. Anglers from several states travel to Merritt each year to try their chance at catching the fish of 10,000 casts. Anglers are reminded that statewide muskellunge regulations allow 1 fish in the daily bag with a minimum length of 40 inches.

Walleye

Walleye anglers experienced a slight increase in total walleye catch this year with an estimated 7,444 fish caught. Anglers harvested 3,480 of those fish which is on an upward trend since 2011. Harvested fish averaged 19.1 inches in length compared to the 2001-2012 average of 18.6 inches. The largest fish harvested during the survey period measured 33.5 inches. Anglers who targeted walleye specifically had a catch rate of .21 fish per hour and harvested .10 fish per hour.

Walleye Regulations: Daily bag limit of 4 which may include one from 15 to 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.



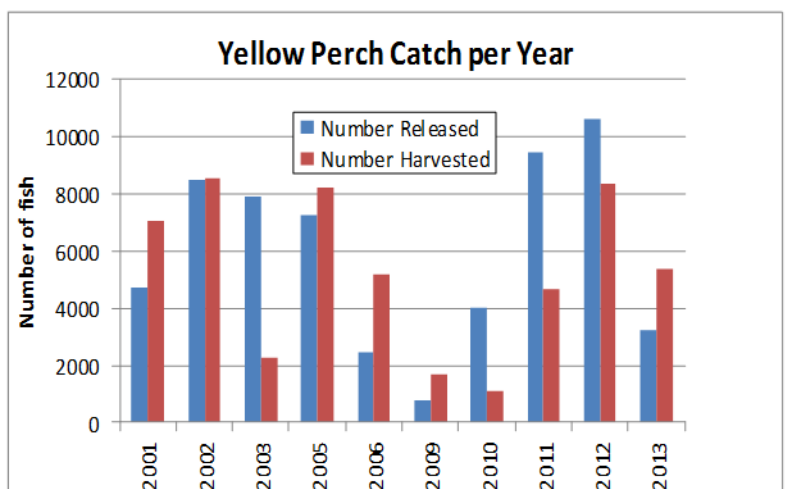
Walleye angling success was best during the months of June and July. Approximately 50% of the walleye harvest for the entire survey period came during the month of June. Success really tapers off August through October mainly due to fishing pressure and walleye moving to deeper water. Be sure to check out the Merritt Fall Survey for more information. Surveys indicate good size structure with good numbers of fish over 20 inches in length.

Yellow Perch

Yellow perch anglers observed lower catch rates in 2013 than they had seen in the past couple years. Anglers caught 8,572 fish, harvesting 5,357 and releasing 3,218. The harvested fish averaged 8.7 inches which is average when comparing it to 2001-2012 data. Anglers seeking yellow perch caught .45 fish per hour and harvested .44 per hour.

Anglers should see similar results as they did in 2013 for fish from 7-12 inches in length.

Yellow perch regulations: All panfish have a daily bag limit of 15 fish in any combination.

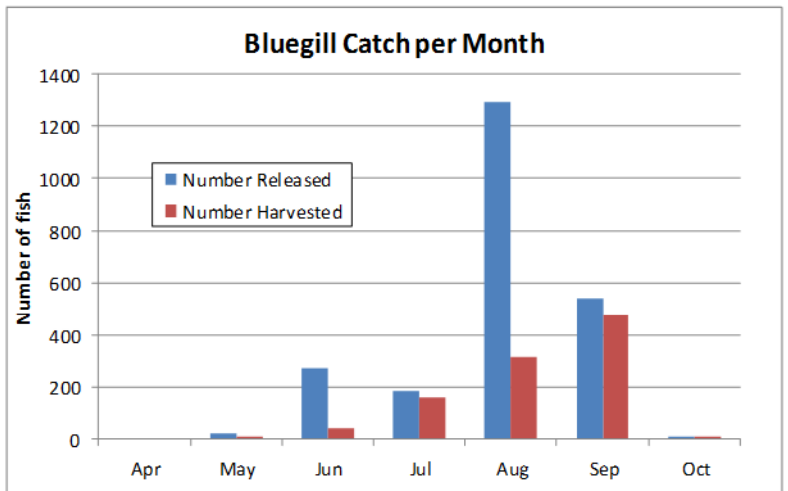
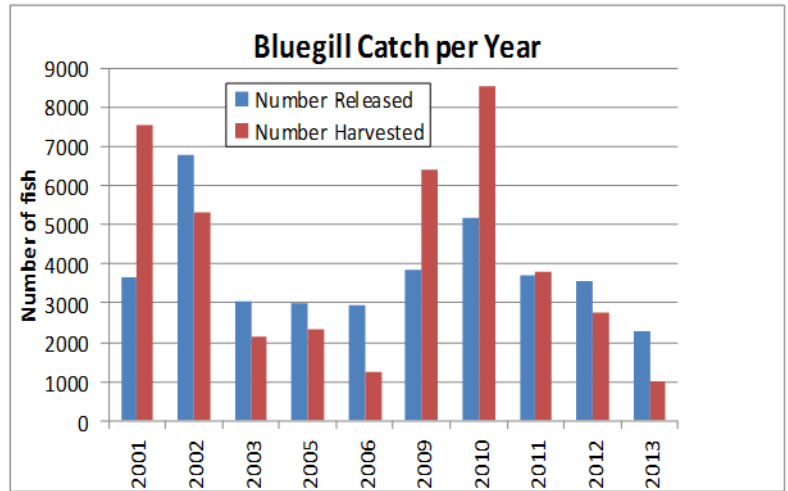


