



2010 Lake Oahe Fishery Projections

Each year, biologists working on Lake Oahe collect information on fish populations from netting surveys and information on angler use and harvest of those populations from creel surveys. By looking at trends in fish populations and anglers use and harvest, predictions can be made about fishing on Lake Oahe for 2010.

Walleye

Regulations for Lake Oahe Walleye

Lake Oahe walleye regulations include a daily limit of 4 walleyes, which may include no more than one walleye 20 inches or longer, per day, year-round and the possession limit is 8. The regulation is the same as the standard statewide regulation.

Lake Oahe Walleye Regulations



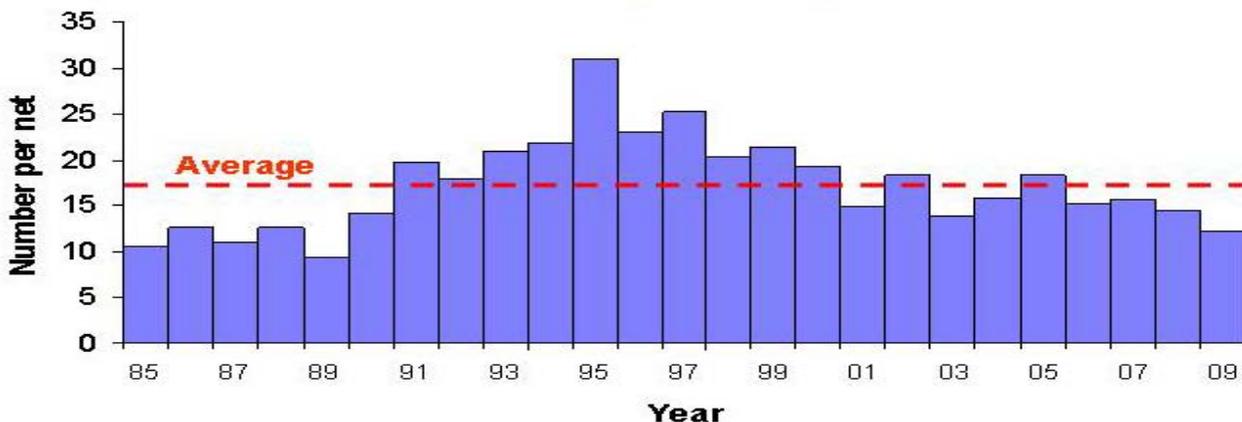
Possession limit of 8

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Walleye Fishing Trends for 2010

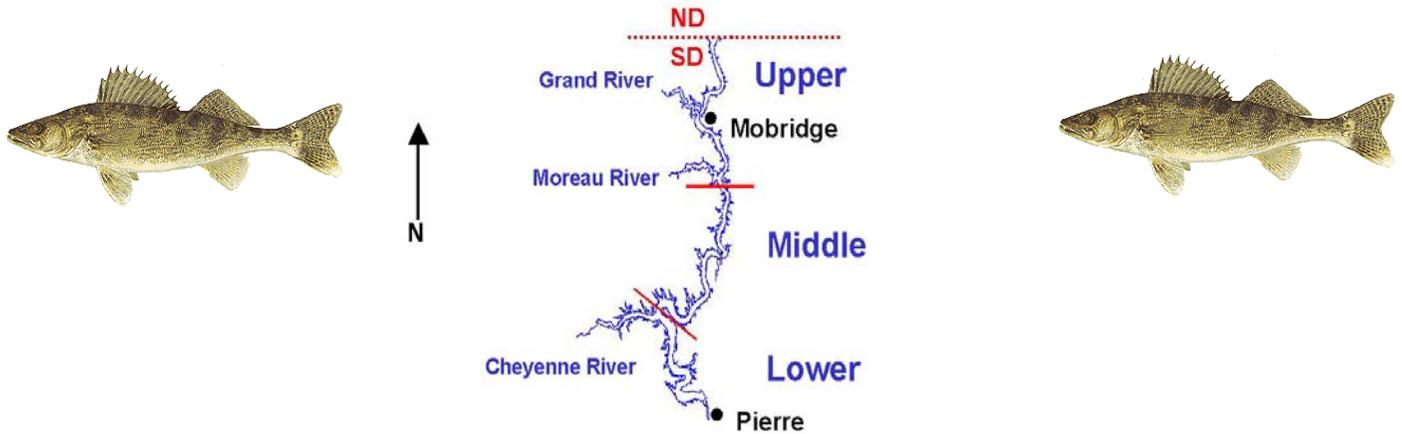
Walleye abundance is indexed using the average number of walleye caught per gill net. In 2009, the walleye abundance index was 12 walleye per net. This is similar to the last few years, but lower than the peak during the mid-1990's. In 2009, the walleye abundance index was below the average for Lake Oahe of 17 walleye per net.

Lake Oahe walleye abundance is similar to past years



Walleye abundance in Lake Oahe usually is higher upstream due to higher natural production of young walleyes in the upper section of the reservoir. Currently, abundance is highest in the middle and lower regions of Lake Oahe due to production of young fish during the 2005 to 2009 period. Walleye fishing should be good in all areas of Lake Oahe in 2010.

