



Oklahoma is a fishing state. The variety of species available to anglers across the state is broad, and the sheer number of fish is astounding.

2014 Anglers' Guide

Compiled by
Michael Bergin, Associate Editor

In just the last two years, Oklahomans have landed multiple state record largemouth bass, a state record smallmouth bass, and also a state record trout. And a whole host of lake record fish have been reeled in from waters across the state.

Additionally, the state hosted the most prestigious bass fishing tournament in the world — the Bassmaster Classic — right here in Oklahoma in 2013. We have some of the best — if not the very best — paddlefish angling in the world; trout fishing in mountain streams that could rival the fishing offered in the Rocky Mountains, and catfish noodling that has become popular on a national stage.

In short, Oklahoma is a fishing state. The variety of species available to anglers across the state is broad, and the sheer number of fish is astounding. Just flip through the pages in this year's annual Angler's Guide and you'll see there are more fishing opportunities in Oklahoma than any one angler could ever undertake.

However, while all of these accomplishments and noteworthy fishing milestones are definitely exciting, what really makes Oklahoma a fishing state is the people. That may sound a little ironic, but it is the people of Oklahoma that make our state such a great place to be an angler.

Oklahomans love fishing. They travel for miles and miles to find good honey holes. They study techniques to make themselves

better anglers. They show up in droves to watch the weigh-in at big fishing tournaments like the Bassmaster Classic. They spend money on fishing licenses, boat fuel and other gear that ultimately funds conservation work. They take their kids fishing, and they pass on their heritage to new generations.

Wildlife Department biologists, technicians and hatchery employees work tirelessly to create and enhance fishing opportunities. From research and raising fish in hatcheries to stocking fish, enhancing habitat, improving access and monitoring fish populations, among other tasks, these professionals are key to making Oklahoma fishing what it is today.

Game wardens work tirelessly to enforce fishing laws that conserve our fisheries resources, and other professionals specialize in communicating the regulations, helpful techniques and other important information about fishing in Oklahoma.

So, whether you prefer a calm day of fishing in an urban pond, river angling or high-action and fast-paced trophy fishing at a large reservoir, let the information in this Angler's Guide remind you of just how good we have it as anglers in Oklahoma. But remember to take someone with you, be it a family member or friend, because while the fishing is fun, it's the people that make Oklahoma a true fishing state.

—Michael Bergin



Crappie

Aggressive feeders, flakey meat, plentiful numbers — can an angler ask for more in a sport fish? Crappie are a favorite in Oklahoma, and one of the best things about them is they can and should be harvested heavily by anglers.

There are two subspecies of crappie in Oklahoma. The white crappie is more common than the black crappie, but both are plentiful. Such large numbers combined with the crappie's ability to compete well against other predator fish like black bass means they can and should be harvested heavily. In Oklahoma, anglers can take home 37 crappie daily.

Crappie are found in waters all over the state, and for most part, a rod and reel with a handful of small jigs will have you catching more crappie than you can eat.

White and black crappie look similar, but it's not hard to tell them apart if you know a few tricks. White crappie are marked with distinct vertical bands of bluish-gray spots, while the black crappie has a sporadic pattern of black spots. Additionally, a white crappie will have five or six bony spines on its dorsal fin, whereas a black

From the Experts



Who: Josh Johnston, northeast region fisheries supervisor stationed in Jenks.

Thoughts on crappie: Crappie are one of my favorite fish

to pursue in Oklahoma. Not only are they fun to catch, and present in nearly all of the state's reservoirs, they make for excellent table-fare. They are very prolific, resulting in a liberal creel limit. Crappie can be targeted year-round from bank or boat, but springtime is the most exciting, when they are preparing to spawn. At this time, crappie invade the shallows with a hefty appetite.

Best tip: When the water temperature hits 60 degrees F in the spring (usually early April), head out to your favorite cove or creek, and look for brush in shallow water (1-4 feet deep). Drop a jig in the brush and get ready. I suggest using a long rod, as this disturbs the fish less, especially when wading. Use jigs that will be noticed. Don't worry about it looking natural, you want the jig to be seen. I suggest bright colors such as chartreuse, red, or pink. Not a patient person? No worries. If a fish is there, the bite will be quick, so move your jig often.

crappie's dorsal fin will have seven or eight bony spines. There is no difference in the way the two are caught.

Making It Happen

Anywhere that submerged brushy structure is found can be a good place to start.

During mid-March to mid-April, crappie move into shallow water to spawn. That's when they are easiest to catch, and also when you have the best chances of catching big female "slab" crappie. Good bait choices include live minnows, worms, and small jigs. Try using a plastic grub or live minnow to tip off a jig for another approach for catching crappie. Additionally, some anglers even recommend tipping off your crappie jig with a small piece of onion, which may serve as an attractant and draw a strike from a hungry crappie.



A trio of rock bass. Rock bass are one of many species of sunfish found in Oklahoma waters.

Sunfish

Much can be said about why sunfish are one of our favorite fish. These voracious little fighters probably make their way into more “my first fish tails” than any other found in Oklahoma’s waters. Nothing more than an inexpensive rod-and-reel combo is required, and they welcome just about any offering you put on a hook. They can also be found just about anywhere.

As any self-proclaimed sport fisherman can tell you, these small fish often try to bite off more than they can chew, persistently picking at baits meant for what some call “more desirable” species. But what could be more desirable than a prolific native fish that can be caught any day of the week, any time of year, on any budget, by anglers of any skill level with even the simplest of gear and techniques?

Sunfish are abundant in Oklahoma ponds, lakes, creeks, streams, rivers and pretty much anywhere standing water can be found most of the year. A stringer full of sunfish is well worth the time and effort to catch and clean, and young anglers can learn the ins and outs of fishing in just a few trips to a local sunfish hole.

The sunfish family includes a range of common fish found in Oklahoma, among them the popular bluegill, redear, warmouth, rock bass and the green sunfish. For a unique, Wildlife Department-produced field guide on Oklahoma sunfish, log on to <http://www.wildlifedepartment.com/fishing/fishspecies.htm>.

Getting It Done

Sunfish will bite worms, minnows, insects like grasshoppers and crickets, small jigs and almost any other bait. One of the best times to catch sunfish is during the spawning months of May and June, when sunfish are especially aggressive and active. You can often see their shallow nests — some of the best spots to fish — from the bank.

Weedbeds also make ideal habitat for big bluegill and redear sunfish. To fish the weeds, try using small minnows throughout the spawning season. Later in the summer, slip-bobber rigs can be used to fish deeper waters.

Good fishing can be found locally through the Wildlife Department’s Close to Home Fishing program, or you can plan a road trip with the family to almost any fishing destination that sounds like fun to you and your family. Chances are, the sunfish will be waiting.

