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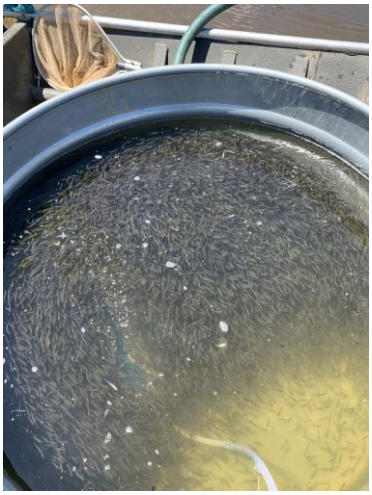
2026 Walleye Fishing Forecast

Walleye fishing opportunities in Virginia should be plentiful in 2026 to allow anglers a chance at catching this popular fish species. The collaborative efforts between VDWR fisheries biologists and hatchery staff allow for the propagation of Walleye. Walleye brood stock is typically collected from the New River, Staunton River, and South Holston River each spring. Collections occur in March to coincide with the spawning runs of each system. Walleye spawned or hatched at Vic Thomas, Front Royal, King and Queen, and Buller Fish Cultural Stations, are raised in fertilized ponds anywhere from 4 to 6 weeks. Walleye fingerlings, reared primarily on a zooplankton diet, will range in size from 1 to 2 inches in length. Ponds are harvested and Walleye fingerlings are stocked in waters across the Commonwealth. Additionally, female Walleye are crossed with male Sauger to produce the hybrid Saugeye. Saugeye perform well in some systems and are stocked with or in place of Walleye. In 2023, VDWR had a banner year in which 1,781,500 Walleye and Saugeye fingerlings were stocked into 19 selected waters. Anglers

should expect good Walleye and Saugeye fishing from the 2023-year class of stocked fish. Several factors were at play during the hatchery production cycle of 2024 that impacted the overall success of fish fry hatching and fingerling survival. The 2024 production allowed for the stocking of 669,170 Walleye and Saugeye fingerlings into 13 priority waters.

The 2025 production allowed for the stocking of 1,323,227 Walleye and Saugeye fingerlings to be stocked into 18 priority waters. An additional 2,235,874 Walleye and Saugeye fry were stocked into 9 selected waters. The rebound in fingerling abundance was a welcomed sight in 2025 thanks to all the hard work and effort put forth by VDWR hatchery staff.



For those anglers interested in additional information on specific waters, this forecast lists the resources by region. What follows are specific reports of Walleye and Saugeye sampling results with details for anglers that might assist them in their pursuits.

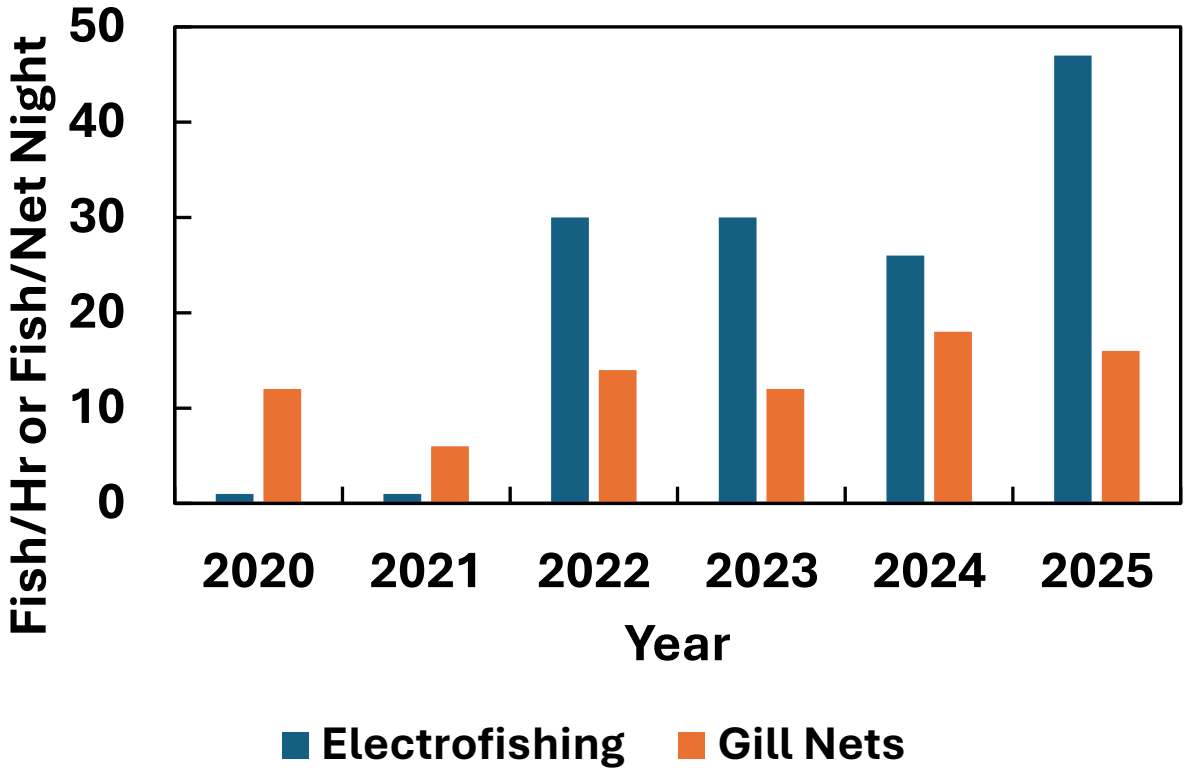
Southwest Virginia

South Holston Lake

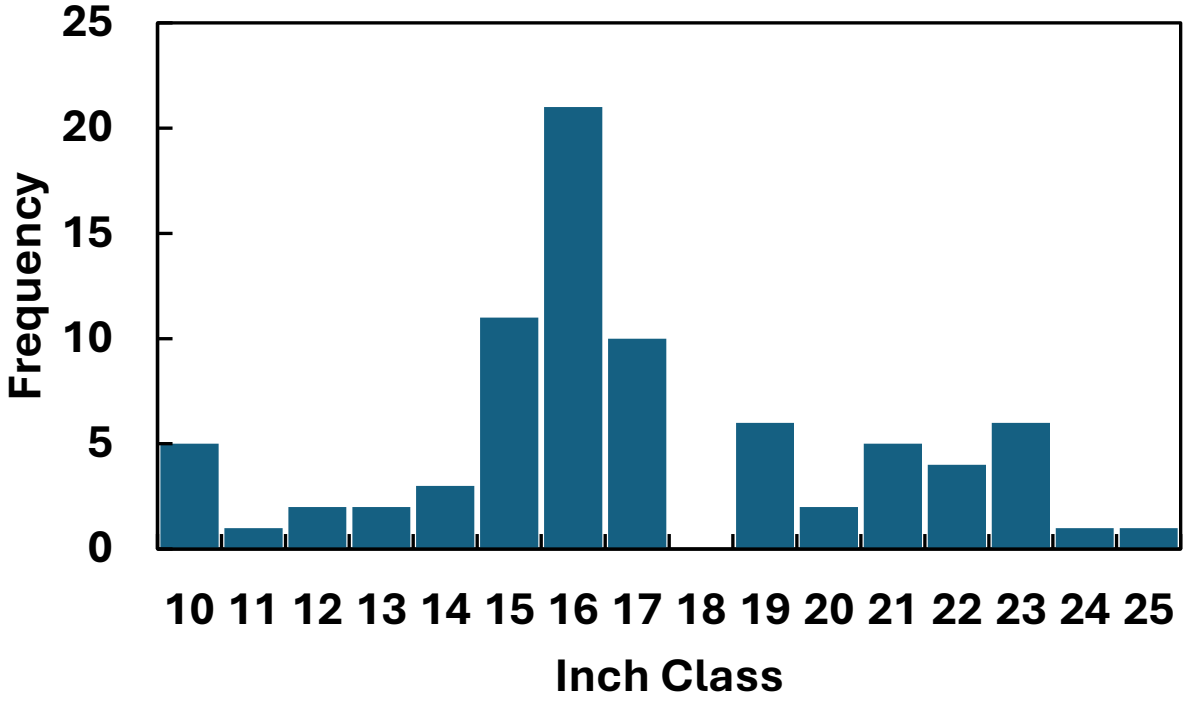
Anglers visiting South Holston Lake in 2026 should experience excellent Walleye fishing as the population continues to rebound. Sampling during 2025 of both electrofishing and gillnetting, showed similarity to 2024, with a desirable size structure and most collected Walleye larger than 18 inches. The electrofishing catch rate during spring of 2025 was 47 fish/hr., which was almost double 2024 and well above the long-term average (7 fish/hr.). The 2025 gillnet catch rate decreased slightly to 16 fish per net which was still above the long-term average (12 fish/net night). Winter gillnet surveys provide a more complete picture of the Walleye population at South Holston Lake in terms of population densities, growth rates, and survival of stocked fingerlings. Anglers should enjoy the current state of the fishery as the population has quickly rebuilt due to more consistent stockings.

Anglers can expect average fishing during the spring spawning "run" on the South Fork Holston River due to a reduced but building lake population. Anglers congregate near the community of Alvarado from February through April to catch Walleye on the spring spawning "run". During May and June, anglers find Walleyes feeding along the shorelines of the lake. The post spawn top water bite in the lower lake will yield the best Walleye fishing Virginia has to offer. When Walleyes move deeper during the summer months, successful anglers troll crawler harnesses on lead core line or use jigging spoons to reach the depths. Fall and winter fishing call for jigging spoons or jigs and live minnows.

Walleye growth is outstanding, so anglers should find plenty of fish larger than the minimum size of 18 inches. Most Walleye exceed 10 inches in their first year and measure 15 to 18 inches in their second year. Walleye generally reach 20 inches by their third year. Walleye growth slows after age four and males seldom exceed 24 or 25 inches in length, while females may reach lengths of 30 inches or more. The current size structure of Walleye shows that anglers can expect to find walleye up to 29 inches, with the bulk of legal fish (18 inches) ranging from 19 to 23 inches.



Sampling catch rates for Walleye in South Holston Reservoir 2020-2025. Blue columns represent spring electrofishing catch rates (fish per hour) and orange columns represent fall gillnet catch rates (fish per net).



