

## 2023 BBL Fishing Report

Tom Stinson, Chair of the Bass Lakes AEP Fishing and Fish Habitat Committee

- BBL has gaps in the food chain and may be contributing to the overabundance of undersized bass.
  - - Crayfish and frogs are rarely seen. After checking stomach contents of over 120 10"-14" bass I found only 3 crayfish during the entire season. More than 90% of stomach contents were minnows (brook silverside, skip jack, and fatheads). The other 10% were young of the year bluegill, perch and some bugs. This was derived from visual I.D. by shape and coloration only.
- Bluegill population findings:
  - - There is a low density bluegill population. The growth rates are high and bluegill quickly outgrow "forage" size for small bass, leaving the bass to roam open water to chase minnows. I observe schools of bass crashing the surface in 35 feet of water chasing minnows on a daily basis. BBL is the only lake where I have seen this on a regular basis. This doesn't seem healthy to me; I would think a bass will struggle to grow when having to roam and chase its forage constantly.
      - - There appears to be respectable numbers of bluegill in the 4"to 8" range along with an overabundance of bass under 10", so if a bass does escape the stunted size range it has plenty of forage and can grow very big! I have witnessed a few 5 pound bass during the spawn this year.
- Spawn problem:
  - - - We surveyed 2 areas of the lake this spring, both about 40 acres in size, and counted bass and bluegill beds. This was done to get the predator to prey ratio. With bluegills being the backbone of a bass diet in a healthy fishery, this ratio is important!
        - - The bay had 148 bluegill beds and 56 bass beds. The second area had 170 bluegill beds and 59 bass beds, pretty consistent, the second area was slightly larger. I do not know the ideal ratio, but this seems unbalanced.

- The bass spawn is closed and protected while the bluegill spawn is open and very vulnerable to fishing pressure. Bluegills are very easy and fun to catch during the spawn, and BBL gets a lot of fishing pressure for bluegills.
  - Bluegill spawn is in full swing after Memorial weekend in normal weather (early this year) due to unusual warm weather, and this is the time boat traffic ramps up. Boat traffic may have a negative impact on the bluegill spawn, it seems like it would, but I have no data to support.
  - To sum it up, the bluegills are getting beat up, and bass get to spawn unmolested.
- Bluegills play a big role in limiting bass populations.
    - - Bluegills will raid bass beds to eat eggs and eat hatched bass fry. Without a healthy bluegill population, bass can become overcrowded and stunted in size, and that is what we have in BBL. Too many bass and not enough food to feed them all.

We gave our best effort to fix the overcrowded bass problem last year and we fell woefully short! I had a consultation with a fisheries biologist from Texas A&M and he advised we remove 2000 pounds of undersized bass to put the lake back into balance. We removed only 750 pounds! I'm sure that helped, but it didn't fix our problem. The bass catch rate per hour is the same as last year or better. Meaning the bass we removed just made room for the next year class to move up.

In my opinion there are 2 ways to move forward to get our lake back to the good old days:

1. The D.N.R. allows BBL a year round open season with a 10 bass under 14" bag limit, and enjoy what the lake has to offer now. This would be a really fun ice fishery if we could keep a meal of small bass , instead of panfish.
2. We (property owners) pay to have the lake stocked with panfish.

These are my opinions and observations, please let me know yours!

Tom Stinson

[stinsonproducts@gmail.com](mailto:stinsonproducts@gmail.com)