You have a good chance of catching sunfish in any pond or creek that holds water year-round. That means you can catch them all over Oklahoma, including in urban and metro areas, such as the Wildlife Department’s Close to Home Fishing Waters. Under cooperative fisheries management agreements between Oklahoma municipalities and the Wildlife Department, there is a wide variety of fishing opportunities around the Oklahoma City metro through the Close to Home program.

From the Experts



Who: Larry Cofer, Southwest Region Fisheries Supervisor stationed in Medicine Park

Thoughts on sunfish: “Every kid should grow up with glowing memories of angling for sunfish at a quiet pond, stream or small lake, like those around the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge. Half of the fun comes from collecting bait for the trip — turning over dry cow patties for worms, catching crickets under a street light, or netting grasshoppers in a field. Sunfish are hungry and colorful — especially the competitive breeding males that morph from olive drab to fluorescent aqua, orange and yellow in summer.”

Best tip: “Beginners can try a number 6 hook tied about a foot below a small bobber on 4-pound line and a light action pole. Parents can challenge kids to cast toward weed line edges, rocky banks and near brush to find hungry sunfish. Bring some extra tackle (and your tolerance) to make up for the tangled misfires.”

“Patience is usually not an issue with sunfish. Let the bait linger in a likely spot for a minute, then move on. If there’s a sunfish in the neighborhood, it should take the bait in no time.”

“In early summer, scout for nesting colonies in clear-green water with polarized glasses. Sunfish are group nesters that come back year after year to prime locations behind points, on pea-gravel flats and in sandy coves in 2-3 feet of water.”

“If you’re a veteran sunfisher and figure, “I’m past all that,” try challenging yourself with a reel-less crappie stick and 2-pound test line, or a whippy fly rod and barbless hooks. Spend a trip counting the number of sunfish species you can catch and identify. Then fry a few up for dinner to remember why we started fishing in the first place. Bluegills and green sunfish are the most common species, but Oklahoma is home to 17 colorful sunfish varieties.”



Oklahoma Angler Tells Why Sunfish Are Where It’s At

While they are easy to catch, there’s no end to how seriously you can pursue sunfish. ODWC Facebook fan Greg McWilliams of Shidler is no stranger to fishing for sunfish. In fact, it’s a passion of his. He regularly shares photos of his tube fishing adventures with the Department’s social media community, and rarely is he shown in a photo without a fly rod and sizable sunfish in hand.

“I fish with light-weight fly rods, 2 weight being my favorite!” McWilliams shared with us recently. “I also tie my own flies.”

He says it’s easiest to catch them from the shallows during the spawn, but he doesn’t limit himself to that.

“In the heat of our summers and the cold of our winters, they can be caught in the deeper water out from their spawning beds,” he said. “I use an intermediate sinking line to reach depths of 25 feet, with a countdown and real slow retrieve.”

Like most, McWilliams learned to fish by catching sunfish while his father sought out black bass.

“When I was 5, my dad took me to a small city lake around Bartlesville, Okla. with a tub of worms and a cane pole and a rope stringer. I filled the rope stringer with bluegill, green sunfish, pumpkinseed, while he went bass fishing. I out-fished him one rope stinger to none!”

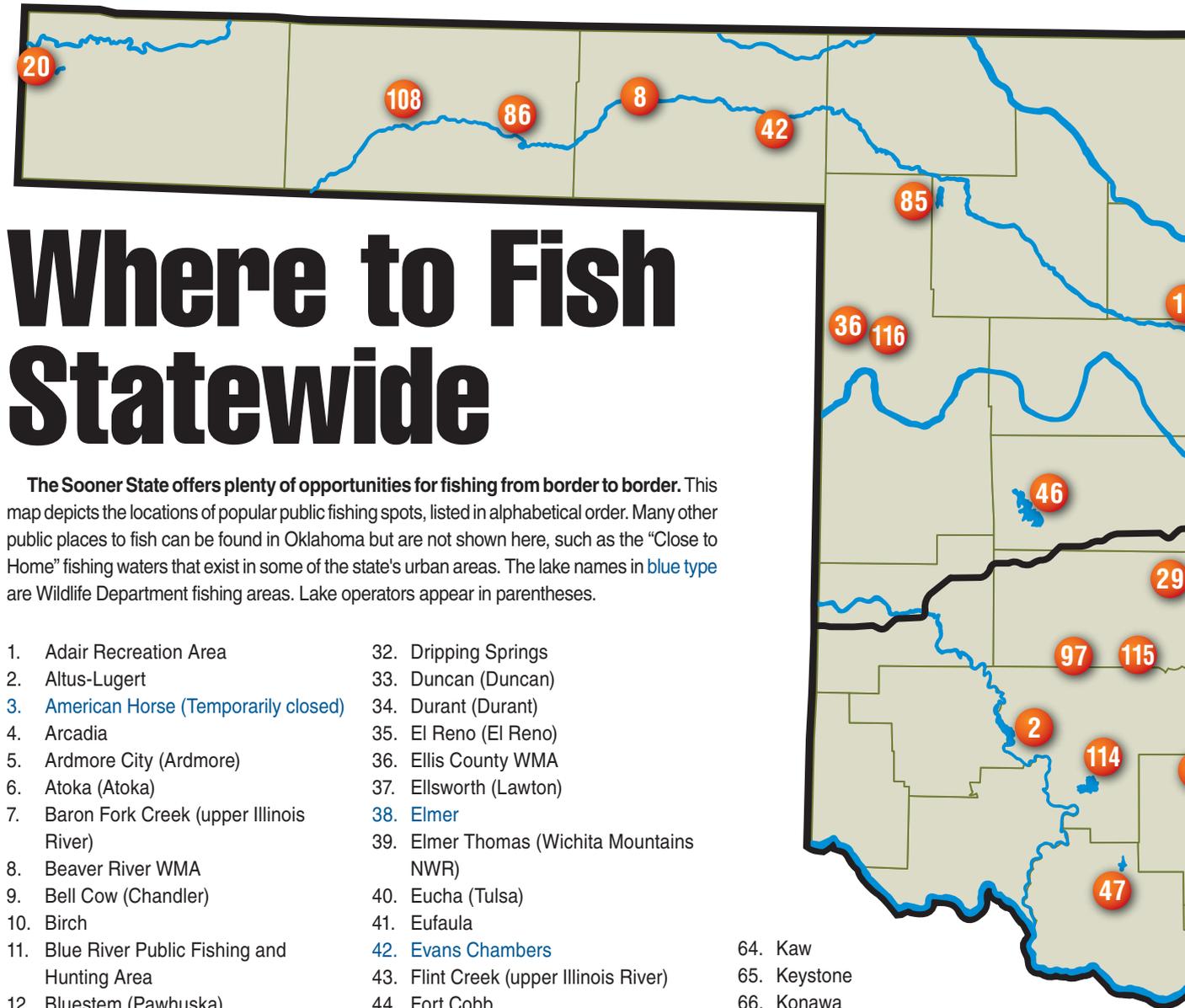
For McWilliams, sunfish are as much fun to catch as anything Oklahoma’s waters have to offer.