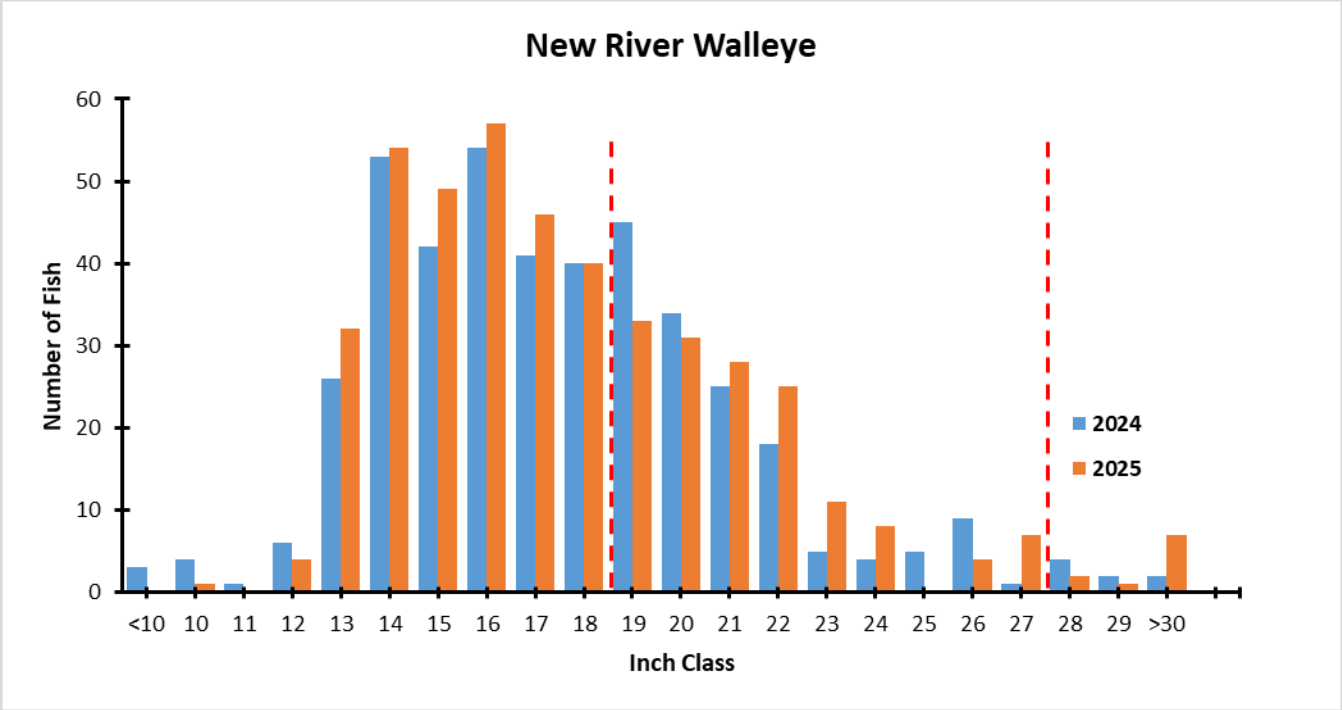
Size distribution of Walleye collected from South Holston Reservoir during 2025 surveys.

Upper New River

The New River in southwest Virginia has a unique genetic strain of native Walleye. Since the early 2000's the VDWR has been working to conserve this unique fishery through stocking efforts. These efforts have led to an increase in catch rates for both anglers and biologists, specifically over the last 10 years. In addition to increased catch rates, DWR's ongoing efforts have succeeded in shifting the genetics of the New River Walleye fishery from containing only 15% native alleles in the late 1990s to 73% native alleles in 2025. Past stocking efforts have focused on areas from Allisonia to Buck Dam. Anglers continue to report good catch rates of smaller fish 12-20" and fish greater than 28" in these areas. DWR continues to focus stockings in these areas annually. However, in good production years when excess fish are available, fish are also stocked above and below Fries Dam creating a good fishery in the Byllesby pool while also starting to bolster a population near Oldtown. The New River was stocked with 84,000 Walleye fingerlings in 2024. The 2025 stockings resulted in the introduction of 83,515 Walleye fingerlings.

Most Walleye in the Upper New River are caught between February- April. Hot spots include Foster Falls, Ivanhoe, Route 100, Fries Dam, and Allisonia on the Upper New and Below Claytor Dam on the Lower New. Walleye can also be found throughout much of the year in Claytor Lake. Anglers should know that the Upper New (including Claytor Lake) has a protected slot limit in place for Walleye. Anglers can harvest 2 fish per day year-round however, no fish 19-28" can be kept above Claytor Dam upstream to Fries Dam in Grayson County. This regulation was enacted to help protect spawning size fish while also giving anglers the option to harvest fish as well.

Similar to 2024, we saw good numbers of fish 13-22 inches, indicating multiple years of good recruitment. We surveyed similar numbers of fish within the protected slot limit range but saw a slight increase in fish >28". Over the next few years anglers should begin to see higher numbers of fish entering the protected slot limit which, in turn, should help increase natural reproduction within the system.

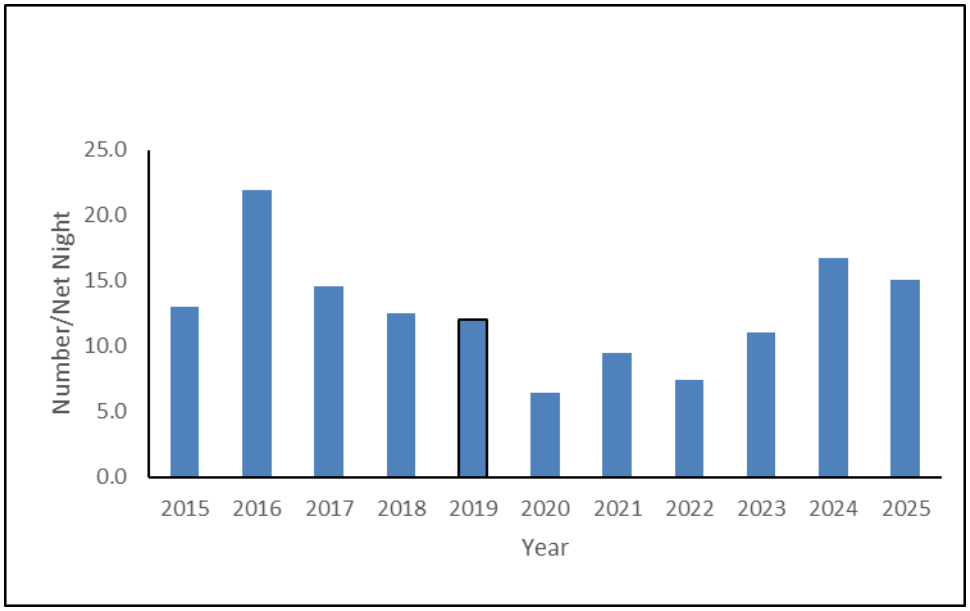


In 2025, 66% of fish collected were outside of the protected slot limit with 64% of fish collected being <19” and 2% being >28”. This indicates several years of good recruitment from the spawning population and DWR’s stocking efforts and gives anglers ample opportunities to harvest fish. Dashed lines indicate fish collected within the protected slot limit of 19-28”.

Claytor Lake Walleye make DWR staff extremely happy.

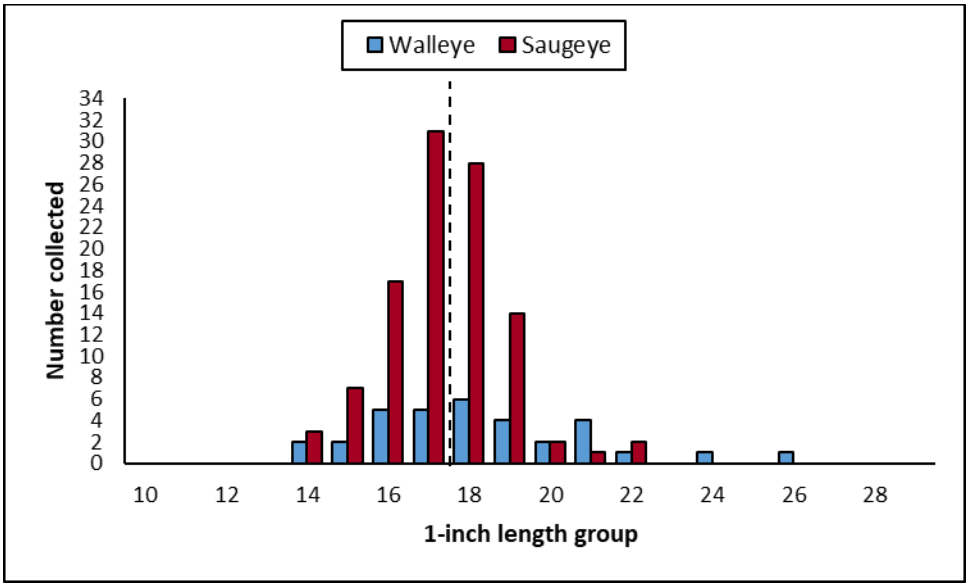
Flannagan Reservoir

Fishing for Walleye on Flannagan Reservoir should be on the rise for anglers in 2026. With stockings reaching or exceeding stocking recommendation, there are several age classes that should be reaching harvestable size. VDWR biologists use the catch rate of Walleye in annual gill nets samples as a measure of the relative abundance of this species in the lake. The graph below shows the combined catch rate of Walleye and Saugeye (measured as the number collected per net set overnight) from 2015 – 2025. The catch rate in 2025 (15.1 /net night) represented a 10% decrease in relative abundance compared to 2024 (16.7/net night). It is a 15% increase from the 10-year average (12.8 /net night). This increase over the 10-year average can largely be attributed to meeting the allocated stocking numbers in recent years. Over the last six years the stocking allocations have been met or exceeded four of those years. Saugeye were also used in place of the Walleye when they were not available. Saugeye are similar to Walleye and serve as a fill in when the production of Walleye does not reach the state's allocations. Fisherman should start to see increased numbers of fish of catchable size due to the complete stockings.



Historic catch rates of Walleye and Saugeye collected from Flannagan Reservoir from 2015 to 2025.

Walleye observed in the 2025 sample ranged from 14 – 26 inches in length with an average length of 18 inches and Saugeye ranged from 14 - 22 inches in length with an average length of 17 inches (see graph below). Forty nine percent of the combined Walleye and Saugeye adult fish collected were ≥18 inches and 10% exceeded 20 inches in length.



Length frequency distribution of Walleye and Saugeye collected during the 2025 gill net survey of Flannagan Reservoir.

