



# Stalker Lake

## FISH SURVEY AND MANAGEMENT DATA

Mandi Brandt - Aquatic Biologist (Brush)

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**General Information:** Stalker Lake is a 27 acre water located near Colorado Parks and Wildlife's Wray Hatchery. Anglers can expect quality fishing for largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, redear sunfish, bluegill, and channel catfish.

**Location:** Yuma County. From Wray take Hwy 43 2 miles west to CR FF. Take CR FF 1.5 miles north to the access road. Take the access road ½ mile west to the lake.

**Recreational Management:** Colorado Parks and Wildlife

**Fishery Management:** Warmwater angling

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

### Amenities

- Boat ramp
- Picnic areas
- Primitive restrooms
- Hiking trails
- Wildlife viewing
- Ice fishing

### Regulations

- Min. size for largemouth and smallmouth bass is 15".
- Min. size for crappie is 10".
- Min. size for tiger muskie is 36" (1 fish limit).
- Statewide bag and possession limits also apply.

### Previous Stocking

#### 2011

Largemouth bass  
Channel catfish  
Rainbow trout and Cuttbow

#### 2010

Largemouth bass  
Smallmouth bass  
Channel catfish  
Rainbow trout and Cuttbow

#### 2009

Smallmouth bass  
Channel catfish  
Rainbow trout and Cuttbow

#### 2008

Largemouth bass  
Smallmouth bass  
Channel catfish  
Tiger muskie  
Bluegill  
Rainbow trout

#### 2007

Largemouth bass  
Smallmouth bass  
Channel catfish  
Bluegill  
Rainbow trout

### Sportfishing Notes

#### Largemouth bass and Smallmouth bass

- Stalker Lake was once the home of Colorado's state record largemouth bass and new contenders are known to exist in the lake.

#### Redear sunfish and Bluegill

- Stalker Lake is currently the home of Colorado's state record redear sunfish.
- Stalker Lake is one of the few places in Colorado where anglers can catch redear sunfish.
- When ice angling, tip jigs with waxworms or a small piece of a night crawler.

#### Channel catfish

- Fish exceeding 10 lbs are NOT uncommon.
- Fishing off the bottom off of the dam is recommended.
- Chicken liver or shrimp as bait work well.



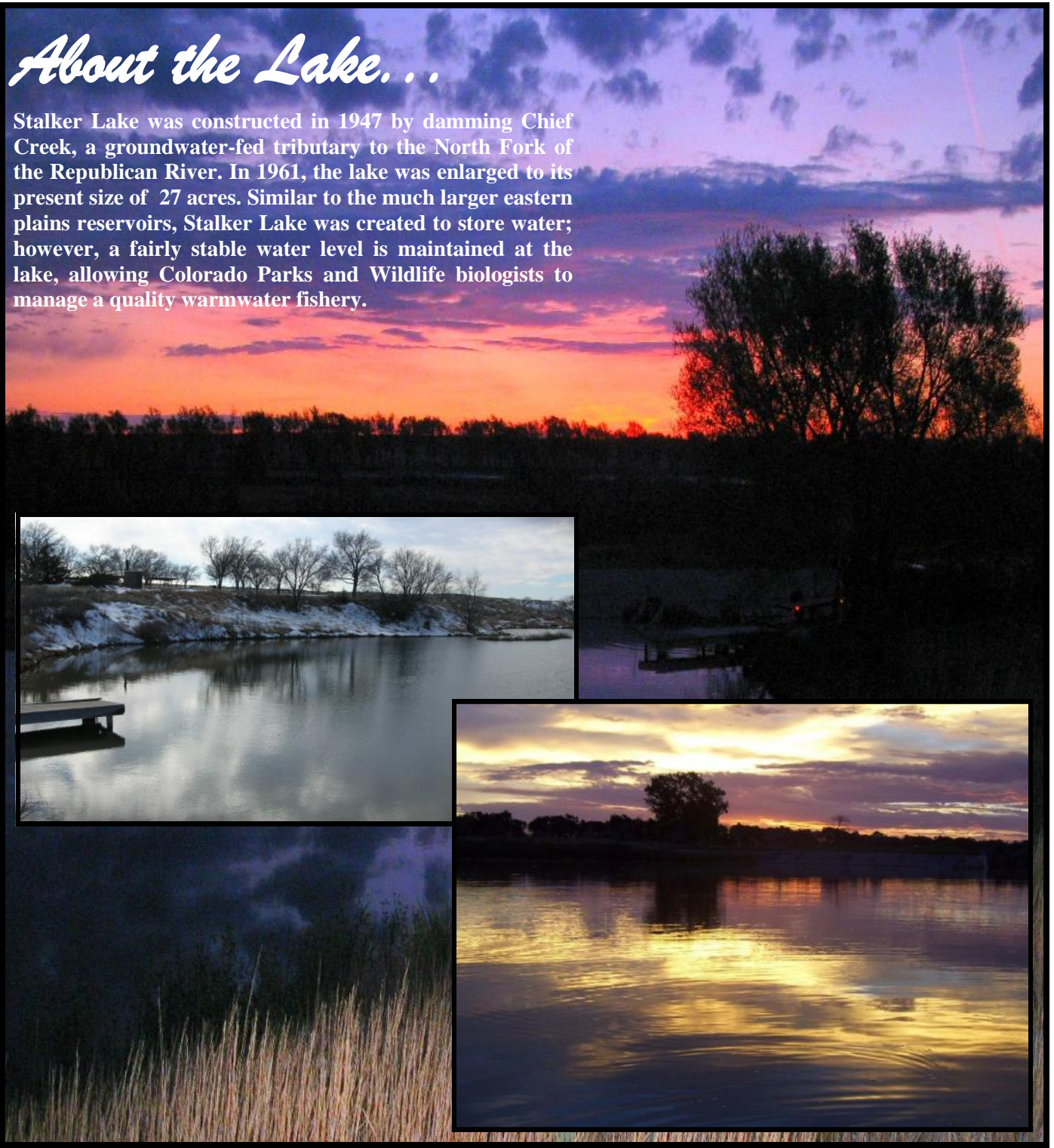
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### *About the Lake...*