Bluegill

Bluegill catch continued on a downward trend since 2010 with only 3,300 fish caught. Harvested fish was the lowest ever recorded since 2001 with an estimated 996 fish taken home. Bluegills that were harvested averaged 7.4 inches in length and the largest creel by anglers measured 11 inches. Large lake fluctuations in the past has had some effect on bluegill recruitment as anglers are beginning to see.

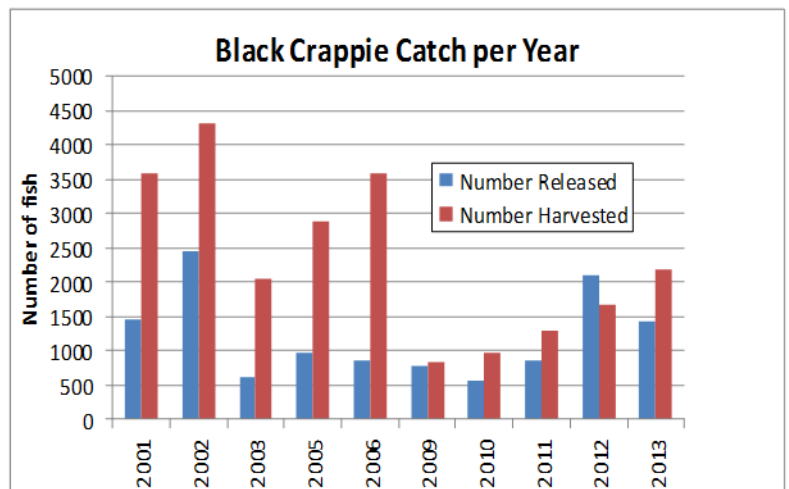


August and September were the best months for bluegill catch and harvest. These fish are generally targeted more in the late summer months when fishing for other species becomes more of a challenge. Anglers also enjoy areas such as the Boardman arm to fish for bluegill during the late winter months through the ice.



Black Crappie

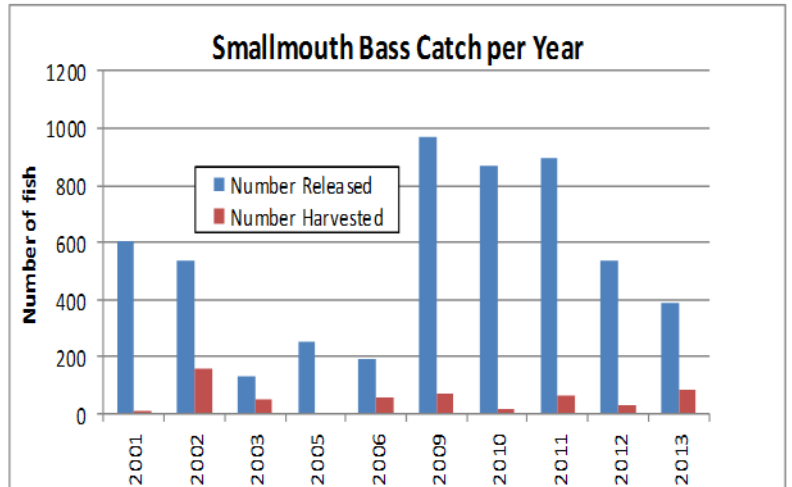
The crappie catch was very similar to that of 2012 with an estimated 3,605 fish caught. Anglers released (1,430) and harvested (2,175) black crappie. Fish that were harvested averaged 9.4 inches and released fish averaged 8 inches. The largest fish measured during the survey period was 13.5 inches. Anglers who sought black crappie observed higher catch rates catching 1.41 fish per hour while harvesting .89 fish per hour.



Anglers should continue to see improved catch rates and size structure for black crappie in the future at Merritt Reservoir. These fish are usually targeted in the early spring or through the ice during the winter months.

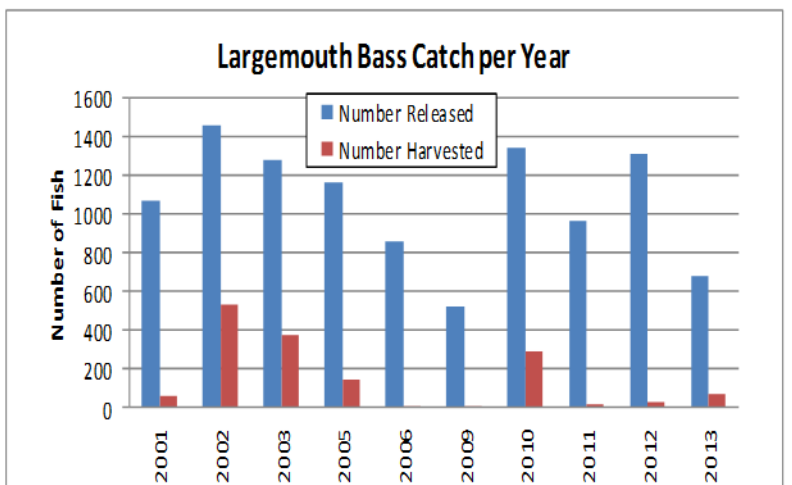
Black Bass

Smallmouth bass catch declined once again in 2013. A total of 479 fish were caught, with 87 harvested and 392 released. The average size of smallmouth bass harvested was 15.1 inches and the largest was 18 inches. Lake level drawdowns significantly reduce the amount of smallmouth bass habitat available and limited recruitment has been observed.