Many anglers target Walleye on the Cranesnest and Pound River arms of Flannagan Reservoir during the spawning run in March through April. However, anglers can also be very successful throwing top-water lures at night in May through early June, which coincides with the Alewife spawn. As the season

progresses and water temperatures increase, the Walleye will move deeper in the lake. This will require anglers to switch tactics and troll nightcrawler harnesses and crankbaits. Saugeye tend to bite on bluebird days better than Walleye. Anglers also report catching Saugeye more while fishing for Largemouth Bass. Saugeye tend to occupy similar habitats and bite crankbaits and other common Largemouth Bass tactics.

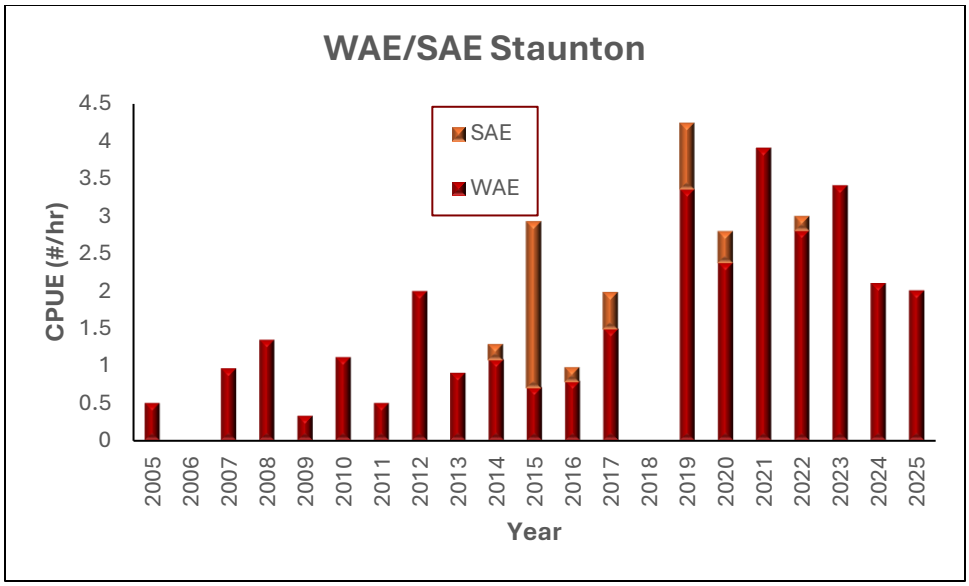
Hungry Mother Lake

This 108-acre lake provides anglers with a great opportunity to catch Walleyes in a small lake setting. Located in Hungry Mother State Park, the lake is also a great destination for families. The Walleye population is stable or slightly increasing. There are good numbers of fish up to 20 inches and just enough larger ones to cause anglers to lose some sleep this summer. Walleyes up to 28 inches in length have been landed in recent years. April, May, and June are the three best months, with night fishing generally being more productive. Most anglers use artificial lures, but live shad, minnows, and night crawlers are also very effective.

South Central Virginia

Staunton River

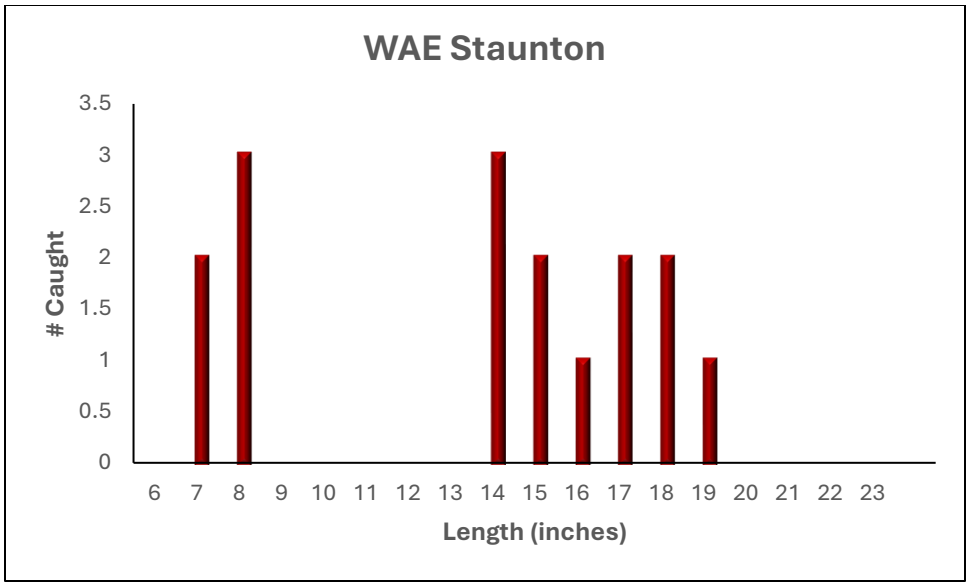
The Staunton River has historically been known for its catfish fisheries, a low density, but quality smallmouth fishery, and a unique spring striper run. Now Walleye fishing in the Staunton River has become a fishery to pay attention to, especially from Leesville dam to Altavista. Quality Walleye are now consistently being caught and sampled all the way to Brookneal. Fingerling and fry stocking into the Staunton historically resulted in limited success. Fortunately, recent stockings of Walleye into Leesville Reservoir have been much more successful, and anglers are reaping the rewards. A portion of the Walleye stocked into Leesville Reservoir passes through the dam and provides a boost to the Staunton fishery. The first figure below shows how VDWR sampling success, measured by the number of fish collected per hour (CPUE), with fall electrofishing surveys has improved over time. Saugeye, a Walleye x Sauger hybrid, which were stocked for three years when Walleye were unavailable, dominated the 2015 sample but now Walleye densities are improving, and anglers are seeing good creels of Walleye. Few Saugeye remain in the population, and none have been collected in fall electrofishing samples in the Staunton since 2022.



Walleye and Saugeye abundance in Staunton River fall electrofishing surveys from 2005-2025.

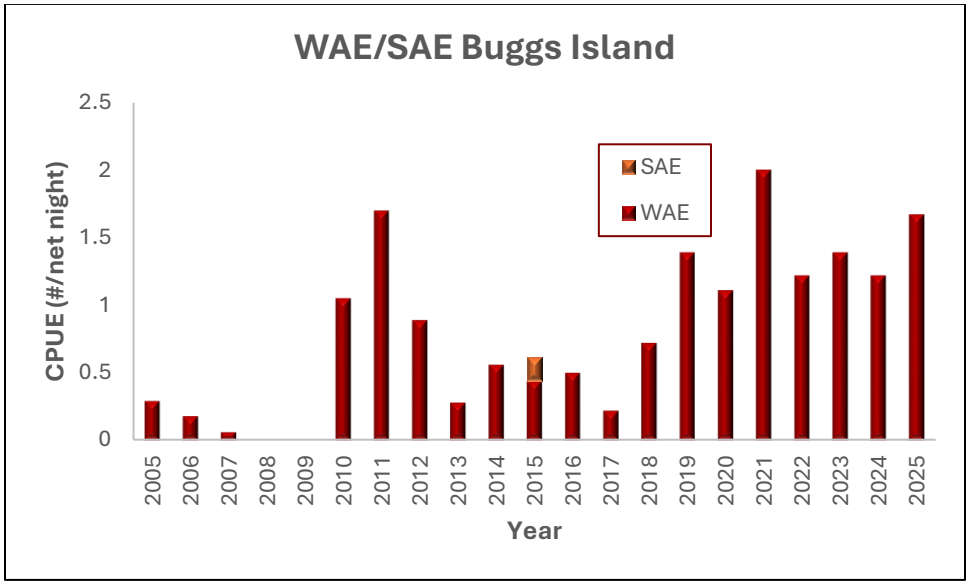
The second figure shows the lengths and numbers of Walleye sampled in fall electrofishing surveys. The largest fish sampled in 2025 was a 19-inch Walleye but larger individuals are certainly found in the river. Walleye in the 14-19-inch range were collected and will provide excellent action for those anglers looking for a late winter, early spring fishery. Smaller fish were also collected in those samples so the fishery shows great potential for the future. Anglers are reminded that the legal minimum length limit is 18 inches and five fish can be harvested per day. While these catch rates may not seem exceptional, spring collections of Walleye during spawning runs are a sight to see! For information on catching Walleye in the Staunton please view our video at the following link.

https://dwr.virginia.gov/blog/staunton-river-walleye-fishing/



Walleye length distribution from the Staunton River fall electrofishing surveys of 2025.

Another benefit of the stockings in the Roanoke/Staunton watershed is a boost in the Walleye fishery at Buggs Island Lake (AKA Kerr Reservoir). While they're still hard to target in this 50,000 acre reservoir, the opportunity to catch Walleye is improving each year. The final figure shows catch rates of Walleye and Saugeye in fall gillnet samples. A peak was deteced in 2021 but we continue to sample consistent numbers each year. Good Walleye numbers are seen mid-lake around Goat Island in the fall and winter months but uplake fishing should be good in early spring.



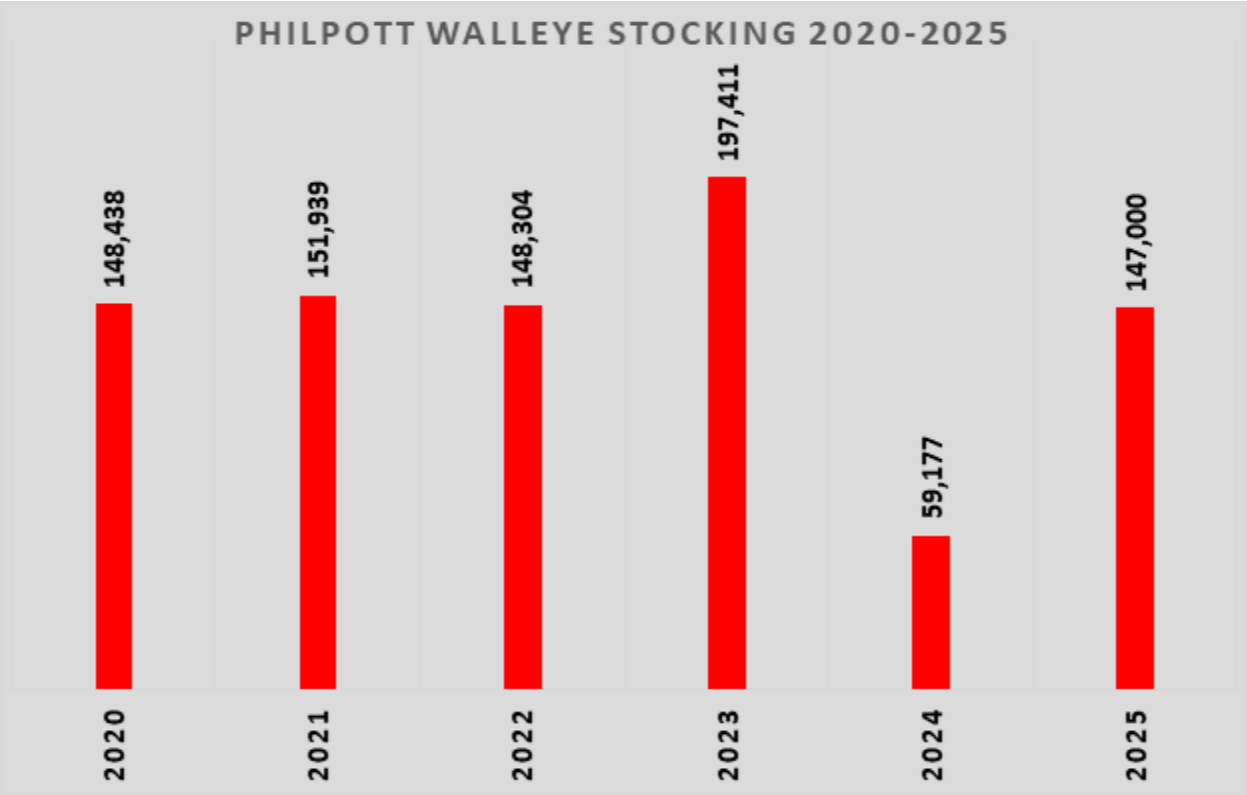
Walleye and Saugeye abundance from Buggs Island gillnet surveys from 2005-2025.

