

Mount Ayr District Fishing Newsletter

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Special Points of Interest:

- 2019 Mount Ayr District Fishing Forecast
- Try Wiper Fishing in 2019!
- Raising Blue Catfish at the Mount Ayr Fish Hatchery



Biologist Notes

We made it through a very cold and snowy winter at the Mount Ayr Fisheries Station! This is the first year I've seen over 14 inches of ice on our district lakes and plowed our driveway more times this winter than ever in the past. One positive of a cold winter is decent ice conditions for ice fishing. Twelve-Mile Creek Lake and Summit Lake produced good ice angling this winter for Bluegill and Crappies. Three-Mile Lake produced good Walleye fishing this winter. I expect to see a lot more Walleye anglers at Three-Mile Lake this open water season.

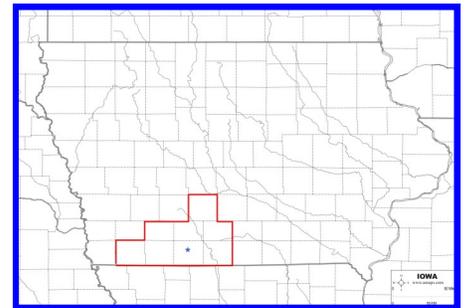
Prepare for your next fishing trip to southern Iowa with our district fishing forecast. We have many good options to choose from based on which species you prefer. We hope the fishing forecast information from our fish samplings and reports from anglers helps you choose where you want to target your efforts in 2019.

If you're looking for a new challenge in 2019, try Wiper fishing! We share a few tips and tactics to get you started and a couple suggestions for how to prepare your catch.

We've spent a lot of time raising Blue Catfish at our facility over the past few years after making the decision to introduce Blue Catfish into Three-Mile Lake after the renovation in 2016. It has been fun raising Blue Catfish. Learn more about our quest to successfully raise Blue Catfish on page 4.

We look forward to another busy, but productive year at the Mount Ayr Fisheries Station. Our new staff person, Jon Christensen, started with us last fall. Jon joined our station after Dray Walter transferred to the DNR's Wildlife Bureau. Jon came to us from the DNR's Missouri River Fisheries Station and has been busy learning about the Mount Ayr district.

Good luck and good fishing in 2019!



The Mount Ayr Fisheries District is based out of the Mount Ayr Fish Hatchery and is managed by Andy Jansen and Jon Christensen.



Blue Catfish raised at the Mount Ayr Fish Hatchery in 2018.

2019 Mount Ayr District Fishing Forecast

Badger Creek Lake: Good numbers of Bluegills and Crappies await just minutes from the Des Moines metro area. Most Bluegills are 7-9 inches long and Crappies are 8-10 inches long. Largemouth Bass fishing is popular with most Bass 14-16 inches long, but some over 20 inches are also available. Channel Catfish numbers were low in 2018, but catfish up to 22 inches are available.

Lake of Three Fires: If you like panfish, check out this lake this year. Good numbers of 8-9 inch Bluegills and 9-11 inch Crappies. It can also be a hidden gem for Largemouth Bass with good numbers of 14-16 inch Bass, plus lunker Bass over 20 inches long.

Lake Icaria: If you like to fish for catfish, add this lake to your list. Excellent numbers of 15-22 inch Channel Catfish. Although Largemouth Bass numbers are low, big Bass (20+ inches) are available. Bluegills are mostly 6-8 inches long, but there are some larger Bluegill. Crappies are mostly 8-10 inches long. You can even pick up a bonus 12-15 inch Hybrid Striped Bass.

West Lake Osceola: Hybrid Striped Bass are doing well in this lake; you can catch 14-20 inch fish. This lake has low numbers of Largemouth Bass, but Bass up to 20 inches are available. Find good numbers of 8-10 inch Crappies and Bluegills mostly 7-9 inch long, but there are some larger Bluegills.

Twelve-Mile Creek Lake: This was an excellent ice fishing spot for Bluegill and Crappie this winter. If you're willing to do some sorting through fish, there are good numbers of Bluegill with fish over 8 inches available. Good numbers of Crappies mostly 8-

10 inches long. Excellent numbers of Largemouth Bass, mostly 16-18 inches, but lunker Bass over 20 inches are available. Walleye of all sizes can be found here, too.

Little River Lake: This lake continues to produce some phenomenal fishing. Many anglers took advantage of the 9+ inch Bluegills available last year. Crappies are harder to find, but are mostly 9-10 inches with some over 12 inches. Excellent numbers of 14-16 inch long Largemouth Bass, with Bass up to 20 inches. Walleye, 12-22 inches long, and bonus large catfish (over 30 inches) are also available.



Talk about a net full of Walleyes! This was taken after one short electrofishing survey at Three-Mile Lake in Fall 2019. In addition to the good numbers of Walleye, notice the many different sizes of Walleye available to anglers. Add Three-Mile Lake to your list to fish in 2019, especially if you like Walleye fishing.

Green Valley Lake: If you like to fish for Largemouth Bass, make this lake your destination in 2019. Good numbers of 16-18 inch long Largemouth Bass, but also Bass over 20 inches. Bluegill, 6-8 inches long, and 7-9 inch long Crappie are available. Thanks to the local High Lakes Outdoor Alliance group, Walleyes up to 20 inches are available. This lake also produces quality Channel Catfish over 30 inches.

