

2016 ANGLER'S GUIDE



Compiled by Skylar St.Yves, Information and Education Specialist

"There will be days when the fishing is better than one's most optimistic forecast, others when it is far worse. Either is a gain over just staying home."

~Roderick Haig-Brown, "Fisherman's Spring", 1951

MORE FISH THAN YOU CAN THROW (CAST) A STICK AT

Flip, pitch, jerk, pop, swing or sit and wait. Whatever your preferred method of angling is, Oklahoma has the fish to keep you entertained for a lifetime and then some.

Vertical jigging crappie out of shallow brush in the early spring. Big bass blow-ups on topwater frogs during the dog days of summer. Dead sticking winter stripers from the depths. You name it, we got it.

Oklahoma waters are home to 14 species of game fish as well as numerous nongame fish, all of which provide anglers ample opportunity to wet a line.

Reservoirs statewide are packed with largemouth bass, blue and channel catfish, walleye and saugeye, black and white crappie, white and striped bass and of course sunfish. The muddy waterways of the Arkansas, Canadian, Cimarron, Red and Washita rivers are home to monster flatheads, giant gar and a slew of carp and buffalo. The clear spring-fed watersheds of the Ozark and Ouachita are a smallmouth and spotted bass sanctuary.

In this year's Angler's Guide, we'll take an in-depth look at several key species. Covering topics from habitat, movement and diet to the where, when and how to catch 'em. Also, Wildlife Department Fisheries personnel will list their Top Five bodies of water to pursue each species as well as give personal insight into the world, or better yet water, of Oklahoma fish.

WHO SAYS FLY FISHING IS A NORTHERN MAN'S GAME?

We don't have salt, we don't have cold-water mountain streams, we don't have salmon. What in the world are you doing with a fly-rod? I'm having a blast, that's what I'm doing!

No, not just for trout at one of the Wildlife Department's seasonal fisheries. I'm talking bass, stripers, sandies, sunfish, crappie, walleye, catfish, and yes, even paddlefish!

Sound crazy? Well for each species, we'll give a breakdown of how to target them with fly gear.

By the time we're through, you'll find out you've been a fly-fisherman your whole life, but just didn't know it yet!



CRAPPIE

With a liberal statewide daily limit of 37 and no size restrictions, crappie are always a fan favorite among Oklahoma anglers. Argued by many as the top table fare available from Okie waters, black and white crappie earned the top spot in the 2014 Oklahoma Angler Survey, produced by the Wildlife Department, for preferred species to catch, surpassing largemouth bass for the first time.

Now found statewide in many lakes and rivers, crappie were originally stream fish in Oklahoma. Both black and white crappie do well in lakes of at least 500 acres. While black crappie require clear lakes, white crappie are adapted to slightly turbid (muddy) lakes. Neither species is suited for farm ponds because they tend to overpopulate these small bodies of water. Although, if you've spent any time on your local pond, I'm sure you've hooked a few.

Crappie are usually associated with standing timber and brushy cover in lakes. In the spring they inhabit the shallow ends of coves, aggressively feeding in preparation for spawning. After the spawn they tend to move into deeper water of 15 feet or more.

Spawning habits of white crappie are similar to other sunfishes except they usually nest in deeper water. Black crappie construct their nests at even greater depths than white crappie. Females of both species deposit 3,000 to 15,000 eggs. Spawning occurs after water temperatures reach 55 to 65 degrees F. After spawning, males guard the eggs and fry.

Even though most anglers target crappie in the spring, they make for a great wintertime fishery. It is during this time that they form loose schools, and often when you find a school, others can be located nearby. The average crappie caught in Oklahoma weighs between a half-pound and 1.5 pounds.

Crappie's natural diet consists of minnows, shad, crayfish, mollusks and insects. Most anglers target these fish with live minnows or brightly-colored artificial jigs using a technique called dead-sticking. This is where an angler locates an area that is believed to hold fish and drops the bait or lure straight down to a certain depth. Instead of retrieving the line, the angler holds the rod steady and waits for a downward tug before setting the hook.

WILDLIFEDEPARTMENT.COM



Large crappie are often referred to by anglers as "slabs." These are fish usually weighing more than a pound.

WILDLIFEDEPARTMENT.COM



A typical crappie tackle box contains an assortment of tubes, bucktail jigs, curly tail grubs, jig heads, bobbers, and crappie nibbles.

FISHERIES' HOT FIVE

Crappie Lakes

ON THE FLY.

The How: Just like vertical jigging with traditional equipment, fly fishing for crappie is all about depth control. This is easily achieved with a strike indicator (fly fishing's bobber). To select a certain depth simply attach your strike indicator that many feet up from the end of your leader. Crappie prefer to fill their diet with minnows, so tie on a streamer pattern that closely resembles your local baitfish population. Any pattern with a light belly (white) and a darker backside (chartreuse) accompanied with bucktail works well for this method of angling. Cast to your desired target, where you can employ one of two techniques. The first would be to dead-stick the strike indicator allowing the fly to sit idle at your chosen depth. When the strike indicator submerges, set the hook by lifting the rod tip to the sky and applying tension to the line by pulling downward on the line with your line hand. The second technique is to work the strike indicator back towards you with quick strips of the line followed by short pauses. This is very similar in style to bobber jigging with traditional tackle. If the strike indicator pauses or submerges, repeat the hook set described above.