“I have chased them for 50 years now and now target all sunfish, looking for the pretty ones and big ones. Six- to eight-inch bluegill are an average size for this part of Oklahoma,” he said.

McWilliams appreciates the great flavor of fried sunfish, too, “with taters, of course.”

McWilliams praises the sunfish as a determined fish, rating some of the ones he’s caught as even harder fighters than largemouth bass.

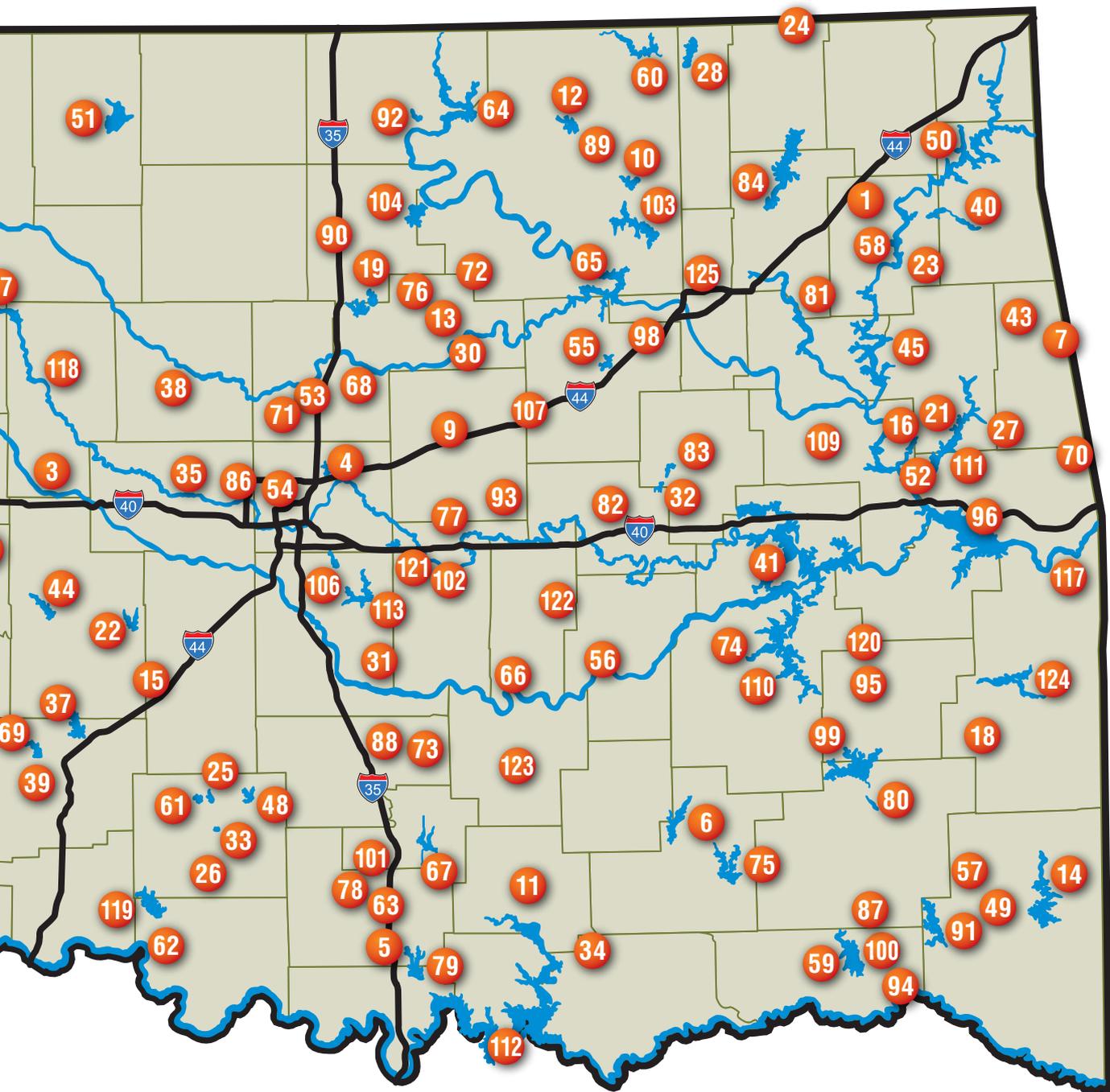
Pound for pound, he may just be right.



Where to Fish Statewide

The Sooner State offers plenty of opportunities for fishing from border to border. This map depicts the locations of popular public fishing spots, listed in alphabetical order. Many other public places to fish can be found in Oklahoma but are not shown here, such as the “Close to Home” fishing waters that exist in some of the state’s urban areas. The lake names in blue type are Wildlife Department fishing areas. Lake operators appear in parentheses.

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| 1. Adair Recreation Area | 32. Dripping Springs | 64. Kaw |
| 2. Altus-Lugert | 33. Duncan (Duncan) | 65. Keystone |
| 3. American Horse (Temporarily closed) | 34. Durant (Durant) | 66. Konawa |
| 4. Arcadia | 35. El Reno (El Reno) | 67. Lake of the Arbuckles |
| 5. Ardmore City (Ardmore) | 36. Ellis County WMA | 68. Langston (Langston) |
| 6. Atoka (Atoka) | 37. Ellsworth (Lawton) | 69. Lawtonka (Lawton) |
| 7. Baron Fork Creek (upper Illinois River) | 38. Elmer | 70. Lee’s Creek |
| 8. Beaver River WMA | 39. Elmer Thomas (Wichita Mountains NWR) | 71. Liberty (Guthrie) |
| 9. Bell Cow (Chandler) | 40. Eucha (Tulsa) | 72. Lone Chimney (Tri-County Development Authority) |
| 10. Birch | 41. Eufaula | 73. Longmire (Pauls Valley) |
| 11. Blue River Public Fishing and Hunting Area | 42. Evans Chambers | 74. McAlester (McAlester) |
| 12. Bluestem (Pawhuska) | 43. Flint Creek (upper Illinois River) | 75. McGee Creek |
| 13. Boomer (Stillwater) | 44. Fort Cobb | 76. McMurtry (Stillwater) |
| 14. Broken Bow | 45. Fort Gibson | 77. Meeker (Meeker) |
| 15. Burtschi | 46. Foss | 78. Mountain Lake (Ardmore) |
| 16. Camp Gruber JMTC | 47. Frederick (Frederick) | 79. Murray |
| 17. Canton | 48. Fuqua (Duncan) | 80. Nanih Waiya |
| 18. Carl Albert (Talihina) | 49. Glover River | 81. Newt Graham |
| 19. Carl Blackwell (OSU) | 50. Grand | 82. Okemah (Okemah) |
| 20. Carl Etling | 51. Great Salt Plains | 83. Okmulgee |
| 21. Cherokee GMA | 52. Greenleaf | 84. Oologah |
| 22. Chickasha (Chickasha) | 53. Guthrie (Guthrie) | |
| 23. Chimney Rock/W.R. Holway | 54. Hefner (Oklahoma City) | |
| 24. Chouteau | 55. Heyburn | |
| 25. Clear Creek (Duncan) | 56. Holdenville (Holdenville) | |
| 26. Comanche | 57. Honobia and Three Rivers WMAs | |
| 27. Cookson WMA | 58. Hudson | |
| 28. Copan | 59. Hugo | |
| 29. Crowder (Washita County) | 60. Hulah | |
| 30. Cushing | 61. Humphreys (Duncan) | |
| 31. Dahlgren | 62. Jap Beaver | |
| | 63. Jean Neustadt (Ardmore) | |



- | | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| 85. Optima | 99. Sardis | 113. Thunderbird |
| 86. Overholser (Oklahoma City) | 100. Schooler | 114. Tom Steed |
| 87. Ozzie Cobb | 101. Scott King (Ardmore) | 115. Vanderwork |
| 88. Pauls Valley (Pauls Valley) | 102. Shawnee Twin 1 & 2 (Shawnee) | 116. Vincent |
| 89. Pawhuska | 103. Siatook | 117. W.D. Mayo |
| 90. Perry | 104. Sooner | 118. Watonga |
| 91. Pine Creek | 105. Spavinaw (Tulsa) | 119. Waurika |
| 92. Ponca (Ponca City) | 106. Stanley Draper (Oklahoma City) | 120. Wayne Wallace |
| 93. Prague | 107. Stroud (Stroud) | 121. Wes Watkins (Pottawatomie County
Development Authority) |
| 94. Raymond Gary | 108. Sunset (Guymon) | 122. Wewoka |
| 95. Robbers Cave WMA | 109. Taft | 123. Wintersmith Park (Ada) |
| 96. Robert S. Kerr | 110. Talawanda 1 & 2 (McAlester) | 124. Wister |
| 97. Rocky (Hobart) | 111. Tenkiller Ferry | 125. Yahola |
| 98. Sahoma (Sapulpa) | 112. Texoma | |



The trout fishery at Medicine Park

Trout

A hundred years ago, few would have thought that Oklahomans could have access to prime trout fishing in their rivers, lakes and even urban ponds. But it's a reality today. Oklahoma has eight designated state trout fisheries as well as urban ponds throughout the Oklahoma City and Tulsa areas that offer trout fishing.

In fact, in 2013 alone, Oklahoma welcomed a new designated trout area at Medicine Creek in southwest Oklahoma, saw a new urban trout fishing opportunity open up in Jenks, and recognized a new state record rainbow trout caught from Lake Watonga.

Native to the cold streams west of the Continental Divide, rainbow trout have been introduced here with great success along with the brown, or German brown trout, which is originally from Europe.

Rainbows are stocked regularly at all of the state's trout areas during the designated trout seasons. The state's winter-only trout fisheries provide angling opportunities in areas where warm water temperatures are not suitable for trout during the summer. They are stocked regularly throughout the wintertime trout season with catchable-sized trout. They include Lake Watonga, Lake Pawhuska, Blue River, Robber's Cave, Medicine Creek and Lake Carl Etling.

The Wildlife Department also success-

fully operates two year-round trout areas that are stocked regularly with rainbow trout and periodically with brown trout. They're located at the Lower Mountain Fork River within Beavers Bend State Park and at the Lower Illinois River. While the rainbow is far more abundant than the brown trout in these year-round fisheries, both fish provide great angling opportunities to fly fisherman and traditional anglers alike.

Anglers can also take advantage of the state's "Close to Home" trout fishery at Dolese Youth Park Pond in Oklahoma City during the months of January and February, and at Veterans Park Pond in Jenks from Dec. 1-Feb. 28.

Regulations at Dolese Youth Park and Veterans Park vary from those at other state trout areas, so anglers should consult the current "Oklahoma Fishing Guide" before fishing for trout at either place.

Getting It Done

Artificial fly variations work well for catching trout, as do live and prepared baits (where legal) such as salmon eggs, corn, Power Bait and small earthworms, minnows, spinners and jigs. Be sure to check the current "Oklahoma Fishing Guide" for trout regulations before fishing an area, as specific hook and bait regulations apply in certain areas.

2013 Saw New Southwest Oklahoma Trout Fishery

Trout fishing and small town charm paved the way for a new fishing opportunity in southwest Oklahoma this past year with the opening of the Medicine Creek trout fishery.

The Wildlife Department began a partnership with the City of Medicine Park to provide trout in the half-mile stretch of Medicine Creek from Gondola Dam downstream to the HWY 49 bridge.

"That's essentially right in town, said Ryan Ryswyk, southwest region fisheries biologist for the Wildlife Department.

The historic City of Medicine Park sits at the foothills of the Wichita Mountains, home to the famous Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge that attracts tourists from across the nation each year. It offers unique lodging,

dining and shopping, hiking and entertainment opportunities and, along with the wildlife refuge, other area attractions such as scenic drives, museums, Lake Lawtonka, Lake Elmer Thomas Recreation Area, and walking trails along Medicine Creek. Along with wintertime trout, the creek also offers fishing for bass, catfish and bluegill. Sidewalks that blend into the granite rock surroundings line the bank of the creek, providing excellent fishing access without taking away from the natural beauty of the area. Many of the city's amenities are within walking distance of Medicine Creek.

"This fishery provides a truly unique opportunity," Ryswyk said. "Being able to catch trout in a pristine southwest Oklahoma creek while a family member takes a stroll on a paved trail to a nearby dining facility for a cup of coffee is an appealing idea. And down here, it's a reality."

Anglers only need a fishing license to catch trout at the new fishery. No special trout or city permits are required, and anglers can keep six trout of any size per day.

Trout fishing and small town charm paved the way for a new fishing opportunity in southwest Oklahoma this past year with the opening of the Medicine Creek trout fishery.



From the Experts

Who: Jon West, southeast region fisheries technician stationed at Higgins.

Thoughts on Trout: "My favorite thing about trout is their proclivity to leap out of the water during a battle with an angler. Their readiness to jump is matched only by their ability, which can be up to 3-4 times their body length! Nothing adds to the excitement of fighting a fish like getting to size up your opponent when they decide to join you in your world for a brief moment before splashing back into theirs."