Sub-legal (less than 18 inches) Walleye were sampled in both the river and Buggs Island Lake in 2025 indicating a strong fishery for several years to come. The Staunton River provides ample opportunity for anglers and paddlers alike. Enjoy this quality Walleye fishery!

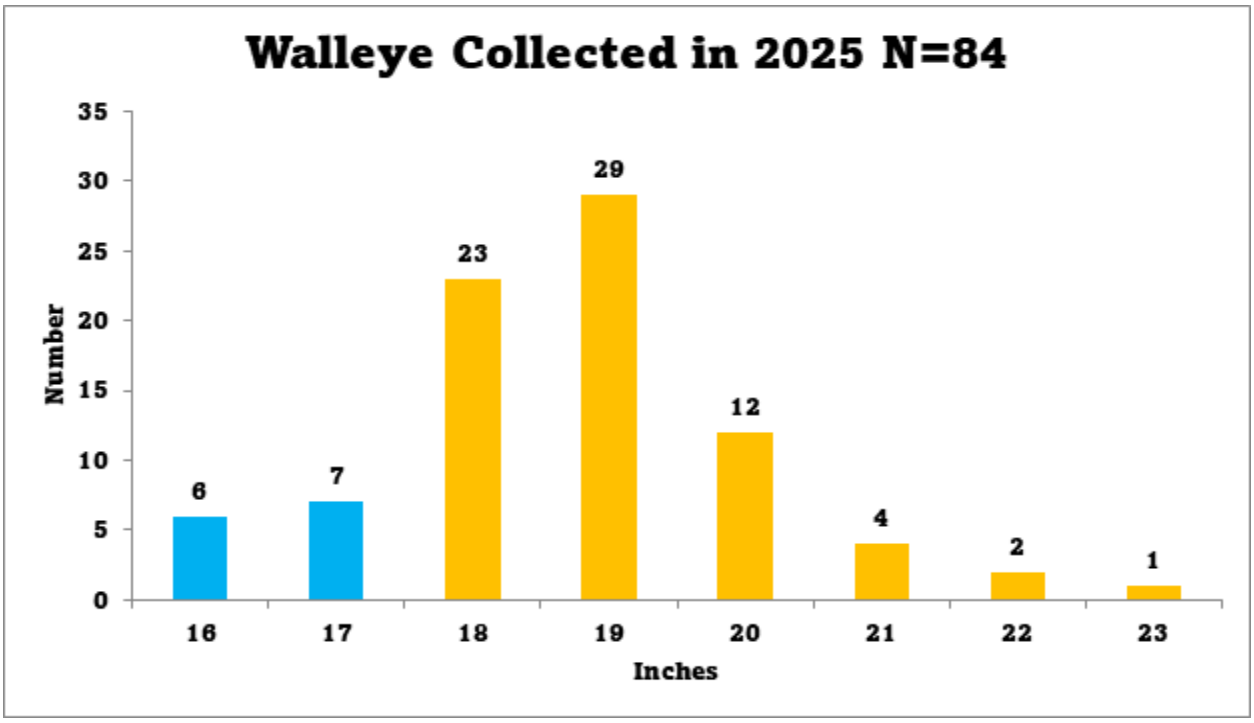
Philpott Reservoir

Walleye fishing continues to be decent at Philpott Reservoir. Stocking numbers from 2020-2025 ranged from 59,000 to 197,000 annually and the population numbers are increasing again. Fish population surveys from 2025 showed that most of the catch is in the 16–20-inch range. A total of 84 Walleye were collected in 2025 with an average total length of 18 inches (2 pounds). Fifty-seven percent of the Walleyes collected in 2025 sampling efforts were 18 inches or longer. The following charts show the numbers stocked in Philpott from 2020-2025 and the sizes and numbers of Walleye biologists collected in 2025.

Walleye in Philpott reach 18 inches at about 2 years of age and most male Walleye grow slowly after reaching this size. Female Walleye typically grow well for another few years, with some achieving larger sizes. Anglers that fish Philpott should encounter a high percentage of harvestable-sized Walleye which will make great table fare.

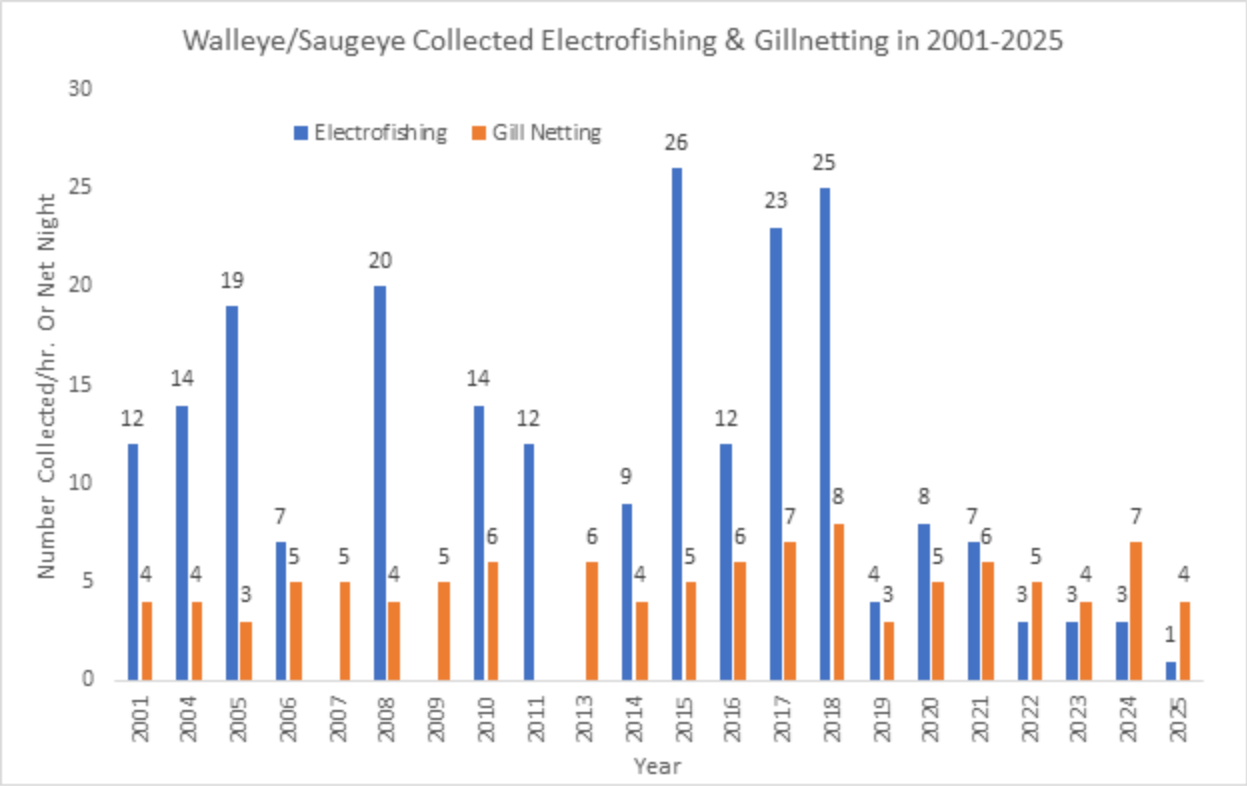


Recent record of Walleye fingerlings stocked into Philpott Reservoir



Length frequency distribution of Walleye collected from Philpott Reservoir during the 2025 survey.

Walleye population abundance in Philpott Reservoir is measured using two sampling methods: electrofishing in the spring and gillnets in the fall. The reason for using two sampling methods is that when compared to bass, Walleyes are less likely to be associated with shoreline habitat during early April. Because this daytime electrofishing catch rate may not always accurately represent the Walleye population, gillnets are also used. Electrofishing catch rates vary considerably from year to year, as seen in the chart below. Electrofishing catch rates for the May 2025 sample were (1.3/hr.) and the December 2025 gillnet catch rate was 4.4 fish per net.