Setup: 3 wt fly rod w/ 3-4 wt floating line. Seven foot 6x tapered leader w/ three feet of 5 to 6x tippet.

Tackle: Size #8 - #10 streamers. Try patterns with lots of white, yellow and chartreuse.

Season: Spring spawn when fish are tight to shallow structure and cover.

Favorite Fly: Size #6 Clouser Deep Minnow in chartreuse and white.

Eufaula

Quantity: ★★★★★

Size: ★★★★★

Habitat: ★★★★★

Forage: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

Oologah

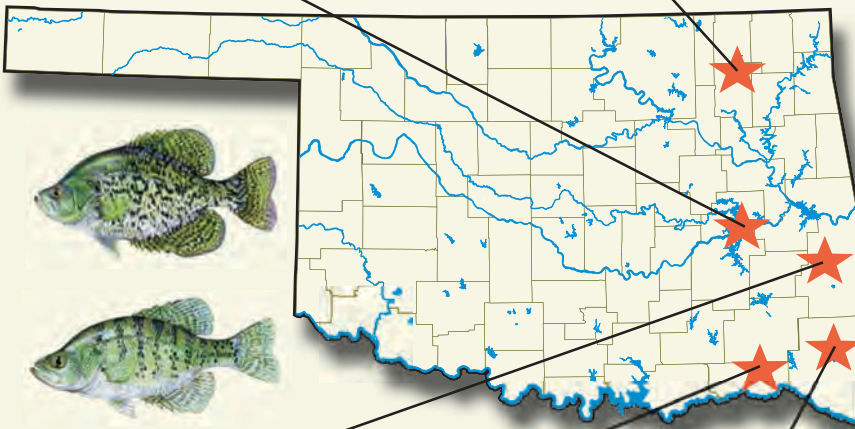
Quantity: ★★★★★

Size: ★★★★★

Habitat: ★★★★★

Forage: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★



Wister

Quantity: ★★★★★

Size: ★★★★★

Habitat: ★★★★★

Forage: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

Hugo

Quantity: ★★★★★

Size: ★★★★★

Habitat: ★★★★★

Forage: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

Broken Bow

Quantity: ★★★★★

Size: ★★★★★

Habitat: ★★★★★

Forage: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★



KELLY ADAMS/ODWC



SKYLAR STYLES/ODWC

BLACK BASS

Is Oklahoma an outstanding state for black bass? The world's most prevalent fishing series sure thinks so and we do, too, which is why the Bassmaster Classic, angling's version of the Super Bowl, returned to Oklahoma for the second time in three years. Grand Lake in northeast Oklahoma is hosting the tournament March 4-6, marking the first time the event has ever been held in March. It has historically taken place in February.

You don't need to be a pro though to enjoy the state's excellent bass fishing opportunities. Oklahoma's three black bass species can be found in just about every body of water. Whether you fancy feisty Ouachita smallmouth bass in one of Oklahoma's clear spring-fed eastern creeks or a lunker largemouth in one of the state's many reservoirs, we've got you covered.

Largemouth bass (LMB) are found throughout the state in ponds, lakes, rivers and streams. Both state and federal hatcheries stock most Oklahoma waters with these powerful fighters. Their natural food sources include crustaceans, insects, crayfish, frogs and fish (especially bluegill). However, small ducklings and rodents have found themselves on the menu for larger fish while not minding their surroundings.

The Florida subspecies of LMB has been continuously stocked in several reservoirs since the 1970s and will interbreed with native LMB. These hybrids grow rapidly and produce trophy-size fish.

During the spring, LMB are found in shallow, weedy habitat where food and cover are available. Spawning activities begin as water temperatures reach 62-65 degrees F (April and May in Oklahoma). Nests are fanned out by males, usually within 10 feet of the shoreline. Females then deposit 2,000 to 7,000 eggs per pound of body weight in the nest. After fertilization, the male drives the female and other intruders from the nest until the eggs hatch and the fry leave. Fry swim in schools until reaching a length of about 1 inch. During the hot days of summer and cold winter months, LMB move to deeper water.

Smallmouth bass (SMB), also known as bronzesbacks or smallies, occur naturally in many eastern Oklahoma Ozark and Ouachita streams and tributaries. There are two strains of native SMB: the Neosho strain and Ouachita strain. Hatchery raised fish known as Tennessee or reservoir strain SMB are found, but no longer stocked, in Oklahoma lakes including Texoma, Tenkiller, Murray, Eufaula, Broken Bow and Lawtonka. These fish are better suited for growth in impoundments whereas the native strains prefer cooler streams with oxygenated current.

Native SMB inhabit clear, gravel-bottom streams. High numbers of SMB in a stream indicate that the water is high quality. SMB are extremely sensitive to changes in water quality, and low numbers of fish

within their native range usually suggest poor water quality. The best areas to fish for SMB within streams are in riffles, pools and the shallows above rapids. In lakes, SMB seek clear, clean water usually with a rocky substrate. Weedy areas along the shoreline, flats off channels and shelves are good areas to find SMB in reservoirs. Crayfish and small fish make up the majority of a SMB's diet, along with aquatic and terrestrial insects, worms, frogs and tadpoles.

SMB spawning takes place in the spring when water temperatures reach the mid- to upper 50s. Nests are built on gravel bars in three to 20 feet of water. The male drives a female to the nest. After she lays her eggs, he searches out another, and then frequently a third female. Each female lays from 2,000 to 7,000 eggs per pound of body weight. Little or no parental care is provided after the fry hatch.

