

City Fishing: Any Chance Of Luck?

By TIM RICHARD

Some good fishing this summer and even better fishing in 1971 are in prospect for western Wayne County anglers.

So says Ronald J. Spittler, district fish biologist of the State Department of Natural Resources. Spittler devoted a special report to the state-county effort to improve anglers' prospects on three Middle Rouge River impoundments.

The three are Phoenix Lake on the Northville-Plymouth line; Wilcox Pond, in Plymouth; and Newburgh Lake, mostly in Livonia.

These urban lakes have been the subject of a good deal of state and county attention, especially since 1967. The State Water Resources Commission made detailed tests of pollution conditions; a county engineer recently suggested methods of curing pollution; and county parks officials last summer acted to kill ugly growths of floating algae on Newburgh.

The lakes are popular, not only among young boys just learning to use simple equipment, but among a lot of adults. Says Spittler: "With the prospects of good sport fishing where virtually none existed, many thousands of people will be able to add this recreational experience to their portfolio."

Here is Spittler's lake-by-lake breakdown of what has been done, what anglers may expect, and when.

Phoenix Lake

Phoenix was killed off and drained almost dry in mid-1967.

Late in 1967 some 7,000 small rainbow trout were planted and spread up the Middle Rouge to a small dam. The following spring, some fishermen had modest success getting rainbows that had reached the then-legal size of seven inches. (The state has since raised the minimum to 10 inches for all trout species except brook trout, which are still seven.)

In June of 1968 the state planted 7,000 brown trout averaging 4.7 inches. Reports Spittler with dry under-statement: "To date the trout fishing has been unspectacular."

A netting survey in fall of 1968 yielded no trout (which are difficult to net anyway) but a number of northern pike ranging in size from 14 to 31 inches. There were also a number of carp, bullheads, and pumpkinseed sunfish. The theory was that they had found their way downstream from Waterford Pond between Six and Seven Mile Roads or that they had survived the 1967 poisoning.

Phoenix Lake today has crappies, northern pike and bass, says Spittler, and it shows promise of good fishing potential without further fish plants.

Wilcox Pond

Smallest of the three public lakes, Wilcox was poisoned in 1968 and re-stocked in 1968-9.

It received 1,000 largemouth bass with an average size of 4.3 inches in 1968. (Legal minimum on bass is 10 inches.)



A CRAPPIE is measured by biologist Melvin Bonham during a 1969 netting of Wilcox and Newburgh lakes, when this species along with bluegills and pike were found.

In 1969 it received eight breeding-sized bass averaging 13 inches in length plus 70 bluegills of almost breeding size, 5.6 inches. "The larger bass and bluegills spawned in 1969 and will continue to reproduce annually, providing progeny for a good fishery, which should occur by 1971," says Spittler.

A net survey in August of 1969 showed some carp had survived the poisoning of 1968, probably because the height of the Wilcox dam prevented the water from being lowered very far and the great amount of water diluted the poison.

On the positive side, however, that survey showed the gills had grown an inch during the summer. No bass were found, probably because they escaped the net.

Newburgh Lake

The largest of the three, Newburgh Lake was poisoned in 1968 at the same time as Wilcox.

In a later 1968 planting, Newburgh received 20,000 brown trout (average size: 3.2 inches) and 1,300 largemouth bass (average size: 4.3 inches).

Last year it received 500 bluegills (5.6 inches), a dozen adult largemouth bass (13.4 inches) and a rather interesting newcomer—152 channel catfish (15 inches).

Spittler comments: "Again, good growth is expected while progeny should produce a good fishery in 1971. The channel catfish should add a 'new' attraction to anglers since they grow to good sizes, fight with vigor and are good eating."

The trout and catfish survival will not be known immediately. Northern pike and crappies found their way into this lake, too, and will add to the fishery."

A survey last August netted a 17-inch northern pike and numbers of pan-sized crappies and bluegills.

One disappointment in the Newburgh stocking was that DNR officials were unable to get a stock of a new hybrid sunfish, as they had hoped. The hybrids are voracious eaters and grow to maturity in a fraction of the time that bluegills and sunfish do.



ABOUT 1,000 largemouth bass, average 4.3 inches, were planted in Wilcox Lake in November of 1968. A later Wilcox planting brought eight adult-sized (13 inch) largemouths, which are expected to spawn. The scrappy largemouth takes a wide variety of baits. Many anglers consider it the king of the warm-water gametfish.

SOME 7,000 rainbow trout, running about five inches in length, were stocked in Phoenix Lake in 1967 and were joined by another 7,000 brown trout the following year, but results to fishermen have been "unspectacular" to put it mildly. One purpose of the planting was to provide some immediate sport and biological balance until desirable warm-water fish could make a comeback. This is a rainbow trout.



WILCOX POND is popular among youngsters and adults with an hour to spare. (Observer photos)



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TROUT WERE trucked all the way from the state's Wolf Lake hatchery, west of Kalamazoo, for planting in Phoenix Lake (shown here) and Newburgh in 1967-68.