Comparison of electrofishing and gill net catch rates for Philpott Reservoir from historic trend data

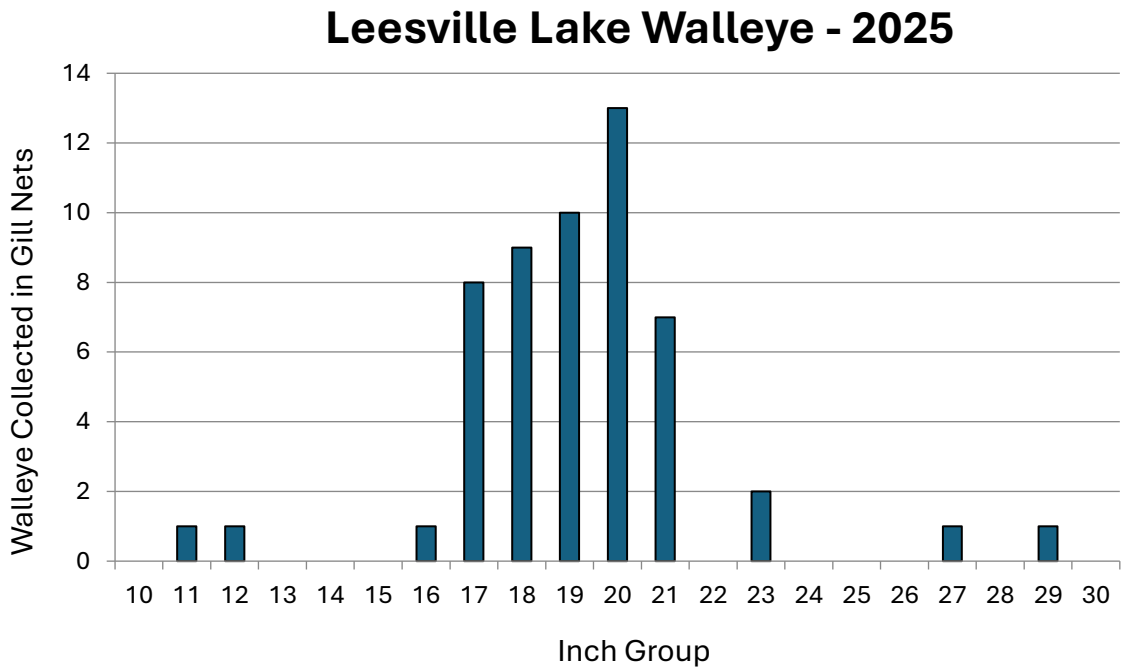
Skilled anglers, who spend time learning effective techniques for Walleye and find areas that are productive, should have successful fishing trips. Top-water night fishing is very popular and productive during the Alewife spawn in May and June. By late June, Walleye move into deeper water and are caught on nightcrawler harnesses and plugs trolled in deeper water using bottom bouncers or lead-core line to reach deeper depths while trolling. As water temperatures increase throughout the summer, Walleye continue to move deeper seeking cooler water. Anglers must fish deeper throughout the summer using vertical jigging techniques or fish at night to capitalize on this fishery. Catching a few Walleyes per outing is considered good, however, some anglers have difficulty locating and catching a few Walleyes per trip, so it may take more time and skill in 2026 to boat walleye.

Leesville Lake

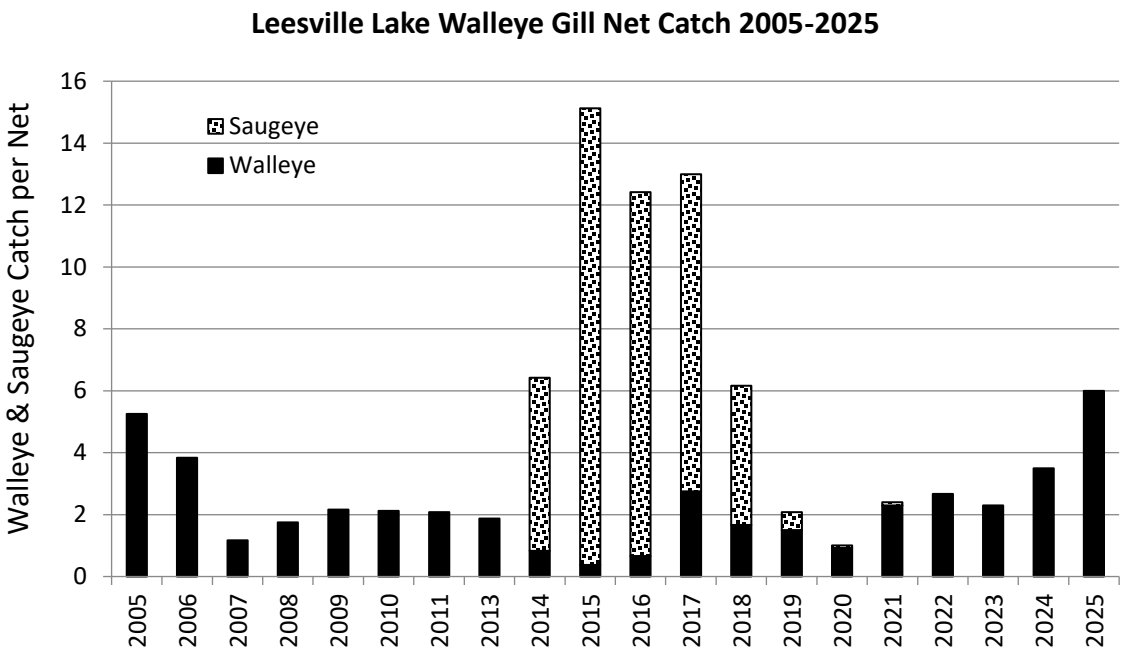
The 2026 fishing season for Walleye at Leesville Lake will continue to be challenging. Fishing has historically been poor due to low retention of stocked Walleye in the lake, as most Walleye eventually pass through the Leesville dam and into the Staunton River. Various data collections within Leesville Lake and the Staunton River confirm that high numbers of Walleye, regardless of size, pass through the Leesville Lake dam every year. Saugeye were stocked from

2013-2015 but only Walleye have been stocked since 2016 to preserve the Staunton River Walleye population and genetic integrity for hatchery broodstock collections.

This fishery usually contains limited numbers of Walleye with overall numbers of Walleye remaining lower than any other Virginia lake stocked with Walleye. The 2024-year class was better than average for Leesville Lake and those fish will be primarily 18-22 inches in 2026. Even though the 2024 stockings have slightly improved the population, most of those fish will leave the lake and end up in the Staunton River during the next couple of years. While the Leesville Lake Walleye fishery remains less than desirable, stockings into the lake are essential to maintain the Walleye population in the Staunton River. Walleye stocked directly into the river have shown very low survival. The only way to sustain the river fishery and Walleye broodstock in the river for hatchery production and stocking, is to continue stocking Leesville Lake. Walleye that remain in Leesville Lake have good growth rates and typically reach 18 inches between ages two and three.



Length frequency distribution of Walleye collected during the 2025 gill net survey of Leesville Lake.



Historic trend data of Walleye catch from the gill netting of Leesville Lake (2005 – 2025).

The most productive Walleye fishing is typically between Leesville Dam and mile marker 6. Night fishing in May and June, with floating or shallow running plugs cast to the shoreline, should not be overlooked. These fish often frequent shallow water during the night in spring and early summer. During daylight hours in the spring, fish the shoreline contour, targeting depths of 10-20 ft., then move deeper if those depths are unproductive. Walleye are very light sensitive and prefer dark or shaded habitat; consequently, these fish will frequent shallower depths if the water is shaded or stained but will remain deeper during the day if the water is clear. Rock cliffs and steeper shorelines should be the most productive, with some coves also holding fish. As water temperatures increase in late spring and throughout the summer, fish continue moving deeper, seeking cooler water, and become most active during nighttime hours.

Leesville can be a challenge due to extreme daily water fluctuations and low fish densities, but anglers who spend time learning productive Walleye angling techniques for Leesville and concentrate on habitats that hold Walleye, may encounter some of these elusive fish. Leesville Lake experiences very light fishing pressure and can provide solitude for anglers looking to avoid crowds and boating traffic.

Northern Virginia

Shenandoah River

Walleye can be found in the Shenandoah River from Warren Dam in Front Royal downstream beyond the Virginia / West Virginia State line. Although they are not as numerous in the Shenandoah as they are in other rivers, their population is stable and the fish are showing good growth rates reaching lengths exceeding 25 inches. In the spring of 2014 VDWR began an annual stocking program of Walleye fry in the Shenandoah River to supplement the natural population and increase the number of Walleye present for anglers to target. In 2025 the river received its 11th stocking of 15,381 fingerling walleye. Half of the allocation are stocked just upstream of Morgan's Ford Landing. The remainder are spread out evenly between the boat ramps at Farms Riverview, Route 50, Lockes, and Rt 7. Anglers should expect to see steady catch rates and better numbers of big Walleye in 2026 due to the surplus fingerlings stocked in 2023. During our January sample we captured 25 Walleye at a rate of 9.2 fish per hour, which is right on the long-term average (Figure 1). During the February spawning run biologists and technicians handled 72 fish (catch rate = 38 fish per hour). The Walleye averaged 22 inches in length, with the largest female topping 27" (Figure 2). Most fish sampled were of legal harvest size or greater. Good numbers of young Walleye were captured during general population sampling during the fall. Higher numbers of young fish bodes well for the population going forward. Anglers should target the spring spawning run and focus on the 11-mile section from the landing at Morgan's Ford to Route 50. The remainder of the year Walleye can be found throughout the Main Stem within the deeper pools. We continue to run into anglers who are turning on to this fishery, so plan a trip to the Shenandoah soon.

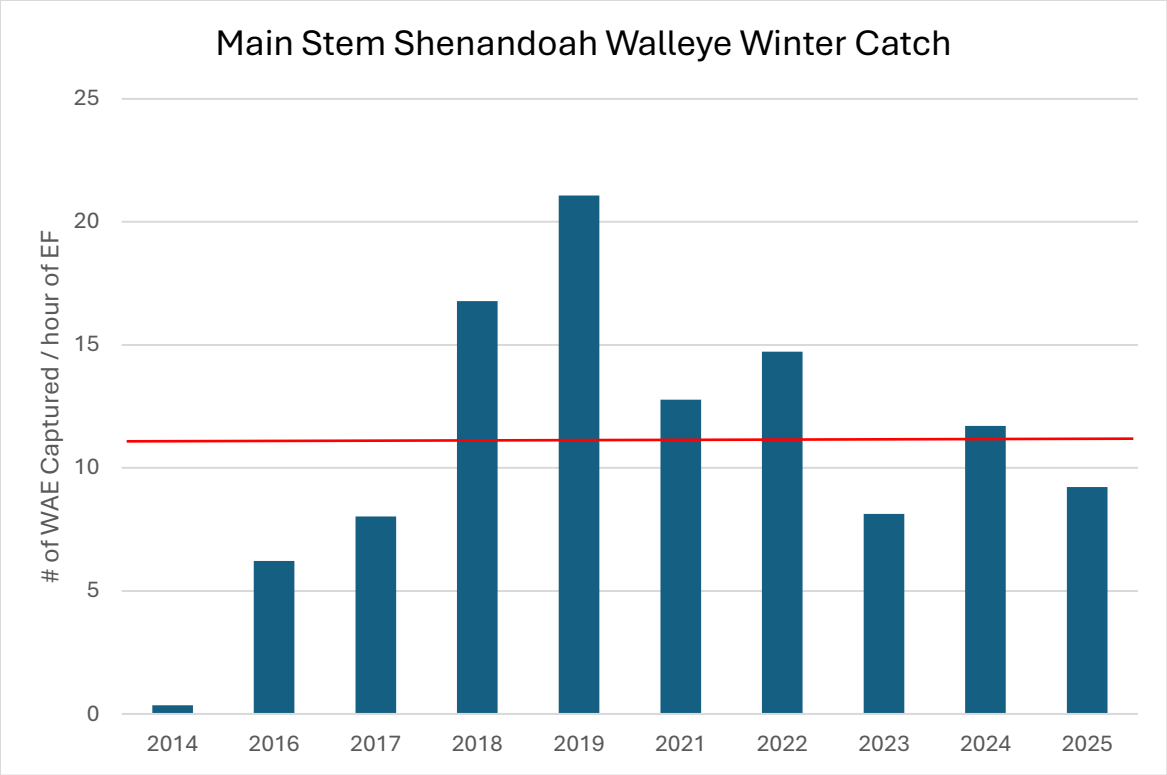


Figure 1: Main Stem Shenandoah Walleye catch rates using boat electrofishing during our winter sample. This graph depicts the catch rate over time. The red line represents the long-term average.