Spotted bass, also referred to as Kentuckies, are common in both the Arkansas and Red river systems. Spotted bass prefer clear lakes and streams in eastern Oklahoma. Although an important game fish in Oklahoma, spotted bass have not been widely cultured or stocked. Unlike SMB, in streams spotted bass are more tolerant of slow moving, warm, turbid water. In lakes, they are found in deeper water and prefer rocky bottom areas as well as steeply sloping sides. Though similar in appearance to LMB, spotted bass have more of a tendency to school and are usually caught at much greater water depths.

Spotted bass spawning takes place in the spring when water temperatures reach 63-68 degrees F. Males clean out a nest on a gravel or rock bottom, usually near heavy cover. After the eggs are laid and fertilized, males guard the nest in a manner similar to LMB males, remaining with the fry until they are about a month old. Their natural food sources include crayfish and immature insects as well as small fish such as bluegills.

Quick Fish ID Tip



Most largemouth bass have no tooth patch on the tongue.

Smallmouth and spotted bass display a tooth patch on the tongue.

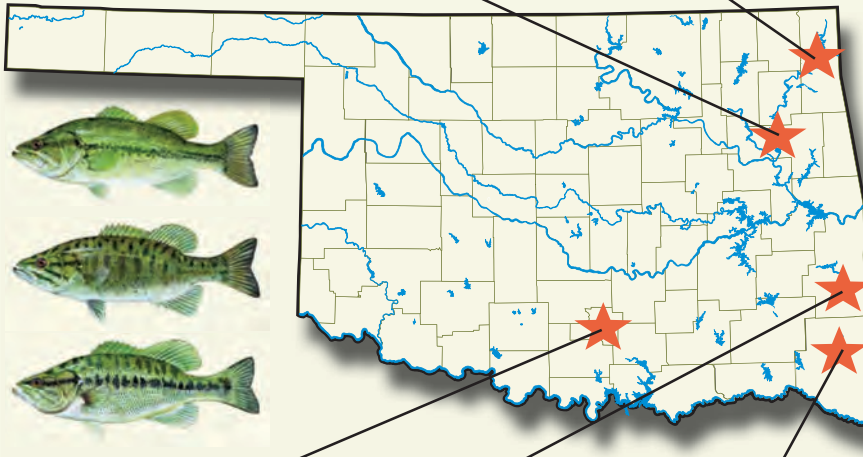
FISHERIES' **HOT FIVE**

Black Bass Lakes

ON THE FLY.

Fort Gibson
 Quantity: ★★★★★
 Size: ★★★
 Habitat: ★★★★★
 Forage: ★★★★★
Overall: ★★★★★

Grand
 Quantity: ★★★★★
 Size: ★★★
 Habitat: ★★★★★
 Forage: ★★★★★
Overall: ★★★★★



Arbuckle
 Quantity: ★★★★★
 Size: ★★★★★
 Habitat: ★★★★★
 Forage: ★★★★★
Overall: ★★★★★

Cedar
 Quantity: ★★★
 Size: ★★★★★
 Habitat: ★★★★★
 Forage: ★★★★★
Overall: ★★★★★

Broken Bow
 Quantity: ★★★★★
 Size: ★★★★★
 Habitat: ★★★★★
 Forage: ★★★★★
Overall: ★★★★★

The How: There's nothing quite like a wily river smallmouth on the end of a fly line. Zig, zag, leap and dive, a big bronzeback is the pound-for-pound prize-fighting champion of fresh water. In a stream, search for these fish in the seam of a big pool where the fast-flowing current dumps food over the shallow riffles into the depths below. Topwater popper flies are fun in the summer months, thrown toward cut banks in the slower moving water of a long run. Swinging or stripping streamers through the beginning of a pool or the end of a run before the riffles is also a productive method year round. But to target the big mamas, look for a deep pool preferably with a cut bank and some structure in the latter half of February. Swing any type of crawfish or creature pattern into the pool and with the rod tip pointed to the sky, slowly make long strips of line. Great, now your hooked into a monster smallie; landing the hook Houdini is on you. For a good time with largemouth bass on your local farm pond, try working big poppers over weed beds in the early summer.

Setup: 5 wt fly rod w/ 5 wt floating line. Nine foot 5x tapered leader w/ three feet of 5x tippet.

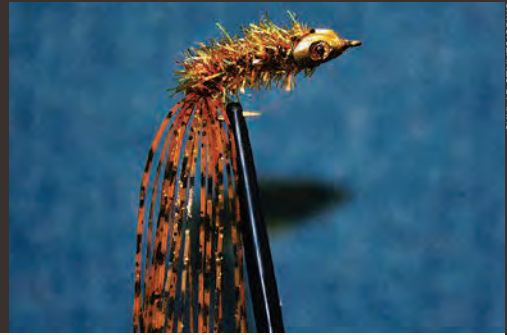
Tackle: Size #1 - size #6 streamers, size #1 - size #4 crawfish or creature patterns, size #2/0 - size #2 poppers.

Season: Mid-February through the end of March on clear-water streams in eastern Oklahoma.

Favorite Fly: Size #1 River Creature in brown.