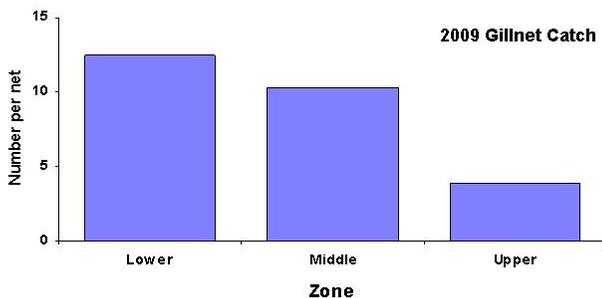
Lake Oahe Zones



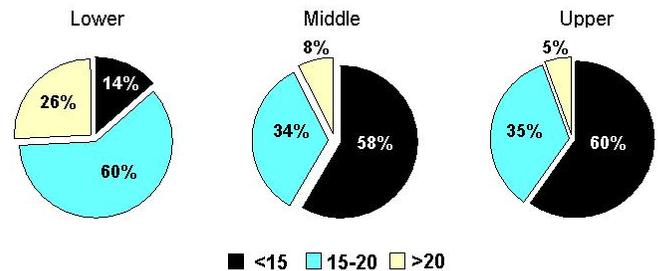
Typically, the average size of walleye decrease as you move upstream from the lower end of the lake. Fish less than 15 inches will be common in 2010 in the middle and upper regions of the lake due to natural production during recent years. Walleye 20 inches or larger make up a greater portion of the population in the lower reach of the lake, but large fish are found throughout the lake. Larger fish will be more common as the walleye population continues to mature. Your best chance to catch a larger walleye will be in the spring or fall in the lower portion of Lake Oahe.

The average size of walleye caught by anglers has continued to increase and this trend should continue in 2010. In 2009, the average size walleye harvested was 17 inches in length.

Walleye abundance differs between areas of Lake Oahe



Sizes of walleye differs between areas of Lake Oahe



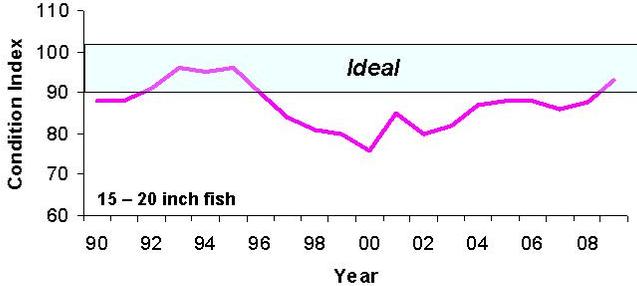
Lake Oahe has many fish species that serve as prey for larger predators. In the cold, deep water, rainbow smelt and lake herring are the primary prey fish. The shallows contain a different array of fishes including gizzard shad, emerald and spottail shiners, yellow perch, freshwater drum, and white bass.

With the increased productivity of Lake Oahe during 2008 and 2009, the prey fish abundance also increased. The walleye growth rates and condition, or plumpness, increased as well and the walleye condition in 2009 were ideal and the best it has been since 1996.

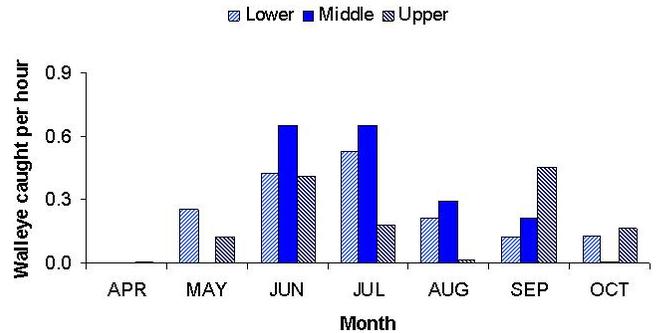
In 2009, walleye natural reproduction was good throughout Lake Oahe and will provide future fish to the population.

Walleye fishing usually peaks at different times for each zone on Lake Oahe. Fishing in the upper region of Lake Oahe usually peaks from late May through June. The middle and lower regions of Lake Oahe peak during June and July. During peak fishing times, catches of walleye by anglers can be higher in upper and middle regions of Lake Oahe than lower region of Lake Oahe. Angler catch rates, or fish caught per hour, should be similar to the past few years. However, catch rates could be lower than the years of 1997 to 2001, when the food supply was low and walleye abundance was high.

Walleye condition has improved to the ideal range for Lake Oahe.



Hourly catch rates of walleye vary between month and zone of Lake Oahe



Access problems, which have occurred during the past several years, should not be an issue in 2010 due to increased water levels in Lake Oahe during 2008 and 2009. The overall quality of the walleye fishery has improved, so enjoy the excellent fishing Lake Oahe has to offer.

