



Gatewood Reservoir: Jewel of the Blue Ridge

John R. Copeland, Fisheries Biologist, Blacksburg

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Gatewood Reservoir is nestled in the hills of southwestern Pulaski County in the Eastern Divide Ranger District of the George Washington/Jefferson National Forest. A 162-acre water supply impoundment owned by the Town of Pulaski, it is a scenic lake, where you can still “get away from it all” for a day. Gatewood is a great place to bring the family for a picnic, camping, or fishing. Facilities include a campground, picnic areas, nature trails, and wilderness camping. With its remote location, peaceful surroundings, and the added benefit of great angling opportunities, Gatewood Reservoir is an untapped “Jewel of the Blue Ridge”.

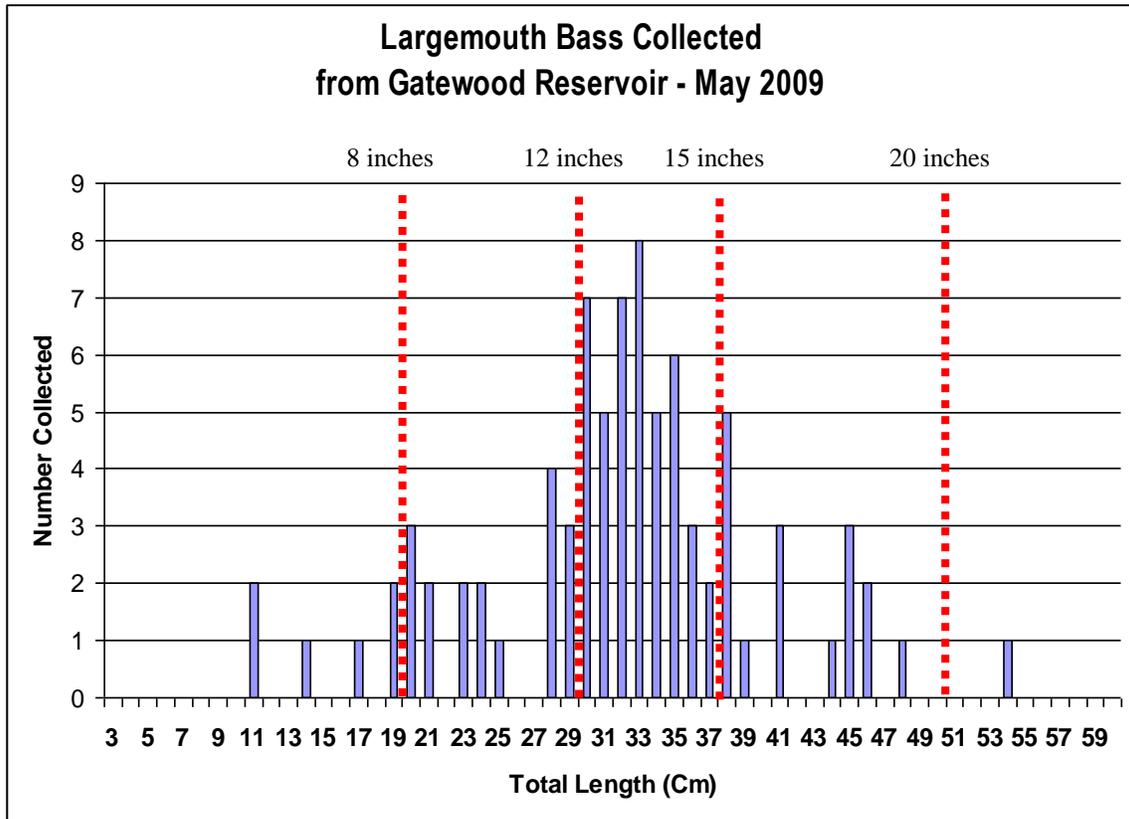
Fish populations at Gatewood Reservoir are sampled in May by Department fish biologists using electrofishing. “Electrofishing” is a fish collection technique that uses a boat-mounted generator and voltage regulator to put an electric shock into the water. The shock affects fish that swim near the boat’s electric field. The electric field is limited to an area within a few feet around the boat. “Electroshocked” fish actually swim toward booms dangling off the front of the boat, where they are temporarily stunned and can be