Stalker Lake was constructed in 1947 by damming Chief Creek, a groundwater-fed tributary to the North Fork of the Republican River. In 1961, the lake was enlarged to its present size of 27 acres. Similar to the much larger eastern plains reservoirs, Stalker Lake was created to store water; however, a fairly stable water level is maintained at the lake, allowing Colorado Parks and Wildlife biologists to manage a quality warmwater fishery.





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### *About the Fish...*

#### *Bass (largemouth and smallmouth)*

Stalker Lake is arguably one of the best largemouth bass fisheries northeastern Colorado has to offer. Whether anglers are looking to catch several fish in the 12 to 15" range, or have their sights on a trophy, Stalker Lake has the potential to serve up the goods. Annual surveys indicate that several quality- (12") and preferred-sized (15") bass, as well as a handful of memorable- (20") and trophy-sized (25") bass inhabit the lake (Figure 1). The existence of trophy-sized largemouth bass can be attributed to the catch-and-release mentality of Stalker Lake bass anglers, who more often than not turn fish loose for another lucky angler.

Whereas largemouth bass have been stocked for decades, smallmouth bass were not stocked until 2007. Unfortunately, smallmouth bass will not be stocked in future years due to limited rearing space at Colorado Parks and Wildlife warmwater hatcheries.





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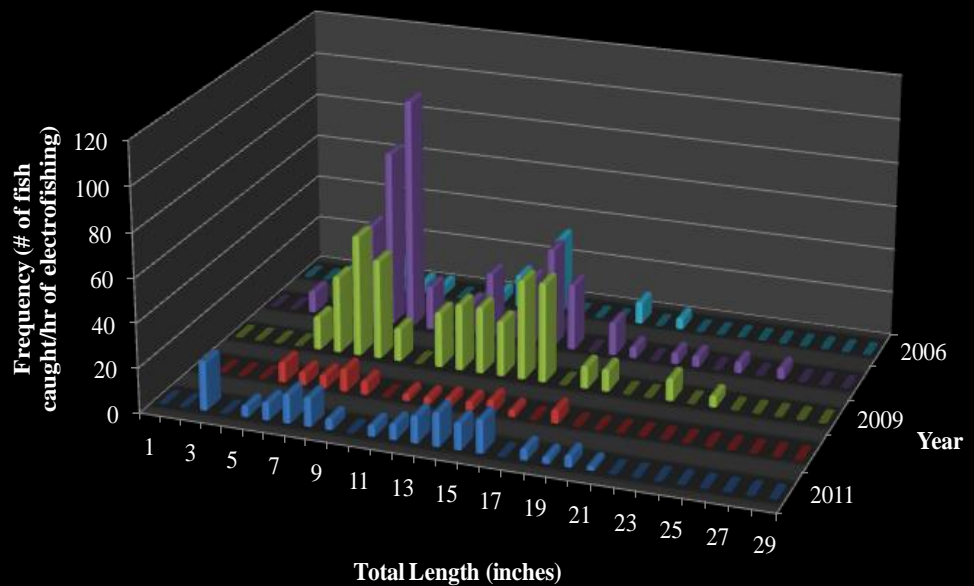
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### About the Fish...