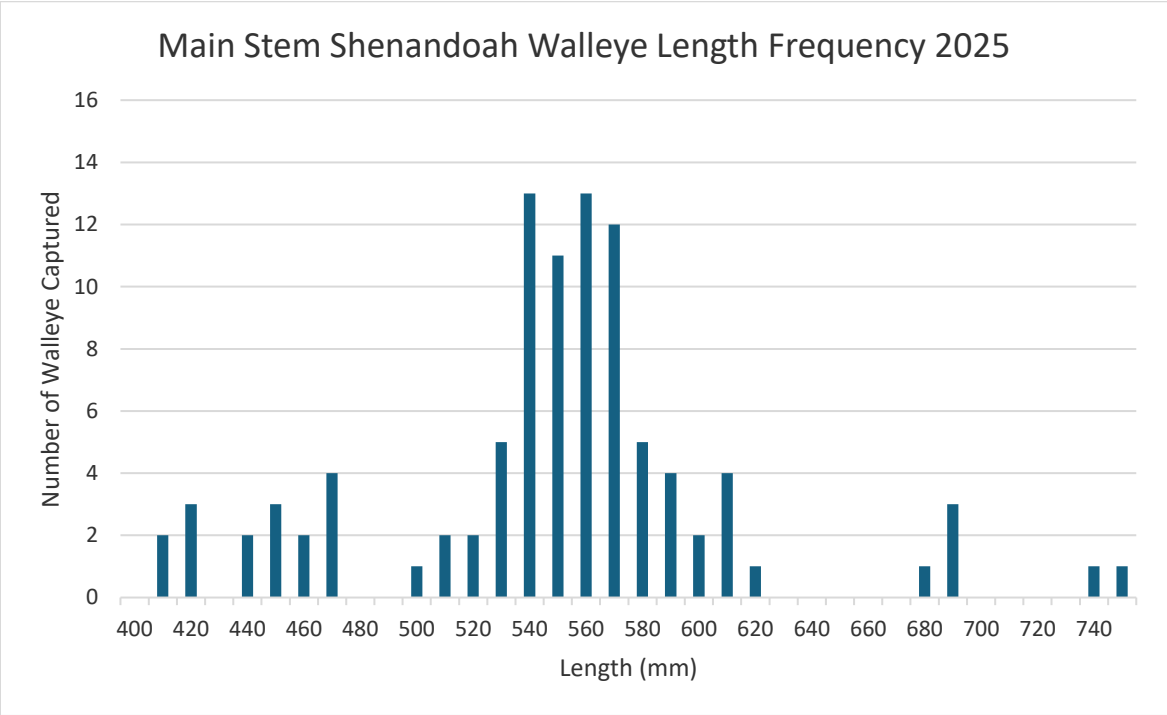
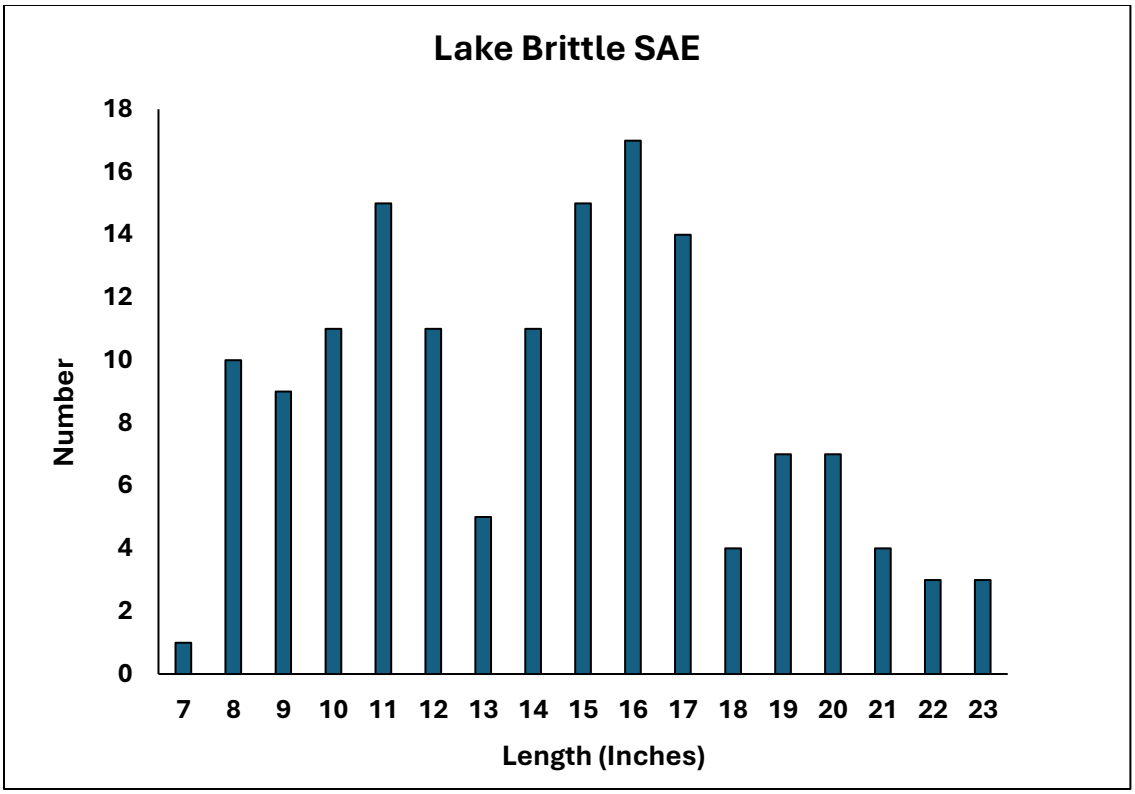


Figure 2: Length frequency distribution of Walleye collected from winter and spring electrofishing surveys on the Main Stem Shenandoah River in 2025.

Lake Brittle

Lake Brittle is a 77-acre impoundment owned by DWR in Fauquier County. The 2025 night electrofishing surveys yielded 147 Saugeye (SAE) for a catch rate of 90 fish/hour. No Walleye (WAE) were collected though there are likely some remaining in the lake. The average total length of fish collected was 15” with 19% greater than the 18” minimum size. The largest SAE was a 24” female. Electrofishing catch rates increased in 2025, from 41 fish/hour in 2024. The increased catch rate was attributed to fish from multiple years of higher stocking rates recruiting to the fishery. The majority of collected fish were 8 to 17 inches, showing strong year classes that should contribute to larger fish in the future. Stocking rates of WAE were historically 100/acre, but due to a declining population it increased to 200/acre in 2019. It is currently stocked with SAE at 150/acre as Saugeye have shown better survival and growth. The reason for the WAE decline was likely poor juvenile survival from 2014 through 2017 resulting in failed year classes. A variety of environmental issues may have contributed, including lake drawdowns during dam and spillway renovation, emergence of dense *Hydrilla*, and prolonged high/turbid water conditions due to increased storm water runoff. The lake provides a suitable population of Saugeye and has some of the best bank and boat access in Northern Virginia. Stronger year classes since 2019 should continue to provide improved fishing and size structure. The statewide 18” minimum/5 per day limit is in effect at Lake Brittle.

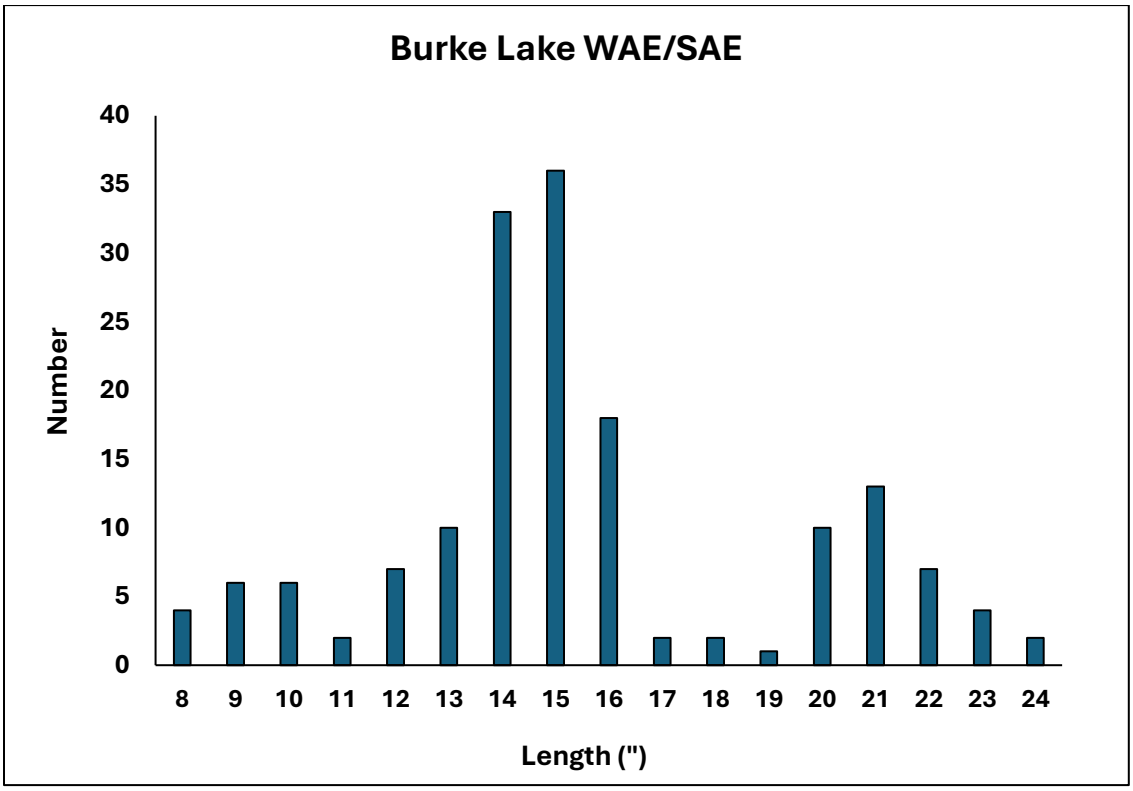


Length frequency distribution of Saugeye collected from the electrofishing surveys of Lake Brittle in 2025.

