

Allegheny River Sauger Re-Introduction (Survey #918101)

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1/31/2019

The Allegheny River sauger re-introduction program continued in 2018 with the stocking of approximately 500,000 tank raised sauger fry in the upper Allegheny River and Olean Creek, and 1,100 sauger fingerlings (1.8 inches) in the reservoir. Despite lower than anticipated stocking numbers, this adds to the total of over 17,000 fingerlings that have been stocked in the reservoir since the program began in 2014.

On September 24th and 26th, Region 9 fisheries staff sampled the Allegheny Reservoir to evaluate the sauger population after the final year of a 5-year restoration stocking program. Boat electrofishing was used to sample 7 sites in the upper section of the Allegheny Reservoir. Sauger and walleye were collected to monitor any changes as the sauger population develops. Very high water levels provided unique challenges to sampling this year, differing from low water levels and algae blooms encountered in previous years.

Despite the challenges, 21 sauger were caught, including 7 young of year (YOY) sauger. A total of 14 adult sauger were collected for a catch rate of 3.7 fish/hour. This is similar to catch rates found during the 2015 to 2017 surveys and indicates that sauger are surviving well in the reservoir from year to year. Lengths of sauger ranged from 5.7 – 20.2 inches, indicating that all 5 stocked year classes were likely represented in the catch. Scales will be aged this winter to accurately determine the age structure of the population. A total of 373 walleye were also collected for an overall catch rate of 99/hour. The catch included 227 young of year walleye, which is similar to past years. Walleye catch rates from surveys in 2014 – 2017 ranged from 26.2/hour to 63/hour. This catch rate is significantly higher than that of previous surveys, suggesting that more walleyes may be present in the reservoir this year.



A pair of 20-inch sauger from the Allegheny Reservoir.

Overall, the sauger stocking program in the reservoir has developed an adult population that is perhaps capable of supporting natural reproduction. The occurrence of YOY sauger from the 2018 stocking is encouraging since no YOY were encountered in 2017. Although surveys indicate good survival and exceptional growth of sauger, we are hoping for an additional 5 years of stocking to increase the chances of creating a self-sustaining population.