Best Tip: "Patience and persistence. As with wild fish, stocked fish have days when they are biting great and also days when they are seemingly close-mouthed. On the slower days don't be afraid to change your tactics and your location several times until you find success. You may just find you are the only angler left on the stream when the bite picks up."



Mark B. Reed of Blanchard landed the state's newest state record rainbow trout on Nov. 17, 2013 from Lake Watonga. The fish weighed 10 lbs., 10.56 oz.



Windy points, dams and along riprap are known prime locations for catching walleye from the bank.

Walleye & Saugeye

They may be bizarre in appearance, but walleye and saugeye are outstanding additions to Oklahoma's waters for several important reasons. For one, they feed on stunted crappie populations, helping to improve crappie fishing. But equally important, they represent a unique fishing opportunity in of themselves. Walleye were introduced into some Oklahoma lakes as early as the 1950s, and since

then walleye have been raised in Oklahoma hatcheries and stocked in most major reservoirs throughout the state. When fisheries biologists cross a female walleye with a male sauger, the result is a saugeye, which wasn't stocked in Oklahoma's waters until several decades later — in 1985 — when the first stocking took place at Lake Thunderbird.

Since then, many state lakes have been stocked with walleye and saugeye — much to benefit of anglers. Both walleye and saugeye make delicious filets for the dinner table, despite their not-so-glamorous appearance.

You can tell a walleye from a saugeye by looking at the fish's spiny dorsal fin. The walleye's dorsal fin will have no spots; the hybrid will have spots and bars in the webbing of the dorsal fin.



Note the bars and spots between the spines on this fish's dorsal fin. Do you know what that means? It's a saugeye — the result of fisheries biologists crossing a walleye with a sauger. A walleye's dorsal fin does not have spots or bars in the webbing.



A saugeye caught at Ft. Cobb.

Getting It Done

The best time to catch big walleyes is usually in March and April when water temperatures reach 45-50 degrees, which is when they move onto rocky shorelines to spawn. They prefer to spawn on riprap along dams and bridges on big lakes.

Walleye naturally prey on insects, larvae, nightcrawlers, crayfish, snails and small fish. Try catching them on jigs tipped with large red worms. After spawning, they move to deeper water in main-lake areas, and a great way to catch them is by trolling deep-diving crankbaits along shoreline drop-offs. Additionally, during periods of heavy water flow, tailwater fishing can be productive.

The time to reel in saugeye is often best from mid-January through March. Long, shallow, windy points are prime saugeye angling hotspots, and anglers often draw strikes using minnow-type jerkbaits or jig combos. A white chartreuse jig tipped with a worm and drifted across a rocky point is good way to draw a strike from a saugeye. Try catching them include in the western half of the state, from lakes like Foss or Ft. Cobb. Also, don't rule out Hefner, Thunderbird and many other lakes. The state record walleye was caught in 2004 from Robert S. Kerr Lake, weighing 12 lbs., 13 oz. and measuring more than 30 inches in length.

A single female walleye will produce some 25,000 to 50,000 eggs per pound of body weight? That means the current state record walleye, for example, could produce between 600,000 and 700,000 eggs!

PHOTO COURTESY OF RYAN RYSWYK

From the Experts



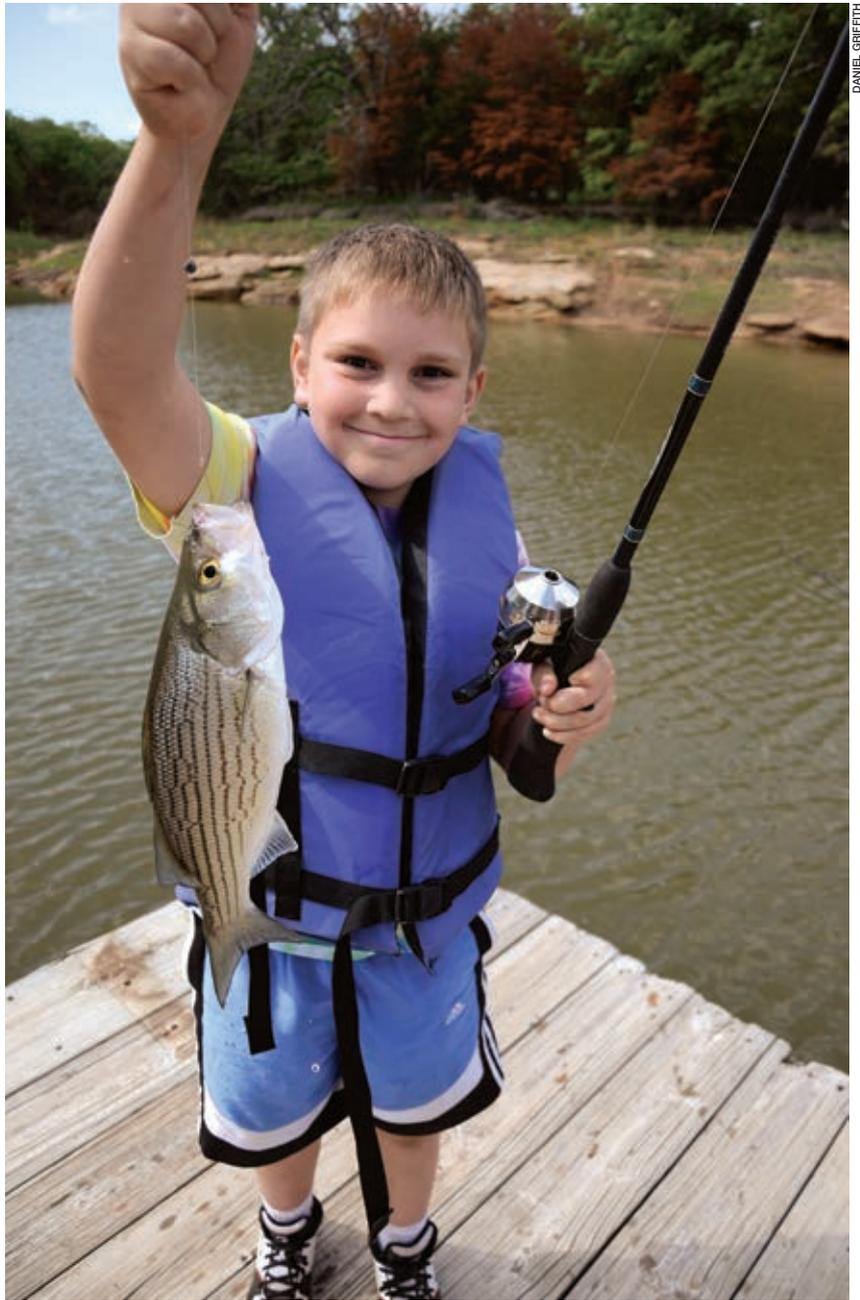
Who: Ryan Ryswyk, Southwest region fisheries biologist.