DON P. BROWN/ODWC



SKYLAR STYVES/ODWC

BLUE, CHANNEL & FLATHEAD CATFISH

The fish of many methods of catch, catfish are a staple of Oklahoma anglers. Pursued with natural or artificial baits, they can be caught on rod and reel, juglines, trotlines, yo-yos, limblines, bowfishing and noodling. Catfish make excellent table fare and their large sizes accompanied with liberal creel limits make for plenty of meat at a fish fry. Blue, channel and flathead catfish can be found statewide in most bodies of waters, including large reservoirs, city lakes, rivers, streams and local ponds.

Aside from sunfish, channel catfish are found in more bodies of water than just about every other game fish in the state. They are heavily stocked across Oklahoma and adapt well to most environments. Channels have the smallest maximum growth potential of the three major catfish species in North America, with the vast majority falling in the 2- to 6-pound range. The state record channel catfish caught in Oklahoma weighed in at just under 36 pounds.

Channels are omnivorous, feeding on a wide variety of organic matter, dead and alive. Some of their natural food sources include fish, mussels, snails, insects and crayfish. However, anglers often have success targeting channels on punch, dough and stink bait as well as nightcrawlers. Found throughout most depths in lakes, channels seek shallower water in the late spring and early summer to spawn.

The largest of the three major North American catfish species, blue catfish can exceed 100 pounds and are found in most large rivers and major reservoirs in Oklahoma. Feeding primarily on shad, blues will also fill their diet with mussels, snails, insects and crayfish. The rod and reel state record blue was caught on Lake Texoma in 2004 and weighed 98 pounds. A 118 pound giant was caught on a jugline, also on Lake Texoma, in 1988.

Unlike blues and channels, who do not discriminate over the status of their food, flathead catfish are truly a voracious predator, preferring their food to be alive at the point of consumption. Most anglers targeting flatheads with rod and reel prefer a live bluegill for bait.

Oklahoma flatheads put a national spotlight on noodling over the past few summers with the TV show "Mudcats." Flatheads seek submerged logs, brushy tangles and holes in undercut banks for shelter during the warm summer making them an easy target for hand fisherman.

All three species share similar spawning traits and can be caught in the same spots during the spawning months. Females will find hollow logs, overhanging underwater ledges and rock holes along rip rap and mud banks to lay their eggs when water temperatures reach 75 degrees F. Males guard the eggs against intruders, including females. Eggs hatch in six to ten days as determined by temperature. After hatching, fry are attended for a short time by the male as they feed in a dense school.

COLIN BERG/DOW



Enjoyed by anglers young and old, catfish are a great sport fish to target with family and friends.

FISHERIES' HOT FIVE

Catfish Lakes

ON THE FLY.

Kaw
 Quantity: ★★★★★
 Size: ★★
 Habitat: ★★★★★
 Forage: ★★★★★
 Overall: ★★★★★

Oologah
 Quantity: ★★★★★
 Size: ★★★★★
 Habitat: ★★★★★
 Forage: ★★★★★
 Overall: ★★★★★



Eufaula
 Quantity: ★★★★★
 Size: ★★★★★
 Habitat: ★★★★★
 Forage: ★★★★★
 Overall: ★★★★★

Texoma
 Quantity: ★★★★★
 Size: ★★★★★
 Habitat: ★★★★★
 Forage: ★★★★★
 Overall: ★★★★★

Fort Gibson
 Quantity: ★★★★★
 Size: ★★★★★
 Habitat: ★★★★★
 Forage: ★★★★★
 Overall: ★★★★★

The How: During the spawn in late May and early June, channel catfish congregate in heavy numbers along riprap shorelines. This is the best time to tie on a San Juan worm beneath a strike indicator and work the north shoreline riprap at your favorite lake. At this time of year the wind is generally blowing in from the south forcing nutrients and baitfish to the wind blown side of a lake. Cast your line 45 degrees from the shoreline and allow the strike indicator to be pushed toward the shoreline by the wind. This will create a natural "rocking" motion for the fly as it drifts toward the bank. Riprap areas, especially along dams, generally have steep rocky drops and because catfish rely heavily on scent and feel to feed, a visual presentation within the middle of the water column is the best play. In most cases, you will want the fly 3 to 6 feet below the strike indicator. When the strike indicator submerges, set the hook and hold on.

Setup: 6 wt fly rod w/ 5-6 wt floating line. Seven foot 4x tapered leader w/ three feet of 4x tippet. Catfish weights can vary dramatically, making a one-size-fits-all setup difficult. A 6 wt rod has enough backbone to hold fish upwards of 10 pounds, without compromising the feel associated with playing smaller fish.

Tackle: Size #6 - #10 San Juan worms. Try red, pink and brown. Double down with a pink or red dropper egg, size #8.

Season: Late spring spawn when fish congregate in heavy numbers along riprap shorelines. In Oklahoma, this generally occurs in late May and early June.

Favorite Fly: Size #6 San Juan worm in red.



MICHAEL BERGIN/ODWC



SKYLAR STIVES/ODWC

TROUT

Not native to Oklahoma waters, trout offer Oklahoma anglers a unique opportunity at six seasonal and two year-round fisheries, as well as two Close to Home trout ponds in Oklahoma City and Tulsa. The trout season for the Wildlife Department's seasonal fisheries generally run from the first week of November through the end of April. Due to a trout's intolerance of water temperatures above 70 degree F., most will not survive past May. However, the fisheries at the Lower Mountain Fork River and Lower Illinois River are able to be maintained for year-round trout fishing due to cold, oxygenated water being released into these tailwaters from the dams that form them.