Three-Mile Lake: If you like to fish for Walleyes, put Three-Mile on your list to fish in 2019. Good numbers of Walleye up to 20 inches. Bluegills were mostly 6-8 inches in 2018, but some larger Bluegill are available. Crappies were also mostly less than 9 inches, but there are some larger Crappie. Find Largemouth Bass up to 16 inches.

Hybrid Striped Bass (aka wipers) can produce some hard fighting battles on the water if you're up to a challenge in 2019. Wipers are a hybrid cross between a Striped Bass and a White Bass. They have been stocked in many lakes and reservoirs in Iowa to provide an unique fishing opportunity for anglers. The Mount Ayr district has several locations for you to target a Wiper. Badger Creek Lake, Lake Icaria, and West Lake Osceola have received Wiper stockings since 2011. West Lake Osceola has the most abundant Wiper population of these three lakes. Wipers exceeding 20 inches are available at West Lake Osceola. We also stocked Wipers at RAPP Park north of Shenandoah since 2015. During our 2018 fish sampling survey, we caught 48 Wipers at RAPP Park, with the largest one over 3 pounds. You might think a 3 pound fish doesn't sound like much, but these fish are built with a lot of muscle for swimming and will fight hard. Here's some tips and tactics to catch Wipers:

Gear

Wipers typically cruise the open water areas of lakes in search of food. They have a lot of muscle to keep up with the constant swimming and burst swimming to capture prey. Your gear needs to match their power. Use a medium to medium heavy rod. While I enjoy using light fishing gear, something a little heavier is needed to catch Wipers. A sturdy 20+ pound braided fishing line is recommended on a good fishing reel that can give and take line easily. Be prepared to use your drag on your reel if you hook a wiper.

Tactics

You can catch wipers on a variety of baits. Some catfish anglers will catch Wipers on chicken liver while fishing for catfish. Wait until mid-summer when you see Wipers chasing baitfish at the water's surface. Match the color of the forage species the Wipers are chasing with a curl-tail jig and cast into the middle of the feeding frenzy. Try to keep the size of the curl-tail jig about the size of the forage. Use jigs or crankbaits that mimic common forage species fished along open water areas near main lake points or creek channels.

Cleaning Considerations

If you're lucky enough to win the battle with a Wiper and want to harvest the fish, remember these considerations. First, put your catch on ice as soon as possible to keep the fish fresh. Wipers are often caught mid-summer when the air and water temperatures are warm. When you fillet the fish, you will see a red stripe down the center of the fillet. This is red muscle the fish uses for burst swimming and is filled with blood. Cut out that red strip of muscle before you soak your fillet in your favorite fish batter and introduce it to the cooking oil. The red muscle can give the fish an off-flavor that some people do not find pleasing.



Hybrid Striped Bass (aka Wipers) like these from RAPP Park can put up a big fight for anglers.

For more information on wiper fishing, please contact the Mount Ayr Fisheries Station at 641-464-3108.

Mount Ayr Hatchery is singing the Blues... (catfish, that is)

We stocked Blue Catfish in Three-Mile Lake after the renovation in 2016 to create a unique fishery for catfish anglers. Catfish anglers expressed interest in having a Blue Catfish fishery somewhere in Iowa and we thought the Three-Mile Lake renovation would be a good opportunity to try them. However, we had to figure out where we could get them and how to raise them. Fortunately, we have good partnerships with other state agencies that were willing to help us. In 2016, I traveled to Arkansas Game and Fish Commission's Joe Hogan Fish Hatchery in Lonoke, AR to pick up our first Blue Catfish fingerlings. The staff at Joe Hogan not only provided the fish, but also shared their expertise on how to raise Blue Catfish at our facility. We raised the fingerlings we received from Arkansas and stocked 15,913 six inch Blue Catfish in late October 2016. Arkansas Game and Fish Commission came through for us again in 2017 and provided feed-trained Blue Catfish fry. We decided to raise these fish only to fingerling size, since our predator populations were still low after the renovation and eventually stocked 35,390 three inch Blue Catfish fingerlings in July 2017. Arkansas did not produce Blue Catfish in 2018, but Texas Parks and Wildlife Department had surplus Blue Catfish fingerlings for us. It was a long 16 hour drive back from the East Texas Fish Hatchery near Jasper, Texas in June 2018, but the fish did great. We tried to get these fish as big as we could in the hatchery and eventually we stocked 7,608 eight inch Blue Catfish in Three-Mile Lake in October 2018. A total of 58,911 Blue catfish that have been introduced into Three-Mile Lake since the renovation.

We've really enjoyed raising Blue Catfish at our facility. We've had the opportunity to meet some great staff from other natural resource agencies and learn the techniques to successfully raise Blue Catfish. It's been a lot of fun and we hope to continue to raise Blue Catfish at our facility and continue to evaluate the introduction into Three-Mile Lake.



Top Left: 2016 Blue Catfish harvest at the Mount Ayr Fish Hatchery



Bottom Left: Fingerling Blue Catfish stocked at Three-Mile Lake in 2017 (photo by Wayne Hill, AFSE)



Right: 2018 Blue Catfish harvest at the Mount Ayr Fish Hatchery