Thoughts on Saugeye: Saugeye are one of my favorite fish to catch. First of all, they are extremely tasty! They will rival or even beat crappie in a taste test; however, a keeper saugeye is going to provide more meat than a keeper crappie.

Best Tip: Fishing for saugeye can be as involved or as relaxing as you choose. Saugeye tend to stay close to the bottom, so keeping your bait in contact with the bottom is the key to catching them. I like to target areas with a hard bottom — either gravel or rock. Points, drop offs, or underwater humps are great areas to target as well. Slowly dragging a four-inch curly tailed grub along the bottom will often trigger a saugeye to bite. My favorite way to fish for them is with a walking weight in front of a barrel swivel, followed by a floating jig head tipped with a nightcrawler on a 12- 14-inch leader, often called a "lindy rig." The floating jig head will make the nightcrawler rise just slightly off the bottom but still keep the bait in the saugeye's strike zone. This presentation is often best when drifting or slow trolling from a boat. If this type of rig seems too complicated, grab your lawn chair and a lantern and head out to your favorite fishing point at sunset. Cast out a ¼ ounce jig head tipped with a live minnow. Let it sit on the bottom, and enjoy the evening.

These tactics will usually work for walleye as well. Another great way to catch walleye is by working a jig up and down the riprap along a dam during the spawn. Not all reservoirs in Oklahoma are suitable for walleye. Saugeye are able to tolerate warmer water as well as more turbid water than their close relative. Because of this, saugeye stockings have enhanced the fishing opportunities in some Oklahoma reservoirs where walleye populations were poor.

White, Stripper & Hybrid Bass



DANIEL GRIFFITH

A young anglers lands a hybrid striped bass — the result of crossing a striped bass with a white bass in fisheries laboratories — at Lake Carl Blackwell while attending a fishing clinic hosted by the Wildlife Department's Aquatic Resource Education Program.

Have you yet to experience first hand the annual spectacle of the upstream movement of the state fish?

You may have heard of the annual spawning run of the white bass; you may have even seen our very own article giving you the scoop on seven white bass runs you don't want to miss in regions across the state (Eufaula, Broken Bow, Tenkiller, Fort Gibson, Texoma, Kaw and Waurika). But we must ask: have you yet to try you own hand? Have you yet to experience first hand the annual spectacle of the upstream movement of the state fish, resulting in large numbers of these meaty fish just waiting to be caught in streams near you?

These aren't just small movements, either. In fact, sometimes they are better referred to as downright mass migrations, and anglers who find themselves fishing rivers and creeks at just the right time could very well exhaust themselves from the nonstop fishing action offered by these fish on a mission.

White bass are aggressive feeders and are found in many larger lakes. Their annual migration draws anglers to the banks of tributaries and feeder creeks at most major reservoirs. Jigs, spinners and minnows are top bait choices during these river runs.

White bass are aggressive feeders and are found in many larger lakes.

Striped Bass & Striped Bass Hybrids

Striped bass and striped bass hybrids are notorious for being strong fighting fish when hooked on the end a line.

Striped bass were not originally freshwater fish. They were Atlantic Ocean fish that used freshwater streams to spawn. As a result, striped bass became landlocked in an artificial impoundment near the coast. They adapted so well to that environment that Oklahoma and other states began introducing them to their own waters where they thrive without detrimental impacts to native species.

When you cross this true bass Atlantic Ocean native with the Oklahoma native white bass in hatchery laboratories, the result is the striped bass hybrid. Long, sleek and slender, they feed in schools and often travel long distances following shad, their main staple. Live bait is often the best bet, but don't rule out spoons, slabs or bucktail jigs, or even topwater plugs early in the morning.

Making It Happen

Jigs, spinners and minnows are excellent choices for white bass during the spring, but topwater plugs are good to have on hand as summer nears. During the spring, have your fishing tackle ready to grab and go on short notice. Sometimes the fishing is good, and at other times it's outstanding. Using the Wildlife Department's weekly fishing report is a good tool to use for monitoring the start of prime white bass fishing in the spring. When water rises after a rain combined with temperatures in the lower 50s, white bass angling action can peak quickly. Keep your gear prepped and ready to go this spring, and don't miss the annual spring spectacle known as the white bass run.

To catch big striped bass, fish the tailwaters and deep holes below dams on the Arkansas and Red rivers. When fishing these areas, the best approach is to drift live shad, preferably six inches or longer. And don't rule out casting from the bank.



WADE FREE

Don't you think it's time you treated yourself to a fishing trip during the annual spawning run of the white bass?

From the Experts



Who: Kurt Kuklinski, senior biologist stationed at the ODWC Research Laboratory in Norman

Thoughts on white bass: "My favorite thing about white bass is that they are so abundant across the entire state. From Broken Bow to Fort Supply and everywhere in between, we are blessed with good white bass fishing. They can be caught in most bodies of water, from our largest lakes to our smaller streams during the spring spawning run. The white bass truly is the state fish of Oklahoma."

Best tip: "Double rig jigs to double your fun! White bass are aggressive schooling feeders, so take full advantage of that by rigging your line with two jig-curl tail grub combos spaced about 16 inches apart. Doing this will increase your odds of a strike, and it may also surprise you how often you hook up with two fish on a single cast. Once the first white bass is hooked, other fish are attracted by the commotion and see a second enticing jig waiting to be eaten and simply cannot resist. The result is often two fish pulling on your line instead of just one!"

BLACK BASS



JOHN PERRY

Oklahoma's most recent state record smallmouth bass caught by Ryan Wasser of Pocasset from Lake Lawtonka on March 31, 2012. The fish weighed 8 pounds, seven ounces.

Black bass are known to provide action-filled angling, whether you fish for fun or for big money in tournaments like the Bassmaster Classic.

Each of the three subspecies of black bass in Oklahoma — largemouth, smallmouth and spotted bass — can be caught statewide, and lately, Oklahoma has been producing not only large numbers of bass, but also big ones.

State records were set for the smallmouth bass in 2012 (Lake Lawtonka) and for the largemouth in both 2012 and 2013 — both of those were from Cedar Lake in southeast Oklahoma.

Additionally, multiple bass fishing tournaments in the last few years have garnered attention for notably heavy winning stringers. In tournament fishing, anglers usually compete for the heaviest five-fish stringer, and last year at least two tournament-winning bags went over 40 pounds each on consecutive weekends at Arbuckle Lake. And who can forget that Oklahoma hosted the biggest bass fishing tournament in the country in 2013 when the Bassmaster Classic was held at Grand Lake.