Figure 1. Largemouth bass catch-per-unit-effort (CPUE) during the 2006, 2007, 2009, 2010, and 2011 annual surveys at Stalker Lake. No annual survey was conducted in 2008. For comparative purposes, the number of fish collected was standardized for one hour of electrofishing. Several quality- and preferred-sized fish, as well as a handful of memorable- and trophy-sized fish were caught. Quality length is considered to be the minimum size of fish most anglers like to catch, preferred length is considered the to be the



length of fish most anglers would prefer to catch, memorable length is considered to be the size of fish most anglers remember catching, and trophy length is considered to be the size of fish worthy of acknowledgment. Quality, preferred, memorable, and trophy lengths for largemouth bass are 12", 15", 20", and 25", respectively. Several Master Angler Award-qualifying largemouth bass (18") were also caught.



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### *About the Fish...*

#### Sunfish

Sunfish relative abundance was similar between the 2010 (83%) and 2011 (79%) annual surveys. As in 2010, the sunfish population was dominated by bluegill, which comprised 89% of the sunfish population (Figure 2).

Sunfish (bluegill, redear sunfish, green sunfish, and their hybrids) comprise the majority of Stalker Lake's prey base. While maintaining an adequate prey base is vital, fishery management has been focused on reducing Stalker Lake's sunfish abundance because over-population has resulted in reduced growth rates. Two main factors have contributed to over-population including prime sunfish spawning habitat, and dense vegetative cover.

Bluegill, redear sunfish, green sunfish, and their hybrids all naturally reproduce in Stalker Lake, making the sunfish population size difficult to manage. Largemouth and smallmouth bass prey upon sunfish, but bass alone are not able to control the sunfish population. Therefore, biologists tried to periodically stock two larger predators (tiger muskie and saugeye).

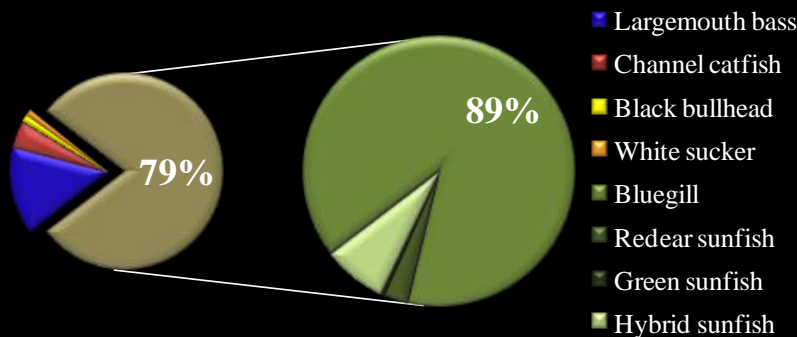


Figure 2. Relative abundance of fish caught during the 2011 annual survey at Stalker Lake. Sunfish, which were dominated by bluegill (89%), comprised 79% of the catch.



State record redear sunfish:  
7.875" (5.9 oz)

However, these two species got fished out of the lake before they could make a difference; thus, stocking was discontinued, once again leaving bass to try to control the sunfish population. To exacerbate the issue, bass predation is hindered by dense vegetative cover that provides several hiding places for sunfish.

Future management will focus on trying to shift a larger portion of the prey base from bluegill to redear sunfish because redear sunfish have a lower reproductive potential than bluegill. Furthermore, redear sunfish can grow to larger sizes than bluegill, and surveyed Stalker Lake anglers have reported redear sunfish are more aggressive.



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### *About the Fish...*



#### *Channel catfish*

Channel catfish abundance during the 2011 annual survey (26 fish) was similar to that during the 2010 annual survey (30 fish). Channel catfish lengths and weights ranged from 10.4 to 25.8" and 0.3 to 5.9 lbs, respectively. Though no huge fish were caught during the 2011 annual survey, a 33.25" Master Angler Award-winning channel catfish was caught by rod and reel during the 2011 fishing season.





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### *Master Angler Awards*

<u>Year</u>	<u>Species</u>	<u>Length</u>	<u>Angler name</u>
2011	Channel catfish	33 1/4"	Darrell Rutz

### *State Records*

<u>Year</u>	<u>Species</u>	<u>Length</u>	<u>Weight</u>	<u>Angler name</u>
2011	Channel catfish	33 1/4"	5.9 oz	Darrell Rutz

