

## MDC reminds anglers of crappie regulation change

As crappie fishing heats up this spring at Smithville Lake, anglers are reminded that the length and creel limit regulation has changed for crappie at the lake. Anglers can now harvest 30 crappie, but no more than 15 crappie can be longer than nine inches. Previously, anglers could only keep 15 crappie over nine inches.

The change is designed by Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) biologists to allow more undersized fish to be harvested. Smithville Lake has two species of the popular panfish, black crappie and white crappie. White crappie tend to grow faster, said Tory Mason, MDC fisheries management biologist. Most black crappie were not reaching the nine-inch length limit.

“Black crappie make a pretty good fillet,” Mason said of preparing fishing for cooking. “They just never reach that nine-inch length. About 70 to 80 percent of the crappie in the lake are black crappie.”

Anglers have thus far provided positive feedback about the change, Mason said. Crappie have been near the banks spawning on sunny days, and anglers have had good success catching them on jigs or minnows.

The limit of no more than 15 fish over nine inches in length is designed to protect the white crappie from over harvest. Biologists are hoping that as the black crappie population is reduced, that will provide more food for both species and help anglers catch more of the larger fish.

Each spring’s young gizzard shad are a main forage fish for crappie. But gizzard shad grow large relatively quickly, eventually too large for crappie to eat them. White crappie grow faster at Smithville Lake because they begin eating other fish, including shad, sooner than black crappie. Their mouths are also somewhat larger, enabling them to eat shad longer. Black crappie do better in lakes with more aquatic vegetation than what is found at Smithville Lake, Mason said. That’s because vegetation hosts invertebrate life such as insects and crustaceans that black crappie like to eat.

MDC biologists have monitored fish populations in the lake for years. Regulation changes are based on scientific data and are designed to boost the entire fishery resource.

“It will take a few years to see what the effects of the regulation change will be,” Mason said, “but we all expect it to be positive.”

For more information about fishing in Missouri, visit <http://mdc.mo.gov/fishing>. Also, MDC’s MO Fishing app allows anglers to use digital devices to check regulations, find places to fish, and even get GPS coordinates for sunken brush piles in lakes that attract fish. To download the app, visit <https://short.mdc.mo.gov/ZJZ>.