The different subspecies of black bass

in Oklahoma have varying management requirements, so the Wildlife Department developed a Black Bass Management Plan to develop site-specific plans that will help improve bass fisheries in Oklahoma. The plan make managing Oklahoma's vast variety of bass fishing waters that much more effective.. The plan has been known as one of the best black bass management strategies in the nation, and anglers are catching the fish to prove it.

When bass populations achieve their full potential, angling opportunities are improved. But doing that sometimes requires special efforts. Although fisheries biologists use a variety of information to determine management recommendations, some of the most important data comes from springtime electrofishing surveys. These surveys provide a wealth of information, such as specific and overall numbers of fish, average fish size and abundance of forage. As you might suspect, some lakes are better suited to producing large numbers of bass, while others are managed to produce trophy bass.

It takes management of both fish harvest and fish habitat to accomplish the goals

of the Black Bass Management Plan. By regulating harvest through the use of slot length limits, minimum size limits and modified bag limits, the Department helps create the highest quality of fishing possible. However, it's up to anglers to ensure harvest regulations have a positive effect fisheries by accepting and following them.

Making It Happen

Black bass fishing can be good in lakes, rivers, streams or small ponds. Black bass diets can include a variety of other fish, crayfish, insects, frogs, lizards and more. Depending on the time of year, there is always something that a bass will hit. Maintain an assortment of jigs, spinners, surface lures, rattletails, rubber worms, deep divers, crankbaits and more.

Look for cover and shady or weedy areas along banks and shorelines as well as flats off channels and shelves. In the moving waters of rivers, streams and creeks—such as those that smallmouth bass call home—fish the riffles, pools and the shallows above rapids. Try casting upstream from honey-holes and allow some drifting to aid your play. Be persistent, vary your lures, colors and baits, keep them moving and don't spend too long in one location unless you are catching fish. Experts claim technique makes the difference in 90 percent of bass catches. Generally, work lures faster in warm water and slower in cold water.



WILDLIFEDEPARTMENT.COM

Oklahoma's state record largemouth bass caught from Cedar Lake not even a year after a different angler landed the previous state record largemouth from the same lake. The fish was caught on March 13, 2013 by Dale Miller of Panama, Okla. and weighed 14 pounds, 13.7 ounces.

From the Experts



Who: Gordon Schomer, Durant State Fish Hatchery manager stationed five miles north of Durant.

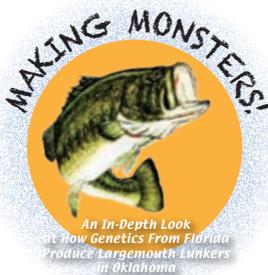
Thoughts on Black Bass: "There are three different members of the black bass family in Oklahoma. The largemouth — in general the most popular sought after by Oklahoma anglers — the smallmouth bass and the spotted bass. All three offer a truly fun and unique challenge and at least one of them is likely to be relatively close in one of your favorite bodies of water to fish in. My personal favorite is the largemouth because of its potential to grow so much larger than the other two. I know that

I likely will never ever catch a state record largemouth bass myself, but I have helped raise and stock enough of them into several southern Oklahoma lakes over the past 23 years so when someone does catch a new record from a lake that I know the Durant State Fish Hatchery stocked fingerlings into, I feel I like my staff and I have had a small part in that fish's success to getting to that point in time to be a new record."

Best Tip: Anybody can catch a bass! That and the sheer power they possess when you battle them is what makes them so fun to catch. Try fishing around cover since bass generally like to ambush their unsuspecting prey and once they hit be ready to set your hook or they may just spit it right back out at you!

Summary of Species Stocked in Public Waters January through December 2013

Bluegill	70,200
Brown Trout	12,578
Channel Catfish	313,315
Florida Largemouth Bass	2,219,957
Goldfish	63
Hybrid Striped Bass	615,625
Hybrid Sunfish	6,214
Largemouth Bass	664,663
Paddlefish	42,356
Rainbow Trout	279,703
Redear Sunfish	100
Saugeye	722,636
Walleye	5,492,766
Total Stocked in Public Waters	9,840,176



To read about how Wildlife Department fisheries personnel are using Florida largemouth bass genetics to grow bigger bass in Oklahoma, turn to page 36.

Catfish

If there is any fish that has captured the thoughts of leisurely bank fishermen, noodlers and trotliners alike, it's the catfish.



COLIN BERG

If there is any fish that has captured the thoughts of leisurely bank fishermen, noodlers and trotliners alike, it's the catfish.

Oklahoma has a place for all of these anglers, and it has plenty of catfish to go around as well. Oklahoma is home to channel cats, blues and flatheads. All of them are known for being heavy on the line and delicious fresh from the skillet.

Though perhaps less attractive than the channel and blue catfish, the flathead is still a favorite among many anglers such as trotliners, jugliners, limbliners and noodlers. Noodlers can catch flatheads during May and June when the fish head for cover in shallow waters to build spawning nests.

Catfish grow especially active when

warm weather coincides with rising water levels. Many anglers use worms, crayfish, prepared baits and cut shad for channel cats, but blues and flatheads, especially the big ones, prefer live bait. Small sunfish work well for trotlines, and live shad are a good option for rod and reel rigs.

Making It Happen

Worms, crayfish, prepared baits and cut shad work well for channel cats, which are omnivorous and feed on a range of organic matter, both dead and alive. These fish rarely grow larger than 50 pounds.

Try live bait for blue and flathead catfish. Blue catfish bite throughout the winter, even when fishing for other species slows

down. Rain and runoff entering waterways stimulates blues in the winter as much as in the spring and fall. During summer, find big blues suspend over deep, cool water and feed. This is especially true at night. They feed on fish, mussels, snails, insects, crayfish, etc. and can weigh in excess of 100 lbs. Flatheads, though maybe less attractive than the blue or channel catfish, are fun to catch on live bait or by hand and trotline.

Methods include using a cane pole to drop a baited hook near submerged logs in rivers, fishing from a bank or boat with a baited hook, and also "unmanned" fishing rigs like limblines, juglines and trotlines. Of course, noodling, or fishing by hand, has grown in popularity as well.

Oklahoma is home to channel cats, blues and flatheads. All of them are known for being heavy on the line and delicious fresh from the skillet.

From the Experts



Who: Matt Gamble, fisheries biologist stationed at Blue River Public Fishing and Hunting Area.

Thoughts on Catfish: One of the best things about catfish is that they can be found almost anywhere from small farm ponds and creeks to large reservoirs and rivers. No matter where you live in the state, chances are you are

near a good catfish fishery. They make great table fare and can be caught by all levels of angling ability from beginner to pro. Some of my fondest memories are of fishing with family in my grandparents farm ponds for channel catfish.

