



Horsetooth Reservoir

FISH SURVEY AND MANAGEMENT DATA

Kurt Davies - Aquatic Biologist (Fort Collins)

kurt.davies@state.co.us / 970-472-4396

General Information: Horsetooth Reservoir (1900 acres) provides quality fishing for walleye, smallmouth bass, and trout. Anglers may also catch white bass, crappie, bluegill, and perch. The lake is open year round to fishing. For more information visit the park's website: <http://www.co.larimer.co.us/parks/Horsetooth.htm>

Location: Larimer County. From I-25, go west on Harmony Road 7 mi. to where it becomes CR 38E at Taft Hill Road. Continue west 4 more miles on CR 38E to park entrance.

Recreational Management: Larimer County

Fishery Management: Coldwater and coolwater angling

Purchase a Fishing License: <http://wildlife.state.co.us/ShopDOW/AppsAndLicenses/>

Amenities

- 4 Boat Ramps
- Swim Beach
- Modern Restrooms
- RV hook-ups
- Tent Camping
- Camper Cabins
- Hiking Trails
- Marina
- Picnic Areas

Regulations

- **Walleye Regulation has changed: 5 fish bag limit, no size restriction**
- Minimum size for smallmouth is 12"
- Fishing prohibited in inlet March 15 - May 31
- Statewide bag and possession limits apply
- Entry requires a Larimer County Parks Pass available on site

Previous Stocking

2010

Rainbow Trout

2009

Splake
Rainbow Trout
Cutthroat Trout
Cuttbow

2008

Splake
Brown Trout
Rainbow Trout
Cutthroat Trout

2007

Splake
Cutthroat

2006

Splake

Mercury Advisory

Fish in Horsetooth have been found to have significant levels of mercury. A consumption advisory is in effect. For more information go to:

<http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/wq/FishCon/HorsetoothADVISORY.pdf>

Sportfishing Notes

Walleye

- Fish rock structures when water temps are 40-55°F.
- Later, fish are scattered but tube jigs, lindy rigs, triple ripples, are good choices.

White Bass

- Watch for surface activity, small fish or birds on the surface, that indicates feeding fish below.

Smallmouth Bass

- Try rock rip-rap areas with crayfish imitations.



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History

Horsetooth Reservoir was completed in 1949. It is part of the Colorado-Big Thompson Project (CBT) transporting water from the west slope and storing it for east slope use. Water operations are conducted by the Bureau of Reclamation and the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District. Expect large water fluctuations in the reservoir from seasonal water use.

Horsetooth has been managed for cool and coldwater assemblies of fish since the 1950's. Various proportions of rainbows, cutthroats, browns, lakers and splake have made up the coldwater assembly over time. Coolwater fish like walleye, smallmouth bass, white bass, and yellow perch have been stocked historically and now maintain self-sustaining populations.

Horsetooth has had a very dynamic fishery. A large yellow perch population provided a great forage for walleye from the filling of the reservoir until the late 1960's when the population crashed. When walleye body condition and growth fell to unacceptable levels as a result, rainbow smelt were introduced as an alternative forage. This led to a boom in walleye fishing in the 1980's and 90's. The smelt ended up eating themselves out of house and home, affecting the recruitment of walleye and other fish. The smelt population subsequently crashed and a viable population has not been verified since 1996.

Efforts in the last decade have been to reestablish a quality forage base without the potentially detrimental effects that smelt had on the fishery. Spottail shiners, emerald shiners and gizzard shad have been successfully introduced though population levels are not yet at ideal numbers. Walleye have reestablished a self sustaining population but body condition and growth have not yet returned to historic levels.