There are two species of trout that are stocked in Oklahoma. The most common is the rainbow trout. Rainbows are found in streams around riffles, eddies and behind exposed obstructions, such as boulders and root balls. In lakes, they can be found in the deeper pool areas off shoreline points. Aquatic insects such as mayflies, caddis flies, stoneflies, dobsonflies, dragonflies and their larvae, plus small fishes and terrestrial bugs such as grasshoppers make up the majority of a rainbow's diet. However, some anglers have success catching this species with artificial baits such as Powerbait, eggs, corn and worms.

The other species of trout stocked in Oklahoma trout waters is the brown trout. Brown trout can survive in warmer water temperatures than rainbows and are often found in slower moving water in streams underneath cut-banks and overhanging vegetation where shade can be found during daylight hours. More of a voracious predator than its rainbow counterpart, big browns will feed on most of the natural prey that rainbows feed on, as well as small rodents, large terrestrial insects and baitfish, including rainbows.

Whether you're fly fishing, running inline spinners or working Powerbait, trout allow Oklahoma anglers an opportunity to get out of the house during the winter months.



WILDLIFEDPARTMENT.COM

ON THE FLY.

The How: Trout are ambush predators in streams. They use natural current breaks such as boulders, seams, rootballs and cut-banks to sit in and wait for their prey to float by. The current acts as a conveyor belt for trout's food sources. It also forces the trout to make a quick decision on whether or not to strike. The less time a trout has to identify an artificial fly from its natural prey, the better results an angler will find. This makes swinging a wooly bugger or streamer one of the deadliest tactics for active fish and oftentimes can entice a reaction strike from inactive feeders. The first part of employing this tactic is finding the right type of water. You want to find quick moving water through boulder fields or that butt up against cutbanks and seams through deep pools. Always work inside-out whenever possible. That is, make your first swing as close to you as possible as work your way across the stream. This will help avoid running your line over or just behind a feeding fish and spooking it out of the feeding lane. Keep some tension with your line hand and when your line stops or pulls forward lift your rod tip to the sky and set the hook. A few strikes like this and you may never throw a dry or nymph again. Tug is the drug.

Setup: 5 - 6 wt fly rod w/ 5 -6 wt floating line. Nine foot 4x leader w/ three feet of 4x - 5x tippet.

Tackle: Size #4 - #10 bead head wooly buggers or streamers. Stick with natural colors such as olive, brown or black that have a little bit of flash in them.

Season: Year-round.

Favorite Fly: Size #6 Bead Head Wooly Buzzer in olive.



SKYLAR STYVES/ODWC



ON THE FLY.

The How: Walleye and saugeye may be the most difficult species to fly fish for in Oklahoma. They are unpredictable and often inhabit waters much too deep to effectively use fly fishing equipment. Tailwater walleye are a little easier due to accessibility, but for this segment the focus is on reservoirs. The spring spawn offers long stickers the best shot at reservoir walleye and saugeye. Locate zones that intersect deep sand or mud bottoms with rocky outcroppings. These fish prefer to spawn in baseball-sized rocks which are usually found at the bottom of rocky areas, such as dams and rip rap. Work Clouser Minnows, Wiggle Bugs and Wooly Buggers near the bottom (1 to 3 feet). This can be done by slow trolling from a boat, kayak or float tube. An angler can also quick strip or use slow, steady, long strips. Either way it is important to remain within a foot or two of the bottom. Always keep your rod tip pointed at your fly with a little tension on the line. Walleye bites are often subtle and easy to miss, set the hook on any tension, tug or pause that feels out of the ordinary.

Setup: 6 wt fly rod w/ type I or II density compensated line if fishing between eight and 15 feet. Floating line if fishing between 1 and 7 feet. Nine foot 4x leader w/ three feet of 3x-4x tippet.

Tackle: Medium sized clouser minnows and other streamer-type flies. Sizes #1 - #6. Try colors in white, silver, grey, chartreuse, green and brown.

Season: March through April during the spring spawn.

Favorite Fly: Size #2 Clouser Deep Minnow in olive and white.



SKYLAR STYLES/ODWC

SAUGEYE & WALLEYE

Don't put your finger in that mouth! Walleye and saugeye possess a sharp row of teeth on their upper and lower jaws. Anyone who has tried to lip one like a bass has found out that lesson the hard way. But don't let their sharp teeth and creature-like appearances deter you; the fillets from these fish are a chef's favorite.

Walleye were introduced to Oklahoma during the early 1950s to Canton and Tenkiller lakes, and have since become a staple of the Wildlife Department's annual stocking program. Walleye can now be found congregated near the bottom, on sand bars or near ledges and drop-offs, in most major reservoirs statewide. Their natural food sources consist of small shad and fish, minnows, nightcrawlers and crayfish. Most anglers like to slow troll small baitfish imitating lures, jigs and worms for walleye.

A genetic hybrid of a walleye and a sauger, saugeye also offer excellent table fare. Saugeye tend to inhabit the same areas as walleye in lakes. However, because saugeye do not possess walleyes' peculiar light-gathering structure in their eyes, they can often be found at shallower depths. Saugeye are often stocked as a means of clearing a body of water's stunted crappie population. Once they reach 16 inches, saugeye feed heavily on these crappie, thus improving the crappie fishery.