Best Tip: A lot of times I see people fishing exclusively on the bottom for catfish. That can be a mistake! Don't be afraid to change depths and even fish near the top, they aren't always on bottom. If you aren't having any luck at one depth, adjust your approach; and you may find them just a few feet above or below where you were. Also, catfish bait can be cheap and readily available without a trip to the bait shop. Clean out your fridge and freezer to find bait. Molded cheese, chicken livers or any other meat that you no longer care to have can make great bait for channel catfish.

Noodling Alert: Changes to Rules Now in Place

Noodling — or the taking of nongame fish and catfish by use of the hands only — has seen significant attention and growth in popularity in recent years. From tournaments to TV shows, the summer waters of Oklahoma's lakes and rivers have become more and more enticing to brave anglers willing to get in the water and up close and personal with the fish they want to catch. The sport also has seen some regulation changes occur recently. So, just what is legal when noodling for catfish, anyway?

Noodling is lawful year-round in all waters only during daylight hours unless restrictions are listed in pages 20-28 in the current "Oklahoma Fishing Guide."

From May 1 to Aug. 31, the daily limit for noodling is three blue, channel or flathead catfish in any combination, of which only one may be 30 inches or longer. From Sept. 1 to April 30, the daily limit for noodling is 10 flathead catfish (except at Lake Texoma, which has a five-flathead limit).

Legal:

- Using only the hands to take catfish and nongame fish, which include buffalo and carp
- Using a stringer to secure a fish once it has been caught

Not legal to use to help catch fish:

- Any object other than your hands used to help you catch a fish.
- It is unlawful to place into any lake or reservoir any container that will attract, entice or lure fish into an open cavity within the container. Containers include but are not limited to drums, cans, tubs, boxes and barrels. It is also illegal to noodle within such containers.

Not legal to possess when noodling

- Hooks, gaffs, spears, poles with hooks attached, ropes with hooks attached. Possession of such items while in the act of noodling shall be proof of violation of the "hands only" law.

Paddlefish



Anglers are discovering just how fun it can be to reel in a fish potentially larger than anything else they will ever catch in Oklahoma, and maybe in their lives.

Paddlefish are known to have existed for thousands of years. They live up to 35 years in Oklahoma, and 30 lbs. is a small one. Every year these fish move upstream in rivers to spawn, concentrating in large numbers that provide good fishing by way of “snagging” a technique

that includes dragging a large, weighted treble hook through the water until a fish is caught.

Known for the unusual appearance of their long, bill-like snout and their large size, paddlefish have been the subject of intense study ever since an important Wildlife Department research facility opened in 2008 near Miami in northeast Oklahoma. Thanks to some robust research efforts in recent years, efforts are well underway

to keep these ancient Oklahoma fish in healthy numbers for years to come. Learn more about it in this section.

Making It Happen

The Neosho River in northeast Oklahoma is a prime spot to catch a paddlefish. What's more, the Department's Paddlefish Research Center near the Twin Bridges area will clean and process your fish for free in exchange for biological data and, if female, the fish's eggs. Among other locations, you might also try Lake Hudson and the Arkansas below Kaw Lake. Don't plan on going unless you feel rested and strong. Depending on your fitness level, two to three fish may be all you can handle before you've had enough.



"Best fight you'll ever have on rod and reel fishing in Oklahoma." - ODWC Facebook fan Johnny Vong of Oklahoma City on paddlefish angling.

New: Paddlefish Annual Harvest Limit Set at Two Per Angler

New this year, the annual harvest limit on paddlefish has been set at two fish per individual, meaning that once anglers have harvested two fish, they must stop keeping them for the year. However, they can continue "catch-and-release-only" fishing for paddlefish. Additionally, the new rules require anglers to log on to wildlifedepartment.com to report their harvest, much like hunters must check in their harvested deer online. Checking fish will further expand biologists' knowledge of paddlefish populations. Current rules that limit anglers to one paddlefish per day and that require them to stop fishing for the day once a fish has been kept will remain in place.

According to Jason Schooley, paddlefish biologist for the Wildlife Department, the rule changes are important for conserving paddlefish in the Grand River system that largely supports the state's - and some would argue the nation's - most popular paddlefish fishery.

Paddlefish mature slowly - females must reach 8-10 years of age before they mature and reproduce; males, 6-8 years of age. And even then, paddlefish are "episodic" reproducers, meaning their populations are marked by good but sporadic years of successful reproduction mixed with less than ideal years. Schooley says protecting the prominent age class - in this case the 1999 age class - will help sustain the fishery while younger age classes mature. While ODWC continues to monitor recruitment, hopefully future year classes will contribute to continued paddlefish angling in Oklahoma.

Six years of harvest data and four years of angler surveys indicate that most paddlefish anglers (84 percent) harvest fewer than two fish in a year. The remaining 16 percent of anglers disproportionately represent over 40 percent of the total harvest. Choosing an individual annual harvest limit of two fish was the ideal option to limit the high-harvest anglers (those putting the most strain on the resource) while not restricting most other paddlefish anglers. Also, survey results indicated that paddlefish anglers put more value on the opportunity to catch a fish than they do on the ability to harvest a fish. Therefore, once an individual annual harvest limit is reached, catch-and-release is still available year-round.

"What we are doing with these rule changes is protecting our paddlefish by proactively adjusting the harvest before we reach a point of over-harvest," Schooley said. "At the same time, we are making these changes while we still have some of these 1999 fish around so they can continue to support the fishery. We have enjoyed that year class as a resource, but because they have a definite lifespan, that population is declining naturally. These rules will help us bring in younger age classes while making sure we have plenty of good fishing available in the meantime."

From the Experts



Who: Jason Schooley, paddlefish biologist stationed at the ODWC Paddlefish Research Center in Miami

Thoughts on paddlefish: "Paddlefish, in many respects, are the big game of Oklahoma fishing. We have anglers traveling for thousands of miles to Miami, Okla. for a chance to catch one of our prehistoric giants. Though paddlefish are primitive, don't mistake them for unevolved. In fact, with their bills loaded with electro-sensing cells, they are a highly specialized, plankton-eating, swimming metal-detectors."

Best tip: "The biggest tip I can give on paddlefish snagging in the Neosho River is that timing is key. Since paddlefish can't be enticed to bite on a hook, an angler needs to have his hook in the water when and where the fish are most likely to be. Smaller males will generally always be available to catch during the period of early March through early May. But if you aim to catch a trophy female (or even an older, larger male), they hang out in the upper lake until the river conditions are just right. Our research indicates that they won't make significant movements upstream until the river crests to 10,000 cfs or greater. If water temps are around 18 deg C, females are going to swim upstream for their spawning grounds, and snag anglers will be waiting. If the river rapidly drops, those females will retreat back into deeper holes in the river and upper lake while they wait for a second chance to go upstream when the river rises again (which it usually does at least 2-3 times per spring). Keep an eye on the regional rain forecast and the river levels to choose the optimal time to catch one of Oklahoma's prehistoric giants."