Black Bass Regulations: 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.

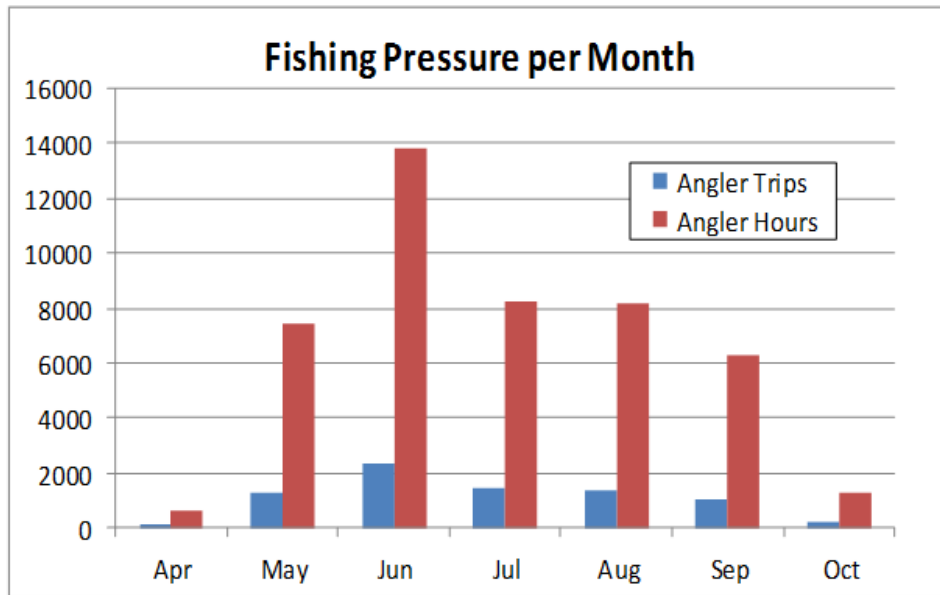
Largemouth bass catch was lower than that in 2012 however number of harvested fish showed slight increases. Estimated catch of largemouth bass in 2013 was 760, with 685 (90%) released and 75 harvested. Anglers who fish for largemouth bass at Merritt reservoir tend to practice catch and release in hopes of catching that same fish another day. Released fish averaged 14.1 inches and harvested fish averaged 16.2 inches in length. The largest fish anglers reported was a 23 inch fish which was returned to the lake to be caught another day.



Black bass anglers should see similar to improved results for fishing in 2014 with a great size structure of largemouth bass. Be sure to check out the Merritt Survey Summary for more information on black bass species.

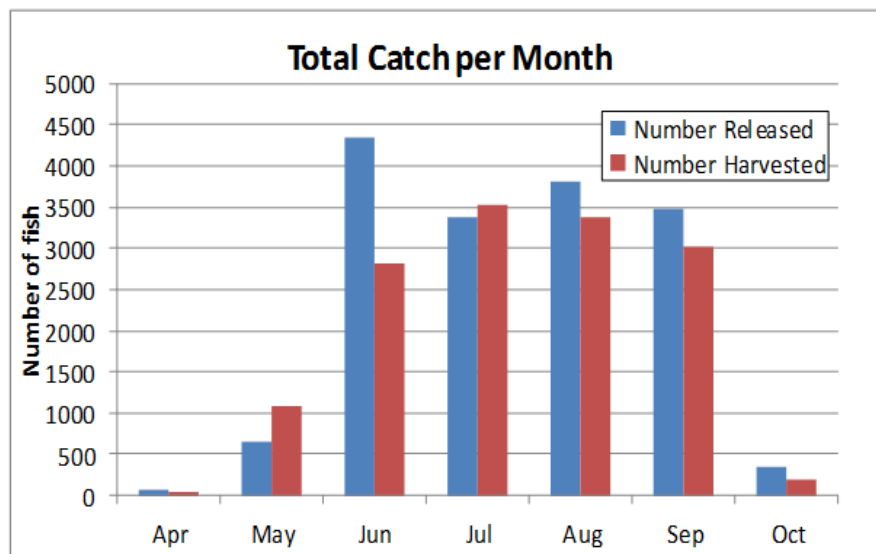
Fishing Pressure by Month

During the 7 month survey period June had the highest fishing pressure followed by May, July, and August which were very similar.



Fishing Success by Month

As can be seen in the graph below anglers in 2013 had similar catch and harvest rates from June through September at Merritt Reservoir.



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