Due to recent flood events on the Lower Mountain Fork River, walleye have established themselves in areas above the re-regulation dam, in Beavers Bend State Park, creating a great new opportunity for anglers who were already accustomed to excellent year-round trout fishing in that section of the stream.

A stringer full of trout and walleye is not something you see every day in Oklahoma.



WADE FREE/ODWC

SUNFISH

Bream, perch, panfish, shell cracker, coppernose — sunfish go by many names depending on where you fish. But odds are, if you've ever wetted a line, a sunfish you have caught. The most common species caught in Oklahoma are the bluegill, green sunfish, redear sunfish and longear sunfish. Rarely exceeding 2 pounds, sunfish are an abundant voracious "predator" when it comes to a can of nightcrawlers. If you grew up fishing in Oklahoma, a sunfish was probably the first fish you ever caught.

Found statewide in streams, ponds and lakes, most species of sunfish prefer similar types of habitat and can be found intermixed in the same fishing holes. Natural food sources for sunfish include insects, crustaceans, snails, larvae and small aquatic vegetation.

Sunfish create colony nests in the summer months when water temperatures reach the mid-70s. These nests are usually constructed in shallow water near the shoreline. Males build nests by fanning out small depressions for females to deposit their eggs into. The male then fertilizes the egg and drives the female away, so it can provide parental care for the eggs during incubation.

During the spawn, sunfish can be found in astounding numbers. Fish can be caught by the hundreds with a small hook, piece of worm or corn, and a bobber placed six inches above the hook. Pitching the bait anywhere near these spawn colonies will result in instant bites. This is a great time to get youths or first-time anglers involved in the sport because the action is fast-paced with quick results.

Sunfish, especially bluegill, are important pond forage fish for bass and catfish and are often the first fish stocked in a new pond along with fathead minnows. A population of over-abundant, stunted bluegill can provide a well-managed bass population in a pond with an opportunity to grow to large sizes (5- to 10-pound range).



ON THE FLY.

The How: Hard to beat a little backyard fun on your local pond during the summer months. Fly fishing for sunfish can put a whole new spin on a fish you've all but ignored since your last childhood camping trip. Sunfish stack up in heavy numbers along weedbeds in the shallow ends of ponds during the summer months. Working small poppers along the edges of these weedlines can provide great topwater action, especially with a 3 wt fly rod. In the early morning hours and right at dusk, try ant and grasshopper patterns. If the bite is slow when the fly hits water, give it a quick twitch or a couple strips of line and see if that doesn't entice a strike, but pay attention because oftentimes in farm ponds this type of tactic is just as likely to bring a feisty bass or channel cat to the surface and really put your light tackle fly skills to the test. Caddis and mayfly patterns should also be in your farm pond fly box. You never know when an evening hatch will get the water boiling and this is not the time to be unprepared. Small wooly buggers and scud patterns can also be a deadly addition to your pond arsenal.

Setup: 3 wt fly rod w/ 3 wt floating line. Seven to 9 foot 6x - 7x leader w/ 3 or 4 feet of 6x-8x tippet.

Tackle: Small poppers size #12 - #16. Try hopper and ant patterns. Small dry fly patterns, like Parachute Adams, are also good to have in your box during evening hatches.

Season: Early June through early September.

Favorite Fly: Size #12 Hopper Popper in yellow.





ON THE FLY.

The How: Topwater blow-ups from monster fish is what keeps anglers up at night. In Oklahoma, that monster is a tailwater striper. Whether it be below Eufaula, Keystone or Tenkiller, there's nothing better than a heavy dose of actively feeding stripers near the surface. When fishing the striper tailwaters of Oklahoma, an angler must be prepared to face fish up to 40 pounds. A sturdy 8 wt with a decent reel should do the trick in most scenarios. The goal in this type of fishing is to best simulate a wounded baitfish. In order to do so, you must first identify what the local baitfish is: gizzard shad, threadfin shad, shiners, etc. This will determine the color of your fly. Angling your casts 45 degrees upriver, make your cast to the desired target then erratically quick strip your line in. When a fish strikes, give it a moment to submerge with the fly before setting the hook. A common mistake amongst topwater anglers is to set the hook immediately following a breach at the surface, which more often than not results in pulling the fly from the fish's mouth prior to a hook set. When on actively feeding stripers, also try stripping and swinging clouser minnows at different depths.

Setup: 8 wt fly rod w/ 8 wt floating line. Nine foot 0x leader w/ 4 feet of 0x-1x tippet.

Tackle: Large shad imitation popper flies. The bigger the better. Try colors in gray, silver, white, chartreuse, gold, green and brown.

Season: Summer (June through September).

Favorite Fly: Size #2/0 Taco Pescado in olive and silver.



SKYLAR STYLES/ODWC

HYBRID, STRIPED & WHITE BASS

Known as the state fish of Oklahoma, white bass, or sand bass as they're commonly referred to, are a popular game fish in Oklahoma. The annual spring spawning run of white bass up rivers and small creeks brings droves of anglers to the water's edge. With no daily bag limits, the thick of the sand bass run can produce daily stringers of hundreds of fish. Small, white grubs and bucktail jigs are enough to do the trick, making sandies a cheap, fun fishing experience. An estimated 1.5 million pounds of white bass are harvested annually from Oklahoma waters by sport fisherman.