Burke Lake

Burke Lake is a 218-acre impoundment owned by DWR located in Fairfax County – just a stone's throw from Washington D.C. Anglers regularly catch Walleye (WAE) in the 4-7-pound range, and the lake record is an 8 lb. 12 oz. trophy. The lake is stocked annually at 100 fish/acre of Saugeye (SAE) fingerlings. Anglers in pursuit of WAE and SAE can expect to find most fish in the 2-to-3-pound range. Electrofishing catch rates were an excellent 75 fish/hour in 2025, which was more than double the 34 fish/hour in 2024 and well above the goal of 10/hour for small impoundments. Spring 2025 surveys resulted in 24% of WAE and SAE being legal with a 16" average. The sample yielded 16 WAE and 147 SAE. The largest WAE and SAE were both 24" females. The majority of fish collected were between 14-16 and 20-22 inches; showing strong year classes bolstering the population with larger fish. Anglers can expect good numbers of 3-5 lb. fish and are encouraged to try trolling deep diving, fire tiger colored crank baits and spinner

rigs around the lake off deep water break lines and points adjacent to deep water. Anglers should also remember that Burke Lake stratifies during the summer; WAE/SAE and most other fish stay above the thermocline (usually about 10 feet down) during this time. Serious anglers can try fishing Burke Lake at night, when WAE and SAE actively feed. The DWR ramp on the lower end of the lake is open 24 hours a day to fishing and launching boats only. The statewide 18" min/5 per day creel limit is in place at Burke.



Length frequency distribution of Walleye and Saugeye collected from Burke Lake during the 2025 electrofishing surveys.

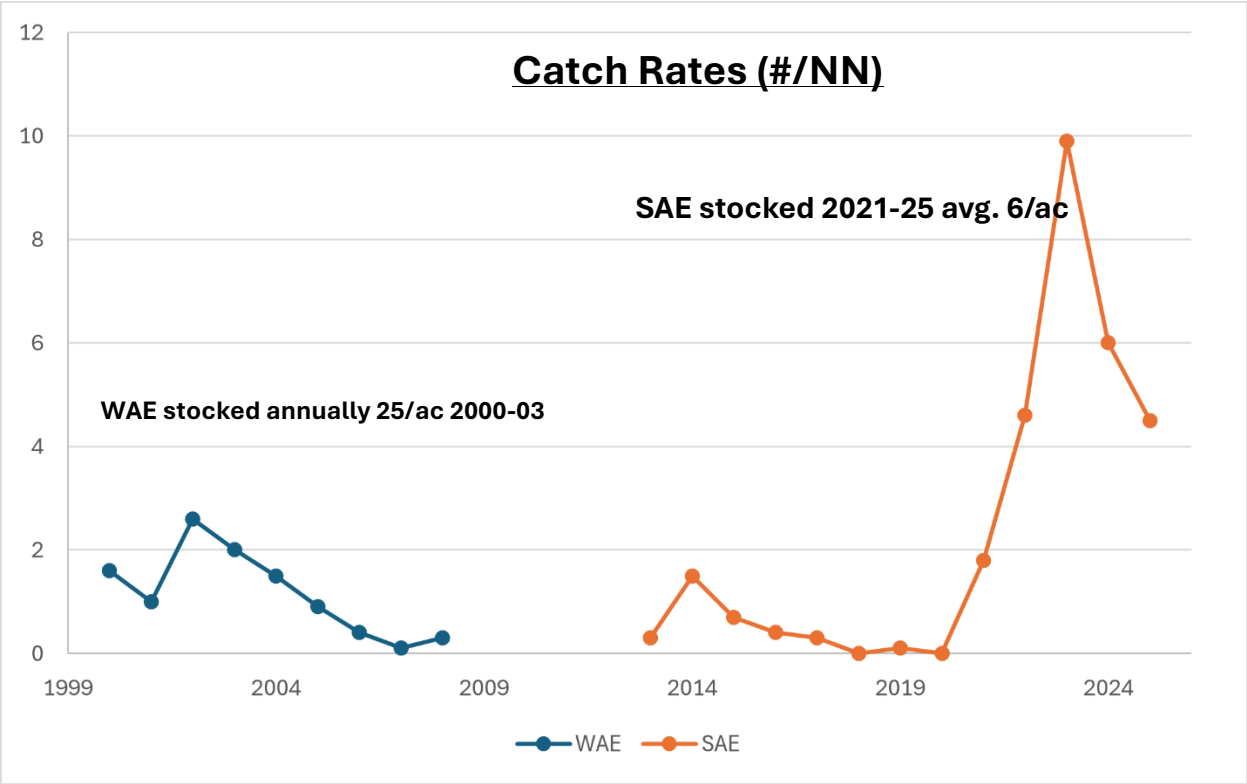
Lake Orange

Lake Orange is a DWR owned 124-acre impoundment in Orange County. Lake Orange has historically produced quality-sized fish over 5 pounds. The 2025 electrofishing catch rate was only 8 fish/hour (same in 2024) and still below the 10/hour goal. Spring nighttime surveys resulted in 17% of collected fish being legal with an average length of 15". The largest Saugeye (SAE) was 25". Lake Orange had been stocked with 200 SAE fingerlings per acre (double the standard) in an attempt to counter poor juvenile survival and boost the population.

However, due to continued poor catch rates, stockings have been discontinued with the allocation for Lake Orange being switched over to Lake Anna. Most fish are caught during the late spring and early summer by anglers fishing for bass, although a few anglers do specifically target the Saugeye population. Anglers should note that an 18” min/5 per day limit is in place at Lake Orange.

Lake Anna

Lake Anna covers an area of roughly 13,000 acres and has an average depth of about 33 feet. The lake reaches a maximum depth of 80 feet near the dam and has well-defined creek channels. About 3,400 acres of the lake known as the hot side is private, while the remaining 9,600 acres or the cold side are open to fishing and boating for the public. The Saugeye (SAE) population within Lake Anna is dependent on DWR stocking efforts. As a result of the 2013 stocking success and being well received by anglers, SAE were stocked again in 2021-2025 and will continue annually to maintain a SAE fishery. This past year, Lake Anna received 49,661 SAE fingerlings or about 5 per acre. A total of 131 SAE were collected in the 2025 gillnet (GN) sample for a catch rate of 4.5/net night, down from 6/net night in 2024. Most of the fish collected were 16-19 inches, suggesting anglers can continue to expect larger SAE in upcoming years. Since 2021, GN surveys have caught 20 citations by TL (largest 25.5”) and 46 citations by weight (largest 7.25 lbs. – state record!). The average SAE was 16” with the largest being 25”. Anglers should utilize subtle movements or even erratic actions to mimic behavior of injured prey to provoke a response. Slow and methodical retrieves are often effective in enticing strikes during periods of low-light or bad weather conditions. When feeding, anglers should try aggressive jigging or rapid trolling to trigger reactionary strikes. Dike 3 is a very good place to catch these fish during the winter months as forage will congregate around the warm water coming in from the hot side. Saugeye will target the schools of Threadfin Shad that migrate to this area of the lake each winter. The statewide 18” min/5 per day creel limit is in place at Lake Anna.



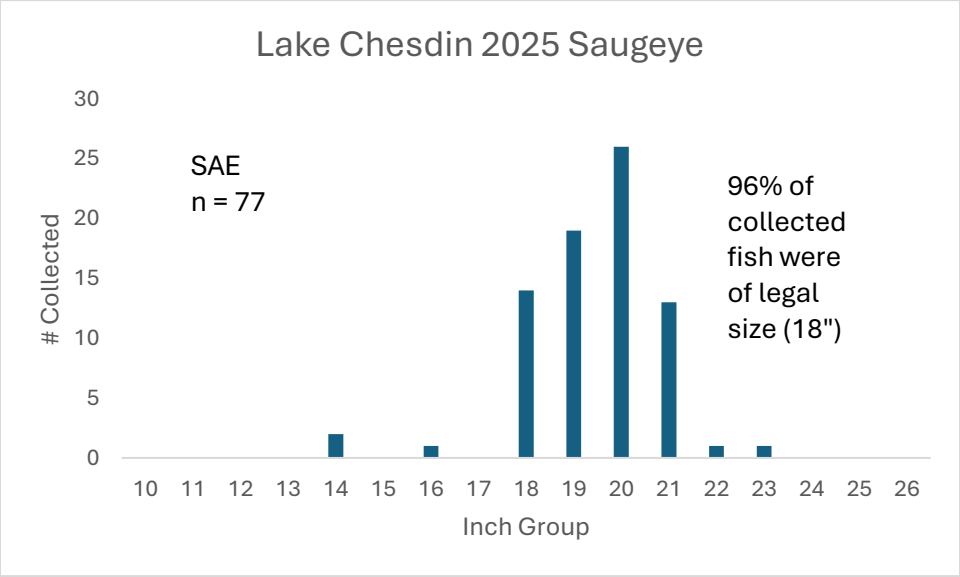
A comparison of Saugeye growth rate to that of historical Walleye growth rate revealed that Saugeye grew much quicker than Walleye their first few growing seasons. With the average YOY (Young of Year) hitting 11.6" for Saugeye and 6" for Walleye by early December of their first growing season. The mean total length of age 1+ Saugeye was 17.4" compared to 16" for Walleye. Saugeye of age 2+ were averaging 21" in total length with Walleye trailing behind at 18.8" average length. The initial assessment of the Saugeye growth rate is that the majority of stocked fish will hit the legal minimum length of 18" before their second year in the lake.

Eastern Virginia

Lake Chesdin

The Walleye and Saugeye populations within Lake Chesdin are highly dependent on VDWR stocking efforts. The initial stockings of Saugeye fingerlings into Lake Chesdin in 2013 and 2014 were extremely successful. Past Walleye stockings have not been nearly as successful as the Saugeye stockings, and this has pushed management decisions to go forth with Saugeye as one of the primary introductions into Lake Chesdin. The most recent stockings have seen Saugeye stocked in 2019, 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2025 with Walleye stocked in 2020 and 2024. The 2023 stocking consisted of 103,736 Saugeye fingerlings being dispersed in a pelagic manner. The 2024 stockings consisted of 96,179 Walleye fingerlings. The 2025 stockings consisted of 116,785 Saugeye fingerlings because of banner year of production at the King & Queen Fish Hatchery.