Chinook Salmon

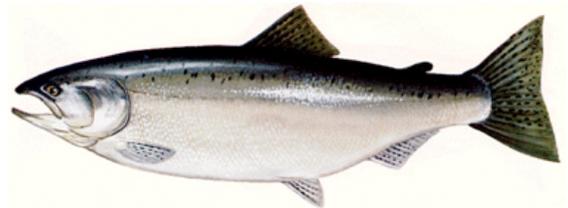
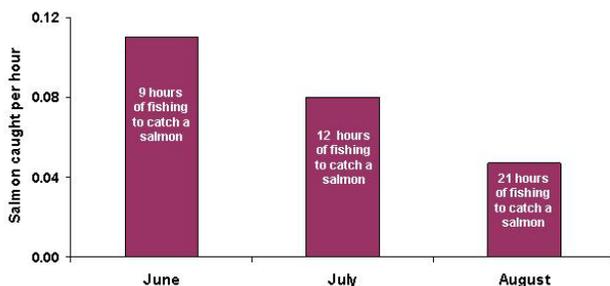
Chinook salmon in Lake Oahe are healthy and experiencing good growth due to an abundance of rainbow smelt, gizzard shad, and lake herring. Stockings are made annually to continue the Chinook salmon fishery. The 2010 Chinook salmon fishing season should provide anglers with good catches that will provide many hours of enjoyment. June and July are typically the best months to catch Chinook salmon. However, early spring can also be a good time to fish for Chinook salmon. If you are after larger Chinook salmon, try fishing in the late summer and fall.

Salmon Fishing Techniques

To effectively catch Chinook salmon on Lake Oahe, an angler needs to remember Chinook salmon are cold water fish. The warmer the water gets, the deeper Chinook salmon tend to go to find food. In the spring and fall, in the lower portion of the lake, anglers can do well trolling with spoons and plugs. During the warm summer months, Chinook salmon tend to concentrate below the thermocline, in the cold water layer and downriggers equipped with plugs, spoons, herring, dodgers, flashers and squids are used to get fishing lines down to where the fish are. During the fall, shore anglers can do well casting spoons and plugs from shore around Whitlock Bay when the Chinook salmon are preparing to spawn.

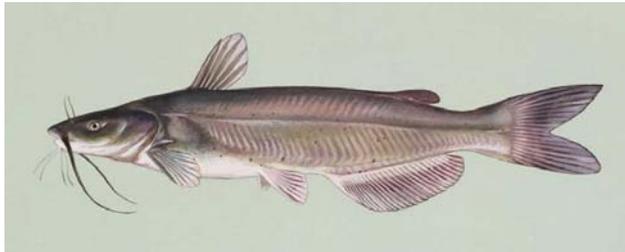
Fishing for Salmon near Oahe Dam is best during June and July

Number of salmon caught per hour in 2009



Channel Catfish

Channel catfish abundance in Lake Oahe is high and they are found in a wide range of depths and habitats. Excellent shore fishing opportunities for channel catfish exist throughout the lake. There is no daily limit for Lake Oahe channel catfish. Many of the channel catfish caught from the waters of Lake Oahe are accidentally caught by walleye anglers. Channel catfish are excellent to eat and easy to catch. If an angler would change a few tactics and fish specifically for channel catfish, they could have good success. To effectively fish for channel catfish, an angler should fish in the back of large bays with a variety of baits such as night crawlers, minnows, and commercially prepared baits.



Northern Pike

Lake Oahe contains a trophy northern pike population, with many of the fish exceeding 10 pounds. They inhabit deep, cold waters and a food base of rainbow smelt and lake herring provides nutrition for large northern pike. The majority of the large northern pike in Lake Oahe were produced during the 1993-1995 period, when abundant flooded vegetation existed. Young fish are currently present in the population. While Lake Oahe refilled in 2008 and 2009, vegetation and trees on the banks provided excellent spawning habitat for northern pike and number of young pike should increase. Catches of northern pike should increase as they grow into larger sizes and are attracted to anglers' baits.

Northern Pike Fishing Techniques

Anglers fishing for northern pike on Lake Oahe have the best opportunity to catch one in the early spring. Northern pike activity increases when open water starts to show up around the edges of the ice cover. Northern pike stay in shallow water through June, and then typically go deeper for the rest of the summer. In the spring, many anglers fish from shore or shallow water with a dead smelt on a treble hook rig or cast slow moving lures. Northern pike seek out the warmest water available in the spring and feed on anything they find, including fish that died during the winter months, such as gizzard shad.

Key Issues for Lake Oahe in 2010

- Water levels increased to normal pool levels during 2009 and depending on mountain snowpacks, should remain normal.
- As water levels increased in 2008 and 2009, the flooded shoreline vegetation increased the productivity of the lake.
- Many species of fish increased in abundance by using the newly flooded vegetation as spawning habitat, including northern pike and yellow perch. Yellow perch have become an important prey fish, again.
- Rainbow smelt numbers have been increasing since 2002, but are not back to levels observed during the mid 1990's.
- Gizzard shad are found throughout Lake Oahe and serve as an additional food source for many species of fish, including walleye and Chinook salmon.
- Lake Oahe should have good fishing for many species of fish during 2010.



For more information, please contact:

Missouri River Fisheries Center

20641 SD Hwy 1806

Fort Pierre, SD 57532

(605) 223-7700

www.sdgfp.info