2010 Horsetooth Reservoir Sampling Results (Gillnet and Electrofishing)			
Species	# Caught	Length Range (inches)	Weight Range (pounds)
Black Crappie	4	1.6-1.8	n/a
Bluegill	17	2.6-8.2	0.0-0.5
Carp	8	1.6-27.2	0.0-9.7
Emerald Shiner	13	2.8-4.2	n/a
Gizzard Shad	137	0.0-18.0	0.0-2.5
Green Sunfish	4	2.4-5.2	0.0-0.1
Largemouth Bass	1	17.3	2.8
Brown Trout	1	12.1	0.6
Rainbow Trout	9	9.3-18.3	0.3-2.3
Smallmouth Bass	794	0.0-17.1	0.0-2.7
Rainbow Smelt	1	7.1	0.1
Spottail Shiner	3	3.3-3.7	n/a
Walleye	329	0.0-19.7	0.0-3.2
White Bass	8	11.4-20.4	0.7-3.6
Wiper	1	27.2	8.2
White Sucker	67	9.8-23.5	0.7-5.6
Yellow Perch	49	0-16.4	0-1.5



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Management

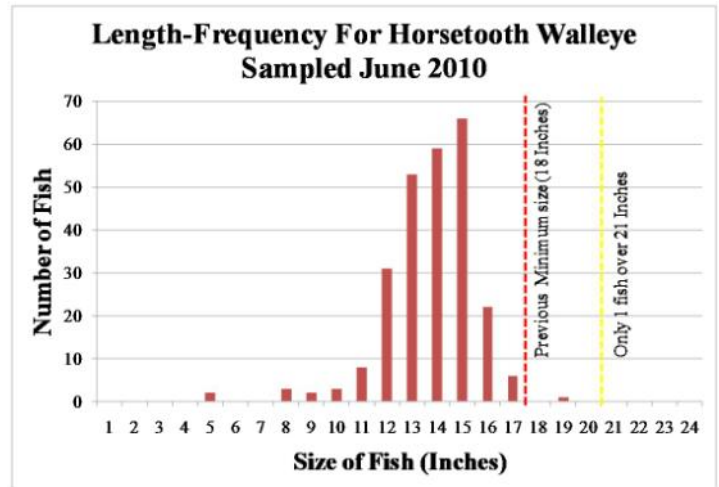
Rainbow smelt were introduced in 1984 to increase walleye growth in Horsetooth. This was highly successful and led higher number and larger sizes of walleye. Unfortunately they were an unsustainable species for Horsetooth. They were incredibly prolific and very efficient at finding food. So much so that they crashed the zooplankton population, the base level of the lake ecosystem. With nothing to eat, rainbow smelt disappeared in 1996.

Horsetooth was drained to dead pool in 2001 for work on the dams. During this period an attempt was made to establish several species of prey fish in the hopes of preventing a complete crash of the system as had happened with smelt. Emerald shiners, gizzard shad and spottail shiners were introduced. These species successfully reproduced and increased while the reservoir was drained down.

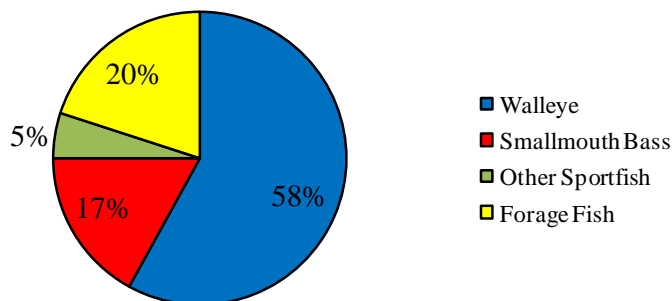
The reservoir was refilled in 2003. Unfortunately, in subsequent years walleye reproduction outpaced that of forage fish. Numbers of walleyes increased but the forage base could not keep up. Prey species were barely able to sustain themselves. This resulted in a stunted population of walleye that had very little to eat in the reservoir. The numbers of walleye remained high but the average size did not increase. This remains the current situation in the reservoir, lots of small walleye that grow very slowly.

During our five year regulation cycle last year, we were able to make some regulation changes that will help to bring the reservoir back into balance. The regulation has been liberalized, removing the size restriction and increasing the bag limit. Very few fish were making it above the previous minimum size that was set in the heyday of smelt. This only served to worsen the poor growth rates. As walleye are removed from the system, the growth rates will increase and produce more fish in the larger size classes. Overall numbers should go down somewhat, allowing the forage fish in the reservoir to become more abundant. This also allows a greater number of walleye anglers to take fish home for the table.

Over the next few years, we will be monitoring this population closely to insure that the population is not being overharvested and that reproduction in the reservoir is not compromised.



Species Composition, Horsetooth Reservoir, June 2010



Horsetooth Walleye Growth 2009