netted by biologists. Fish collected during electrofishing surveys are measured, weighed, and released back into the lake. Length information from collected fish gives biologists an indication of spawning success and whether there are good numbers of fish for anglers to catch. Weight information tells biologists whether these fish are in good condition. Time spent electrofishing is recorded so biologists can measure catch rates of each species and compare this information between years.

The main species collected by electrofishing at Gatewood Reservoir are largemouth bass, bluegill, redear sunfish, and black crappie. Between 2001 and 2009, collections of these species indicate that reproduction is consistent from year to year. In addition, catch rates for these species have been stable or increasing, indicating these populations are not overfished.

Largemouth Bass

Fishing for largemouth bass is as good at Gatewood Reservoir as it is on some areas of Claytor Lake. Largemouth bass are abundant and in good condition. Largemouth bass sizes during electrofishing from 2001 to 2009 were consistent. During these years, between 60 and 80 percent of the adult largemouth bass (over 8 inches long) collected were over 12 inches long and 21 to 43 percent of the adult largemouth bass were over 15 inches long. Anglers will find good numbers of 12 to 15 inch largemouth bass during 2010 and future years.





A nice largemouth bass from a Gatewood Reservoir electrofishing sample.



A good size redear sunfish from a Gatewood Reservoir electrofishing sample.