The fall surveys of 2025 revealed a decent abundance of Saugeye with 77 fish collected. The catch showed a minor increase from 2024 (n = 73) but failed to reach the record of 2022 (n = 192). Collected Saugeye ranged in size from 14 to 23 inches, with the average sized fish measured at 19.97 inches. This average length showed an increase from 2024 (mean TL = 19.22 inches). The vast majority of the collected Saugeye were fish from the 2023 stocking. The collection revealed a major decline in the catch of citation-sized fish (4 pounds or greater) with only 8 collected. The 2024 survey yielded the most impressive tally of 25 citation-sized Saugeye. The largest Saugeye in 2025 weighed 4.91 pounds, down from the 6.5 pounds of 2024. Past surveys have topped out with Saugeye in the 7 to 7.5-pound range, but these larger-sized females have been elusive the last few years.



Length frequency distribution of the Saugeye collected from Lake Chesdin during gill net surveys of 2025.

The Saugeye collection revealed 96% of fish were greater than 18 inches in total length. This percent of legal fish revealed an increase from the 2024 survey (58.9% of fish ≥ 18”) and from the 2023 survey (84.5% ≥ 18”). From all indications, the Saugeye population is taking full advantage of the Gizzard Shad forage base. The collection of Walleye has crashed over the past couple of years as VDWR has concentrated more heavily on Saugeye introductions. The 2025

survey collected one Walleye that measured 17.13” and weighed 1.85 pounds. Time will tell if the Walleye stocking of 2024 will result in year class recruitment.

The gizzard shad population within Lake Chesdin is extremely abundant with a high proportion of fish in the 5 to 8-inch range. Lake Chesdin can be a difficult lake to fish due to the surplus of available forage. Anglers should not get too discouraged if they cannot find a productive pattern that works the first few times out on the lake. Anglers are encouraged to target these schools of shad, as you never know when a Walleye or Saugeye will strike a properly presented lure or bait. Deep diving crankbaits, that mimic the size of gizzard shad, are a good start for targeting the Walleye and Saugeye. Anglers are also encouraged to try trolling around with bottom bouncers and nightcrawler harness rigs. During the fall and winter months, shad schools will typically concentrate toward the lower third of the lake. The vast majority of the larger Saugeye were found toward the lower third of the lake during the December surveys. VDWR biologists began tagging collected Walleye and Saugeye from Lake Chesdin in 2015 as part of the statewide tagging program. Additional Saugeye were tagged in 2025. Anglers should be on the lookout for a Floy tag just below the dorsal fin on the left-hand side of the fish’s body.

Lake Whitehurst

Lake Whitehurst, located in Virginia Beach, is a 458-acre impoundment that has been stocked in the last few years with both Walleye and Saugeye. Whitehurst was once a popular Walleye hotspot, but Walleye stockings were discontinued when the lake's public access was removed in the mid-2000's. The lake has a new public boat access located off of Shore Drive and VDWR has been annually stocking Saugeye/Walleye (mainly Saugeye) fingerlings. Anglers should expect good to excellent success when fishing for these fish, but also remember this fishery is still being established. Angler reports indicate good success with good numbers of legal-sized Saugeye reported. Unlike Walleye, Saugeye will frequently inhabit shorelines and shallow-water habitats during daytime hours making these fish an excellent addition to the angling options. Community fisheries sampling, utilizing daytime electrofishing, took place in 2025 and good numbers of Saugeye were encountered. Lake Whitehurst is a rather shallow impoundment with a few deeper pits that provide some change in the depth contour. A City of Norfolk boating permit must be purchased to fish in this impoundment. Stay tuned as this unique fishery should only get better in the years to come!

Appomattox River

Anglers familiar with the Walleye and Saugeye fishing action on Lake Chesdin are most likely aware of the fishable populations below the dam. The Walleye and Saugeye populations of the Appomattox River below Brasfield Dam have yielded some positive results over the last few years. With recent stockings of Lake Chesdin centered around the higher survival rate of stocked Saugeye, anglers should expect to catch more Saugeye than Walleye. Some older male Walleye may still be present as catch rates of Walleye on the lake have been declining. Depending on the time of the year and the water flow, anglers will find fish stacked up below Brasfield Dam. Anglers are reminded to stay the required distance away from the base of Brasfield Dam and to respect the current that can cascade over the dam especially during high flows.

At other times of the year, fish may be congregated near VSU by Patton Park. Anglers have caught Saugeye in the James River as far to the east as Powell Creek. There is no telling where some of these fish will slide on down the system. With the continued stockings of Lake Chesdin, there is a decent chance that fishing action in the lower Appomattox River will improve. VDWR does not actively stock the Appomattox River, so the populations of Walleye and Saugeye are solely based on whatever fish escape from Lake Chesdin. Natural reproduction within this stretch of the river is possible but highly unlikely that juvenile fish survival would support a healthy population. Chesterfield County has John J. Radcliffe Park situated below Brasfield Dam. This area along the river provides some limited bank fishing access and a canoe/kayak launch area. The similar creel limit of 5 fish/person in aggregate with the 18" minimum size limit still applies in the Appomattox River. Any tagged fish caught in the river, above or below the lake, will be honored for a reward check. Movements of lake tagged fish within the Appomattox River have provided some interesting findings.

Little Creek Reservoir

Little Creek Reservoir in Toano, VA provides another Walleye and Saugeye fishing destination within Region 1. Little Creek Reservoir is a 947-acre impoundment located in James City County. The reservoir was historically stocked at a rate of 100 Walleye fingerlings/acre, and a quality fishery was developed. The Saugeye stocking of 2014 produced a quality year class and anglers enjoyed their action. Some older Walleye may still be holding on from the stockings of

fingerlings from 2015 to 2018. Partial allocations of Walleye fingerlings were stocked in 2020 and 2022. Fry stockings of both Walleye and Saugeye were stocked in 2021 and another batch of Saugeye fry were stocked in 2022. More recent stockings have consisted of 100,000 Walleye fingerlings in 2023 along with 77,000 Saugeye fingerlings in 2025. A supplemental stocking of 178,400 Saugeye fry were also stocked in the spring of 2025. Many factors can influence survival rate of stocked fish but at least Little Creek Reservoir has been able to get back in the game. Drawdowns of reservoir pool by Newport News Waterworks these last few years along with limited rainfall these last few falls have forced James City County Parks & Recreation to close the boat ramp. Anglers interested in fishing the reservoir should call the park staff at 757-207-0880 for any updates on ramp use. The fishing pier remained open the entire time the boat ramp has been closed. Anticipated DWR gill net surveys the last few years have not occurred due to the low water and boat ramp closures.

Additional Fisheries

Upper Head Waters of Lake Gaston

Anglers may encounter decent Walleye action on the upper end of Lake Gaston. Located directly below Buggs Island Lake is Tailrace Park, which provides great access to the upper reach of Lake Gaston. A large % of the Walleye population within Lake Gaston will make a spawning run migration up to Kerr Dam each March. Anglers can discover an abundance of male Walleye first in this area of the lake before the larger-sized females make their presence known. The ideal time for each spawning cycle could depend on factors such as water temperature, lunar phase, and water flow. All anglers should be warned that water releases from Buggs Island Lake (aka Kerr Reservoir) can raise the water level extremely fast when power generation occurs at this hydroelectric dam. Anglers can call the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at (434) 738-6633 for possible water release information. VDWR has an agreement with NCWRC that VDWR would manage the fisheries within Buggs Island Lake and that NCWRC would get management of Lake Gaston. It has been several years since VDWR has conducted electrofishing surveys to assess the brood stock run on upper Gaston.

James River

Recent reports have surfaced of the increased presence of Walleye on the James River. Most of these reports have been centered around the fall line area in Richmond. A remnant population of Walleye has been holding on in this area of the river for many years. Past stockings of Walleye fingerlings on the Rivanna River aided the Walleye population on the lower James River after fish slipped out of the Rivanna. An occasional Walleye can be found near Lynchburg when conditions are right. Some reports have shed light on the large-scale movements of Saugeye on the Appomattox River in which fish have migrated out of the system to be found near Jordan Point on the James as well as down in Powell Creek. An occasional Saugeye has been caught near the fall line in Richmond, as we never know where these fish feel like swimming. Anglers should not expect to catch a limit of Walleye or Saugeye from the James River but might be surprised from time to time while fishing for bass.

Regional breakdown of stocked waters with ratings of each Walleye/Saugeye population

Region	Waterbody	Impoundment Size (acres)	Rating
Southwest Virginia	New River		Excellent
	Flannagan Reservoir	1,143	Excellent
	South Holston Lake	7,580	Excellent
	Hungry Mother Lake	108	Good
South Central Virginia	Staunton River		Excellent
	Philpott Reservoir	2,800	Good
	Leesville Lake	3,400	Fair
Northern Virginia	Shenandoah River		Good
	Lake Anna	9,600	Good
	Lake Brittle	77	Excellent
	Burke Lake	218	Good
	Lake Orange	124	Fair
Eastern Virginia	Lake Chesdin	3,100	Good
	Lake Whitehurst	458	Good
	Little Creek Reservoir	947	Fair

Tagging Studies

Tagging studies are ongoing in several of the waters mentioned above and offer valuable information to fisheries biologists about how anglers use the resources that DWR has invested in. Current studies on Lake Chesdin and South Holston Reservoir are still tracking tag returns. If you catch a tagged Walleye or Saugeye, mail the reward tag to the address printed on the tag and VDWR will send you a $20 reward. Please be patient as it takes time to process the reward payment. Thank you for your part in helping VDWR evaluate our Walleye and Saugeye fisheries.

<u>For additional information on any of the tagging studies and the various fisheries, contact the following offices:</u>

South Holston Reservoir, Upper New River, Flannagan Reservoir, Hungry Mother Lake: Marion Office (276) 783-4860

Leesville & Philpott Reservoirs: Forest Office (434) 525-7522

Staunton River: Farmville Office (434) 392-9645

Lakes Anna, Brittle, Burke, & Orange: Fredericksburg Office (540) 889-4169

Shenandoah River: Verona Office (540)248-9360

Lake Chesdin, Appomattox River, Little Creek Reservoir & Lake Whitehurst: Charles City Office (804) 829-6580