Striped bass, or stripers, were introduced to Oklahoma waters after it was discovered that this sea-run Atlantic Ocean fish did quite well in artificial impoundments. Stripers have thrived in lakes including Texoma, Oologah, Kaw and Keystone. They also make for a great summer fishery on the Lower Illinois River. Naturally reproducing populations have developed in Lakes Texoma and Keystone as well as in the Arkansas River system.

The combination of the white bass and striped bass gave us the best of both worlds: a striped bass hybrid. The first of these hybrids was stocked in Sooner Lake in 1977. As a sport fish, hybrids are probably most notable for their rapid growth and fighting ability. Hybrids are a valuable put-grow-and-take sport fish in lakes with large shad populations but little suitable habitat for striped bass and white bass.



WADE FREE/ODWC

PADDLEFISH

With few morphological changes over the past 75 million years, the paddlefish is truly a living fossil. Often referred to as spoonbills, due to their rostrum, a long spoon-like nose, some of the largest concentrations of paddlefish in North America can be found right here in Oklahoma.

Paddlefish have wide gaping mouths and toothbrush like bristles in their gills. They swim through the water with their mouth open and filter feed on small microscopic plankton, much like whale sharks do. A common misconception is that paddlefish use their bills to stir up the bottom. In fact, their bills are covered with sensors that are very sensitive to weak electric currents and help paddlefish detect their favorite meal: tiny plankton living in the water column.

Because paddlefish feed on microscopic plankton, they cannot be caught on traditional line, hook and bait setups. Instead, anglers line the banks of rivers, where paddlefish make their annual spring spawning runs, with surf rods and heavy pound line in the hopes of snagging these prehistoric fish. A large, barbless treble hook is tied onto the end of a line accompanied by a heavy 2- to 4-ounce sinker weight. An angler then makes casts across the river and makes long sweeps with the tip of the rod in order to drag the hook across the back of a fish, resulting in a "snag."

Due to improvements in sonar technology, access and information on staging areas for spawning paddlefish, boat angling for these fish has become quite popular. The equipment setup remains the same, but instead of casting crosscurrent, most anglers prefer to troll up and down the river channel until their hook finds a fish.

Paddlefish are also unusual in their ability to produce caviar. Paddlefish roe, or eggs, can be removed from the membrane and processed into caviar. However, due to illegal trafficking of paddlefish eggs, no angler can be in possession of more than 3 pounds of paddlefish. Eggs from fish caught in Oklahoma cannot leave the state.



ON THE FLY.

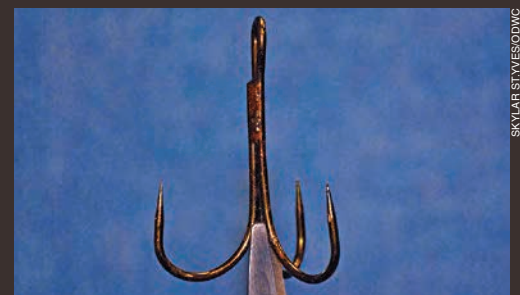
The How: Not your traditional fly fishing setup. Not really your traditional anything setup. Paddlefishing is all about snagging, so the type of equipment used is pretty much irrelevant. The key is to make sure you have enough strength in your rod, line, leader and arms. The latter of which is sold separately. Although casting from the bank is an option, when using a fly rod, being on a boat is more ideal since you will more than likely have to chase the fish once hooked. Depending on how much backbone your fly rod has will determine the amount of weight your sinker will be. The deeper you can get your hook with the least amount of weight attached, the better. Make sure you have enough line stripped out before you begin to false cast. Ideally you want to hit your target in one false cast, so by having line stripped off the reel prior to your first false cast you can load the rod tip in the back cast and let it all fly in the follow through. When you have put your hook in the target zone, allow a few seconds for it to sink lower in the water column. During retrieval, point your rod tip at the target and make long, slow strips of line while sweeping the rod tip away from the target. When the snag is made, get the rod tip straight up to the sky immediately and hang on.

Setup: 9 - 11 wt rod w/ 350 grain sinking line. Nine foot 0x tapered leader.

Tackle: Size #8/0 - #10/0 barbless treble hooks. Half-ounce to 2-ounce sinker.

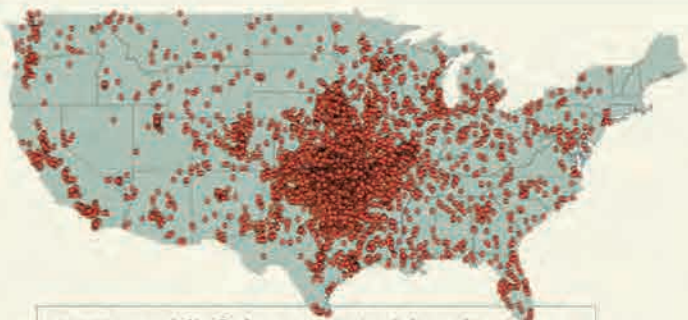
Season: March through April during the annual spring spawning run.

Favorite Fly: "Three-legged lead bugger" - Size # 10/0 barbless treble.



2015 PADDLEFISH ANGLER SURVEY

Each year, the Wildlife Department conducts a survey of paddlefish permit holders to learn about paddlefish angler participation, effort and harvest, as well as attitudes and opinions about certain topics. Here is a snapshot of the 2015 survey results.