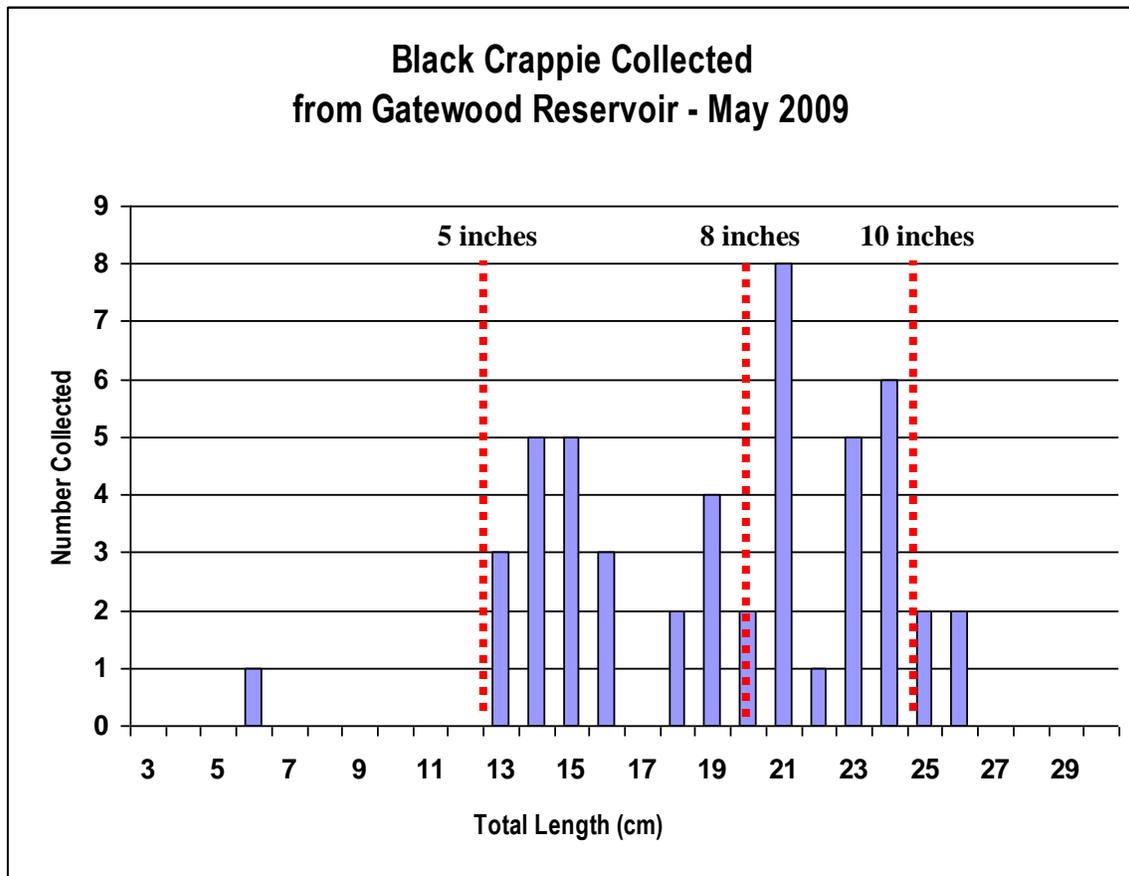
Panfish

For many years, bluegill and redear sunfish were the main attractions at this clear water lake. Yellow perch were introduced to the lake sometime between 2001 and 2005, impacting these species. Bluegill, black crappie, and redear sunfish still reproduce well in Gatewood Reservoir, but are not as healthy as they were before the yellow perch introduction. Yellow perch feed on zooplankton (microscopic animals that live in the water). Zooplankton are an important food source for sunfish and crappie, so these

species are heavily impacted by the yellow perch introduction. While panfish in Gatewood Reservoir are not as heavy as they once were, you can still enjoy fishing for them in a quiet setting.

Bluegill size ranges have been consistent since 2005, with 31 to 36 percent of the adult bluegill (over 3 inches long) over 6 inches long, and 5 to 7 percent of the adult bluegill over 8 inches long. In the May 2009 sample, 25 percent of the adult redear sunfish (over 4 inches long) were over 7 inches long, and 9 percent were over 9 inches long. Catching large sunfish at the lake is easiest during the peak spawning time between mid-May and mid-June. When fishing at other times of the year, look for these sunfish in deeper water near woody debris. Because the lake is very clear, anglers may need to fish in early morning and late evening to avoid spooking these fish.

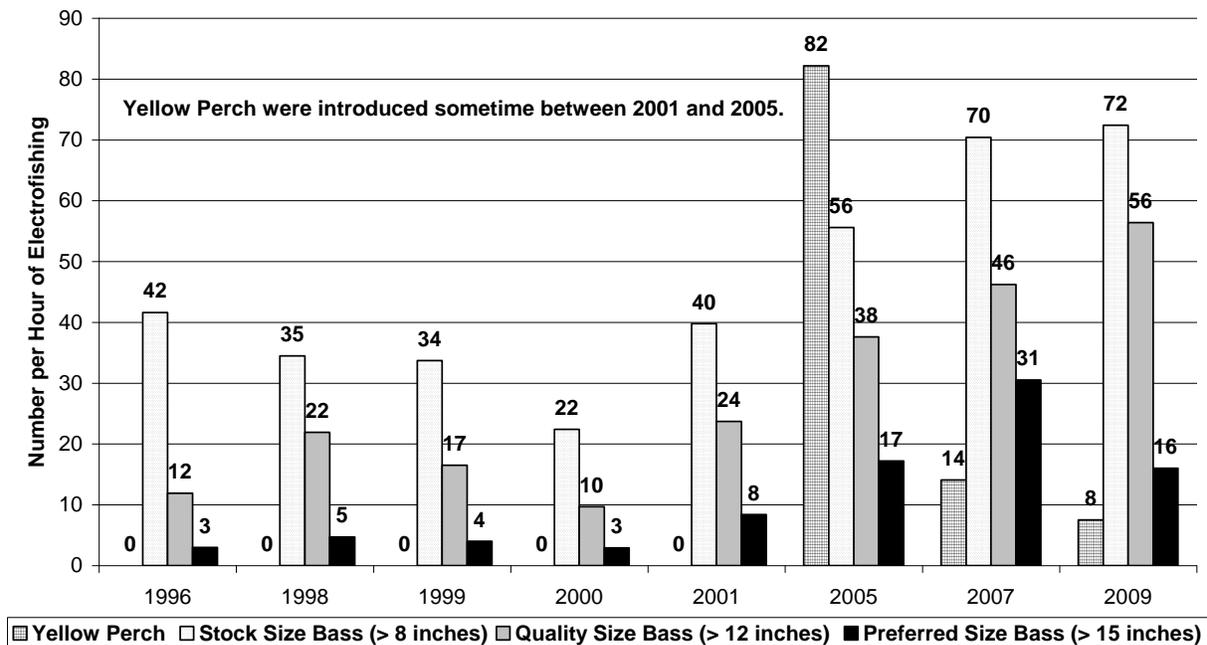
Black crappie size ranges have remained consistent since 2005, with 54 to 71 percent of the adult crappie (over 5 inches) over 8 inches long, and 8 to 10 percent of the adult crappie over 10 inches long. Fishing for crappie is best during the month of April, when spawning fish move to shallow areas of the lake. Black crappie can also be caught all year-round on beaver lodges on the lake.