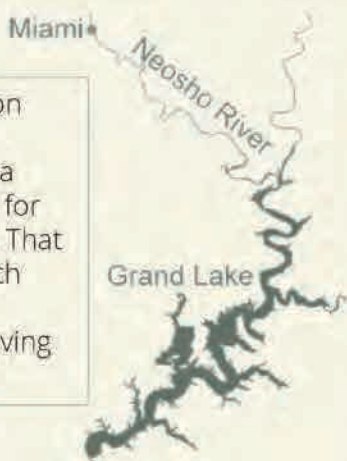
2015 paddlefish permit holders had home ZIP codes from all across the US. The majority, however, were homegrown and from the surrounding states of Arkansas, Kansas and Missouri.

44%

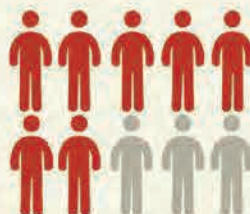
Respondents who have been fishing for paddlefish in Oklahoma for a year or less, while another 15% have been fishing for paddlefish for 15 or more years!



Half of paddlefish anglers preferred to use boats for their paddlefish angling.



The Grand Lake Region has been the most popular area to snag a paddlefish, especially for non-resident anglers. That held true in 2015, with more than 40% of paddlefish anglers having fished in this region.



Seven in 10 paddlefish anglers were successful in reeling in at least one paddlefish. The majority of successful anglers caught just one or two fish total.

70%

of surveyed anglers who kept at least one paddlefish in the Grand Lake Region brought their catch to the Paddlefish Research Center, near Miami, Okla., for processing.

\$180

The average cost of an Oklahoman's paddlefishing trip in Oklahoma during 2015. Paddlefishing trips from out-of-state travelers averaged over \$500.



FOUR

Average number of **day trips** taken by paddlefish anglers

TWO

Average number of **overnight trips** taken by paddlefish anglers



Results are from paddlefish permit data and 624 responses to the 2015 Paddlefish Survey. Data analysis and infographic design by **Corey Jager, Responsive Management Specialist.**

COMMON TERMS

Wt.: This refers to the size of the fly rod. The higher the number, the heavier the tackle (light tackle = 2 – 4 wt., medium tackle = 5 – 7 wt., heavy tackle = 8 – 10 wt., saltwater tackle = 10 & up wt.).

Fly line: Made of a tapered plastic coating over a braided Dacron or nylon core; available in several tapers and in floating, sinking, and sink-tip styles. The fly line's weight refers to the weight (measured in grains) of the first 30 feet of a fly line, used as a way to standardize fly lines in matching them to fly rods of differing stiffness.

Leader: The leader is attached to the end of the colorful fly line and gives the fisherman a virtually transparent connection between the line and the fly. Commercially bought leaders come in a variety of lengths with 7.5 to 9 feet being most common. Most leaders are tapered monofilament nylon, meaning they are a larger diameter at the butt end, which attaches to the fly line, and a smaller diameter at the tip, where the tippet or fly is tied.

For a full glossary of terms visit

www.howtoflyfish.orvis.com/glossary/beginners-fly-fishing-glossary

Tippet: Tippet is a specific gauge monofilament line that is attached to the end of the leader, to which you tie the fly. The tippet is usually the smallest gauge line on your rig and is virtually invisible to the fish. Tippet is also very flexible and allows your fly to float or swim more naturally. Normally the tippet is 2 to 4 feet in length and matches, or is smaller than, the diameter of the leader's tip. The biggest advantage to using tippet is that it extends the life of the leader. Leaders can be expensive and if you change flies often, little by little the taper of the leader is cut away. By tying on tippet, you can avoid losing taper.

Fly size: The number associated with a particular fly refers to the size of the hook. The higher the number, the smaller the hook (small = #28 to large = #2).

X: Measurement used to designate diameter of leader and tippet material used in conjunction with a numeral, as in 5x. The lower the number, the larger the diameter. This type of measurement also determines the break strength of the line (just like pound test associated with line on bait casting and spinning equipment). Heavy break strength = 0x to light break strength = 8x.

Want to Get Involved in Fly Fishing?

Prairie Fly Fishers

Oklahoma City based
President: Tom Adams
(405) 751-7376
gmanagerokc@backwoods.com
www.prairieflyfishers.org

Green County Fly Fishers

Bartlesville based
President: Ivan Winger
president@greencountryflyfishers.com
www.greencountryflyfishers.com

Trout Unlimited

89er Chapter (OKC):
President: Greg Mann
(405) 401-3784
Gmann6@cox.net
www.89ertu.org

Tulsa Chapter:
President: John Sellars
arcamedies1200@gmail.com
www.tulsaflyfishers.org

International Federation of Fly Fishers

Nationwide
(405) 222-9369
www.fedflyfishers.org

Oklahoma Fly Fishing Outfitters

On The Fly
Smallmouth Bass
Illinois River system
(918) 931-1052
onthefly07@sbcglobal.net

Beavers Bend Fly Shop
Trout
Lower Mountain Fork River
(580) 494-6071
eddie@beaversbendflyshop.com
www.beaversbendflyshop.com

Fly Fish Oklahoma
Stripers, Bass, Trout
Illinois River system,
Arkansas River system,
Mountain Fork River system,
Glover River, Red River
flyfishok@gmail.com
www.flyfishoklahoma.com