Yellow Perch Introduction at Gatewood Reservoir

Yellow perch were introduced to Gatewood Reservoir sometime between 2001 and 2005. When the lake was sampled in May 2005, yellow perch numbers were high, with 82 yellow perch collected per hour of electrofishing. By May 2007, the catch rate dropped to 14 yellow perch per hour of electrofishing, and in May 2009, only 8 per hour. Reduced numbers of yellow perch are likely due to largemouth bass population eating them, since the largemouth bass population improved during the same timeframe. Although the yellow perch population in Gatewood has declined over the past 5 years, they are still impacting bluegill and redear sunfish populations. Both of these popular panfish species are smaller and less plump than they were before yellow perch were introduced. **Anglers are encouraged to harvest yellow perch to keep them from competing with bluegill, redear sunfish, and black crappie, which anglers prefer to catch.**

Largemouth Bass and Yellow Perch Catch per Hour of Electrofishing at Gatewood Reservoir



Other Species

Smallmouth bass provide the opportunity for anglers to catch occasional 2 to 3 pound fish. Channel catfish are stocked every other year, and an occasional 20 pounder is caught.

Fishing regulations at Gatewood Reservoir

Species	Size Limit	Creel Limit
Bluegill and other sunfish	None	50 per day total
Black Crappie	None	25 per day
Channel Catfish	None	20 per day
Largemouth Bass	12 inch minimum size	5 bass per day combined
Smallmouth Bass	12 inch minimum size	5 bass per day combined
Yellow Perch	None	None

Location and More Information

Only electric motors are allowed on the lake. Paddleboats and fishing boats with electric motors are available for rent and private boats with electric motors may be launched. Equipment, fishing supplies, and some grocery items are available at the park store. More information about fishing hours, boat rentals, and camping are available at <http://www.pulaskigatewood.com>.

To travel to the lake from Interstate 81, take the Pulaski Exit (Exit 94, Rt. 99 North), continue through the town of Pulaski. Route 99 will become Third Street. Turn left at Randolph Avenue, go one block, turn right on West Main Street, go 3 blocks, turn right on Magazine Street, go one block, and turn left on Mt. Olivet Road (Route 710). Travel 2.3 miles to a hard surface road on right, go 6 miles from this turn to the park. The approximate travel time from Interstate 81 to the park is 20 minutes.

For more information on this reservoir, take a look at the website above, call Gatewood Park at (540) 980-2561, or the Pulaski County Parks and Recreation Department office at (540) 994-8624. More information is also available from John Copeland, Fisheries Biologist, Blacksburg Office, phone (540) 961-8304, email: John.Copeland@dgif.virginia.gov.